

After the Traces of the Women Libertarians in Regeneración, 1907-1918

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By Way of Introduction

Studying the Mexican Liberal Party (PLM), and familiarizing ourselves with the different eras of its propaganda arm, *Regeneración*, allows us to understand that it was a heterogeneous organization that held in its bosom differing ideas and experiences from those who contributed and fought to change Mexican society under the principle of freedom at the center of its programs.² In each of its stages the newspaper, as well as the Party, there were militant women who contributed to the laying of foundations of a social-economic project that impacted everything, from their daily routine to more complex forms of organization.

But, just how important was the involvement of the female militants to the dissemination of the principles of the Party? How did they contribute to the upkeep of the newspaper? What kind of strategies did they implement to carry on the struggle of revolution in Mexico and freedom for their political prisoners? These are some of the questions that the history of the Mexican Liberal Party and a reading of *Regeneración* only hints at.

If the newsweekly started to be published in Mexico on August of 1900, in the charge of the brothers Jesús and Ricardo Flores Magón, the following eras would be edited with the involvement of men and women of different nationalities in the United States between the years of 1904 and 1918.³ The contribution of other Mexican men and women in exile was so valuable that members of *Regeneración* were able to establish themselves in the country and carry on their propaganda work. For example, when Camilo Arraiga, Manuel Sarabia, Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón crossed the border heading to Laredo, Texas, they lived for a short while with Crescencio and Francisco Villareal Márquez, editors of the liberal paper *1810*.⁴ During the years of 1901 to 1906 there were women who were notable in their contributions, as much as in fundraising as in the discussion of ideas. Among the most important we find Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza, Elisa Acuña y Rosseti, Sara Estela Ramírez and Dolores Jiménez y Muro.

Juana Belén was particularly paramount,⁵ she served as a correspondent of *Regeneración*, campaigned and contributed to the formation of PLM in 1905, such as the principles which were pub-

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² Traverso, Enzo, *Melancolía de izquierda. Marxismo, historia y memoria*, Buenos Aires, F.C.E., 2018, p. 17-20.

³ The second era of *Regeneración* was edited from 1904 to 1905 between San Antonio, Texas, and St. Louis, Missouri; the third in the same city, February 1906; the fourth and last era in Los Angeles, California, between 1910 and 1918. Interruptions of the publication and moving of the headquarters was a result of the persecution of its editors on behalf of the Mexican and American governments.

⁴ Flores Magón, Ricardo letter to Crescencio and Francisco Villareal, 5 May 1904. *1810* was published in the period of 1904 to 1906 in the cities of Laredo and Del Rio, Texas.

⁵ Gargallo, Francesca, *Las mujeres en la Revolución Mexicana, un acercamiento a una participación que no se estudia*. Online: <https://francescagargallo.wordpress.com/ensayos/feminismo/feminismo-filosofia/las-mujeres-en-la-revolucion-mexicana-un-acercamiento-a-una-participacion-que-no-se-estudia/> Juana Belén stood out because of her track record and journalistic and political influence; she was one of the first who dared denounce the working conditions of the mines in Northern Mexico, particularly in Chihuahua, a deed that cost her years in jail, from 1897 to 1899. Once freed, she founded the *Club Liberal Benito Juárez*, promoting the ideas of 19th century liberalism, denouncing the abuses of the clergy and, thus, the entire administrative network of the government. In 1901, she founded the newspaper *Vesper* in Guanajuato, which was later transferred to Mexico City and circulated through different states

lished in 1906, under the titles “Program of the Liberal Party”.⁶ If her name does not appear in the signatures of the program, we can assume her influence given that the document was worked on while she belonged to the Party, and she denounced the specific problems in the conditions of women in areas of labor and motherhood.⁷

If well the history of the Party and in its propaganda arm many women actively participated, it’s important for us to delve in the present text into the labor of the women militants of PLM in two periods, from 1907 to 1909, and from 1910 to 1918. The interest I propose as eras of the Party, is in response to the fact that it wasn’t published in the first *Regeneración*, in its place they edited *Revolución* as a cautionary measure given the persecution of the American and Mexican governments, who finally succeeded in jailing the representatives of the Organizing Board of the Mexican Liberal Party (JOPLM).

The first stage is of value because the women who worked to distribute the printed material, implementing different cultural activities and disseminating the Party program published in April 1906, managed to gain the support of other socialist and anarchist groups, and thanks to their propaganda work, by 1910 PLM’s struggle was known internationally.

Of the second period of 1910 to 1918, we rescue those who wrote for *Regeneración* and were militant members within PLM, because they are a different type of women, workers and peasants, with an incendiary discourse, emphatic of problems of their gender proper, who influenced the culture and the values of the bases within the Party, and some who took up arms to fight in Mexico.

The above is taken up with the end of naming them, to see them and stress that they were not extensions of men, nor secondary figures by being, in different occasions, loving partners of *luminaries*, but rather that they were women who lived as libertarians – taking up the word they used for themselves – without placing the adjective of liberals, feminists, socialists and anarchists. They, in their actions and convictions took up a public space, in their different circumstances. They acted from their own trenches and in the process of building – ideologically as well as practically –, they intermingled activities that led them to new ways of living, questioning and reconfiguring gender roles.

To investigate about the women who participated in the Party entails a challenge, give that, as Graciela Gonzáles says, “they suffer from a double-silencing stigma: *being women ... and revolutionaries in the most radical project at the start of the Mexican Revolution: PLM*”.⁸ The majority are women without history, who we scan following the clues that the sources bring, but with the assurance that they were protagonists in the history of the Party.

in the Republic.

⁶ “Programa del Partido Liberal y Manifiesto a la Nación”, *Regeneración*, 3rd era, #11, (1906), p. 1-3.

⁷ “Programa del Partido”. Of the publication of said document is rescued a fourth section dedicated to “Capital and Work”, in which a maximum workday of eight hours was proposed, with a minimum salary established according to the region of the country, regulations to domestic work and housework, essentially to alleviate the exploitative conditions of women, as well as to ban child labor. Towards the end of 1905, the group that joined PLM separated itself due to differing strategies and ideas. On the one hand, the moderates Juana Belén and Camilo Arriaga fought for a political change in Mexico without violently challenging the government, whilst the brothers Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón proposed an open war and began to seed the necessity of a social revolution.

⁸ González Philips, Graciela, *Anarquistas mexicanas redactoras en los albores del siglo XX*, Casa del Ahuizote, 2012, p. 15.

Who are the women who support PLM?, 1907-1909

From 1906 on, we see the participation of women who inevitably radicalized the ideological and strategic perspective of the propaganda organ of PLM. Throughout the program published that year, the Party attracted the attention and support of other libertarian organization in the United States, networking with another type of militancy and ideas. Deepening the reading of the works such as those of Anselmo Lorenzo, Charles Malato, Élisée Reclus, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Piotr Kropotkin and Francisco Ferrer. Also, they met the anarchists Emma Goldman, or “Red Emma” as the American press called her, and Voltairine de Cleyre.⁹

Emma Goldman and Voltairine de Cleyre were essential for the dissemination of the principles of PLM’s program, the legal defense of the incarcerated Mexicans, and the fundraising for the newsweekly *Regeneración*. Thanks to their vast political and propagandistic trajectory, both women validated the social and economic revolution that the members of *Regeneración* proposed to carry out in Mexico. In the case of Goldman, she had started her journalistic work in the 1890s, taking part in *Anarchist*¹⁰ and *Freiheit*.

By 1906, when she met the Mexicans, Goldman had gained a vast experience as a militant libertarian, aside from a series of connections with other groups and women such as the Russian revolutionary Natasha Notkin who introduced her to Voltairine de Cleyre, Emma Lee and María Rodda, a young Italian who was the romantic partner of the Spanish anarchist Pedro Esteve. She struck up a friendship and political affinity with all of them, but it was with Emma Lee with whom she established a greater closeness because of her interests on free love and the rejection of the institution of marriage, a mindset that was later included in *Regeneración* articles.¹¹

From that era were bonds of friendship forged and later political-organizational affinities that were the support of the *Regeneración* editors up until the last days of its publishing. Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman and Voltairine de Cleyre embarked in a struggle for the Mexicans. During this period they launched the first edition of *Mother Earth*, a paper headed by Emma and in which at different times she requested monetary aid for the Mexican newsweekly, as mentioned by Ricardo Flores Magón in the lines of *Regeneración*.¹²

Both women contributed money to arm the rebel groups looking to venture into Mexico, realized propaganda tours and exchanged printed material with the men and women of PLM.¹³ Voltairine’s relationship with the other female militants of the Party lasted until her death in 1912. She was known for her criticisms of the social and cultural construction that imposed on women the role of submission and acceptance of the marital institution.¹⁴

One of the most important contributions that Voltairine made for anarchist praxis, and which was later adopted by the greater part of the militants in PLM, was what she called “direct action”. It dealt with violent attacks to any person against the libertarians and against private property;

⁹ Duffy Turner, Ethel. *Ricardo Flores Magón y el Partido Liberal Mexicano*, Mexico, INEHRM, 2003, p. 72.

¹⁰ Goldman, Emma, *Living My Life*, Book I, Madrid, Fundación de Estudios Libertarios Anselmo Lorenzo, 1996, p. 127.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 160-180.

¹² *Mother Earth*, Vol. 6, #2 (1911), p. 46-49. Flores Magón, Ricardo, “Emma Goldman”, *Regeneración*, 4th Era, #37, (1911), p. 2. “*Mother Earth* which is published in New York, is going to open a membership for the Red Flag rebels, and [...] extol the sacrifices of our brothers who fight in Mexico for Land and Liberty.”

¹³ Flores Magón, Ricardo, “Movimiento de solidaridad”, *Regeneración*, 4th Era, #35, (1911), p. 2.

¹⁴ Tuñón, Enriqueta, *¡Por fin ... ya podemos elegir y ser electas!*, Mexico, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2002, p. 17.

there were great similarities to “propaganda of the deed” that was practiced among those kinds of groups; but the difference was that the latter that directed itself to the representatives in the heights of political power, *direct action* proposed violence directed to the representatives of authorities at every level, and attacking material goods.¹⁵

In 1906, the year that Goldman, Voltairine and the leadership of the JOPLM established political relationships, *Regeneración* stopped being published due to continued persecution of its editors. In these circumstances, in Los Angeles, California, the publication of *Revolución*, a newsweekly born in 1907, began with the intention of shaking off the American and Mexican authorities and, primarily, to replace *Regeneración*. During this year, María Talavera Broussé, also called María Broussé, joined PLM. Not just Talavera, for in expanding PLM’s contacts, they came in touch with other women.

Elizabeth Darling Trowbridge joined forces with PLM in 1907 acting as a double member, for in 1908 she became affiliated with the Socialist Party in Los Angeles and she maintained an important network with other women, among them Frances Nacke Noel. In that era, Frances was an active suffragist and syndicalist.¹⁶ Precisely then, in that geographical moving and establishing of connections, the militants Librado Rivera, the Flores Magón, Antonio I. Villareal, and Manuel Sarabia were jailed, and the *Revolución* edition was laid in the hands of Práxedes G. Guerrero.

Among other militants, Trowbridge and Talavera worked together for the legal defense of the imprisoned Mexicans with whom they kept constant communication and managed to liberate Ricardo due to his health issues. Together with the above mentioned, Hattie de Lara – Lara Gutiérrez de Lara’s wife – worked, who had an arrest warrant for violating the neutrality laws, a charged based on the sale and distribution of PLM’s Manifesto, something she took part in with Talavera in the Mexican Plaza.¹⁷

Once *Revolución* went out of print in 1907, the propaganda work and diffusing of printed materials continued on with Trowbridge, Talavera and her daughter Lucía Norman, who, together with Fernando Palomarez, labored on an issue of *Libertad y Trabajo* where articles by Ricardo, Enrique, Rivera, and Sarabia were still published. The newspaper was funded by Trowbridge and didn’t get publish more than a couple issues. It mainly functioned as a kind of fundraiser and bear part of the costs of their legal process.¹⁸

Moreover, in December 1908, Trowbridge alongside Ethel Duffy, John K. Turner, Murray and Manuel Sarabia publish *The Border* magazine in Tucson, Arizona, whose aim was the political activity in favor of the jailed Mexicans. Based on a trip to Mexico that Turner and Lázaro Gutier-

¹⁵ De Cleyre, Voltairine, *Direct Action*, Online: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/voltairine-de-cleyre-direct-action.pdf> The importance of *direct action* was that it was proposed as a type of micro-organizing for women and it arose from observing daily life. If a group of them identified their unfavorable working conditions, they would join to share their experiences at home and at work, evaluate the means at their disposition, and decide to change their situation through the organization, deciding on *direct action*, and in becoming an example to their fellow female comrades, it transformed into an act of propaganda which in a greater scale hailed social change through violence.

¹⁶ Lomnitz, Claudio, *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón*, Brooklyn, NY, 2014, p. 29, Worth noting that Noel, apparently leading a syndicalist movement, was able to win the vote for women in California in 1910.

¹⁷ Kenneth Turner, John, *México Barbaro*, Mexico, EMU S.A., p. 237. And Ricardo Flores Magón to María Brouse, September 27, 1908, Ricardo Flores Magón, *Correspondence*.

¹⁸ Vásquez Montaña, Rosario Margarita, *Ethel Duffy Turner. Una biofía política e intelectual desde la frontera, 1885-1969*, (History Doctorate Thesis), College of Mexico, 2019, p. 72.

rez de Lara went on, they denounced what they considered “slave conditions”.¹⁹ Trowbridge also wrote articles on Mexico for *Appeal to Reason* and *Miner’s Magazine* newspapers.

The Border closed publishing in January 1909 since it had reached the influence its editors had hoped for, printing was expensive and Trowbridge’s resources were running low.²⁰ The members of the group remained in Los Angeles, they dedicated themselves to handing out small leaflets with the PLM Program. Despite the economic support and solidarity on behalf of the women, there were personal conflicts that affected the relations among the members and caused ruptures. Trowbridge and Sarabia entered into a marriage contract in 1909, their union herald a split in the group.

Ricardo accused the couple of betraying the cause; however, the reason for the anger was of a personal character, he reproached Manuel Sarabia for courting his adopted daughter, Lucia Norman, months earlier only to later leave her for Trowbridge.²¹ The result was a series of public attacks against Sarabia and Trowbridge. The couple set sail to England due to the ill-reception of their union, the threat that Sarabia would once again be jailed, and because he was once again gravely sick.

Elizabeth was known for being a strong source of economic support for the Party, *Revolución*, and the paper *The Border*, published together with Duffy, John K. Turner, John Murray, and Sarabia in Tucson, Arizona, and for the apparent ruptured caused by her marriage. Apparent because it can’t be confirmed that it was final since when the couple went to live in London in 1909, they spread the principles of PLM throughout Europe.

On the other hand, Ethel Duffy worked on propaganda favorable of PLM, and in various journalistic projects proposed by Trowbridge. When the paper ended publication, Duffy traveled to Mexico City in 1909, a place she later described as naturally beautiful, but with a contrasting misery that shocked her, stating that, “what’s most moving is the spectacle composed by children, emaciated by ravenous hunger and raising their painful eyes to passers-by, in the plazas and streets (... and these) are the gifts Porfirio Díaz lavishes his people with.”²²

After the group broke with Elizabeth, Duffy continued to help and worked as an editor of the English section at the beginning *Regeneración’s* fourth era in September of 1910, work she abandoned in April of 1911. Her place was taken by the anarchist William C. Owen who made strong declarations against the socialists and against Duffy in particular.

The anarchist did not acknowledge the labor the American had done in *Regeneración*, neither journalistic as a writer nor as a champion of the Mexican cause. Owen declared that the articles signed as Duffy were the work of Turner, which to Duffy meant an implicit accusation of incompetence. She said, “I was furious when he later said that John had written everything! It’s not true, it was my name on the headings.”²³ This was a constant type of argument and part of the journalistic practice of the era.

Up to this point, considering the involvement of Ethel Duffy and Elizabeth Trowbridge, we can say that the women that worked with the Party were educated, both had studied copperplate

¹⁹ Lomnitz, *The Return of Comrade*, p. 117 y 252. Lomnitz, points out that the description of “Mexican Slave” was commonplace among the authorities to describe the harsh conditions the workers lived in the large plantations south of the country. [Transl. note: This is also highlighted by Turner’s aforementioned book.]

²⁰ Vásquez Montaña, *Ethel Duffy Turner*, p. 80-88.

²¹ Lomnitz, *El regreso del camarada*, p. 400-410.

²² Duffy Turner, Ethel, “La benevolencia del déspota”, *Regeneración*, 4th Era, N.o 8, (1910), p. 2.

²³ Lomnitz, *El Regreso del camarada*, p. 415.

letters. Duffy did so at the University of Berkeley in 1904; meanwhile Trowbridge studied the same subject at Harvard University, she was also a millionaire heiress from Boston²⁴ with the ability to invest in a political project such as the kind proposed by PLM.

By 1910, the female participation took on other characteristics because the context in Mexico and the group's circumstances so required it. We find Paula Carmona -whose pseudonym was Consuelo Rivas-, who urged Mexican women to send their husbands to the armed revolution. There were others such as Delfina Morales setting up clubs in Mexico. The militant Antonio Villareal described them as strong, brave, and virile examples before the men.

PLM was also nourished by family ties; Antonio's sisters, Andrea and Teresa Villareal published from San Antonio, Texas *Mujer moderna* and *El Obrero*, respectively, and declared, "we are women, but have felt no weakness that obliges us to abandon the fight. The sharper the pain that wounds us, the greater the love grew for the cause of liberty that we profess..."²⁵ But they were not the only ones who worked with the Party and with the weekly newspaper *Regeneración*.

For Women and Anarchy! The Women and Their Pen in *Regeneración*

If very well the participation and propaganda of Ethel Duffy and Elizabeth Trowbridge was foundational for PLM to be internationally known, it also impacted the group internally. With their work, they broke new ground for the male militants to question the importance of work and female contribution with the Party, undermining the ancient forms they were accustomed to in relating with one another. On recognizing the other, the difference, and that women were a section with their own agenda, they changed the discourse within *Regeneración*.

From 1910 onward, the editors of the newsweekly directed articles to the female populace, emphasizing the ones by Práxedes G. Guerrero who was one of the first in addressing them as comrades in the struggle, and said,

The virtue of our cause has found refuge in the delicate bosom of woman, man's joint female comrade who now rebels, she doesn't set her children to sleep with mystic psalms, she doesn't hang ridiculous amulets around her husband's neck, she doesn't cease in web of her caresses to her loves; virile, resolute, splendid, and beautiful, she lulls her little ones to sleep with *La Marseillaise*. Women, you, the ones inspired by the sublime spirit of the struggle...²⁶

Doubtlessly, the articles directed to the feminine gender multiplied. But what was more interesting was that they created a figure of a female militant to show that they too were part of the struggle and were necessary. Thus, "Rosa Méndez" was born under the pen of Enrique Flores Magón, whose goal was to, "raise woman's morale, inciting them to the struggle, and to support the struggle of the men, encouraging them to remain steadfast, firm and daring before persecution".²⁷ Once the articles began to be published with Rosa Méndez's signature and incendiary speech, the financial contribution of women to the newspaper increased.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 83.

²⁵ ¿Qué hacéis aquí los hombres?, *Regeneración*, 4th era, # 21, (1911), p. 2.

²⁶ Guerrero, Práxedes G., "La mujer revolucionaria", *Regeneración*, 4th era, # 20, (1910), p. 2-3.

²⁷ Sixth citation, taken from González Phillips's work, *Anarquistas mexicanas*, p. 8.

Rosa Méndez's wasn't the only "female" signature plastered in *Regeneración*. Francisca J. Mendoza had been a columnist and contributor since April 1912 when the notice of her arrival to Los Angeles was sent out.²⁸ She was described by her comrades as a woman who was, "intelligent, firm, resolute, a persuasive and simple speaker. Additionally, she is a worker, not a bourgeois."²⁹ It is important to stress these last few words, since they are elements of the emancipated, militant women that came from the working class,³⁰ who experienced exploitation, and so sympathized with the cause and struggle for a new society.

Francisca was a woman convinced that PLM were the only ones who vindicated the cause of workers' emancipation and, so, the flag under which the struggle should bind itself. In an article she wrote in remembrance of Práxedes G. Guerrero she declared that, "your early death weighs heavily among the disinherited; your genius is deeply missed within the proletarian's cause".³¹ She also emphasized on the necessary education for the people and sent out a call of international solidarity for the Mexican struggle:

Send funds to the Organizing Board of the Mexican Liberal Party in Los Angeles, Cal., to continue with the *Regeneración* weekly; purchase books so you may learn. Carry each of you upon your blouses the Party's button that bears the watchword of Land and Liberty. Fight, comrades, all together. Let us set an end to the representatives of the oppressive ivy: Government, Capital and Clergy. Long Live Land and Liberty! Death to Authority! Death to Capital! Down with the Clergy!³²

Finally, Francisca J. Mendoza quit the newspaper editorial on October 1912 due to personal disputes between Anselmo, Librado, Ricardo and Enrique, and her romantic partner, Rafael Romero Palacios. There was a letter published in *Regeneración* where the Board demanded that Palacios immediately hand over the offices where the newsweekly was published and they offered Francisca the management of the paper, a position she refused and resigned from her duties.³³

What is interesting of Francisca's rupture with the agency with the reason why, she kept sending money to keep *Regeneración* going, and in the meetings she held afterwards, she positioned herself in favor of PLM. From June 1912 onward, and in parallel to Francisca, the political practice of another woman stood out who, through her writings, gained the respect and a place alongside the offices of the paper; "Someone once said that in times of peace we must prepare for war, let us prepare and Long Live Land and Liberty! The watchword of the Mexican proletariat."³⁴

²⁸ "Bienvenida", *Regeneración*, Los Angeles, California, 4th era, # 86, (1912), p. 1.

²⁹ "A los compañeros", *Regeneración*, 4th era, # 60, (1911), p. 1.

³⁰ Mendoza, Francisca J., "Una explicación", *Regeneración*, 4th era, # 71, (1912), p. 1. Francisca lived in Bridgeport, later in Alba and subsequently in Como, Texas. She lived together with her three daughters and her parents for whom she was the primary breadwinner, she moved around constantly to work in the various factories located in those cities. She found herself in Como when members of JOPLM asked her to move to the city of Los Angeles to contribute to the newspaper given that she was one of the loyal militants with whom they kept correspondence with, who sent money and established liberal clubs.

³¹ Mendoza, Francisca J., "En memoria de Práxedes", *Regeneración*, 4th era, # 71, (1912), p. 3.

³² Mendoza, Francisca J., "En Defensa de los Mexicanos", *Regeneración*, Los Angeles, California, 4th era, # 71, (1912), p. 3.

³³ Lara, Blas, "Conocimiento", *Regeneración*, 4th era, # 114, (1912), p. 1.

³⁴ Bretón, Sofía, "Punto de atención", *Regeneración*, 4th era, # 101, (1912), p. 3.

We're talking about Sofía Bretón, of Cuban descent. Bretón's involvement with *Regeneración* was announced in various anarchist papers.³⁵

For example, in July 1912, Paris's *Le Libéraire* announced, "another female comrade, Sofía Bretón has joined the editorial making up four of the most steadfast pillars of the Mexican cause."³⁶ She joined as a writer at a time when the Organizing Board of the Mexican Liberal Party (JOPLM) were still in jail, and was the person who described one of the crowds she found herself in when the Mexicans were sentenced to eight months behind bars.

Bretón wrote solely about oppression and the struggles against it, although she also demonstrated sympathy for the class struggle, she proposed a union between men and women, a fight irrespective of sex towards a common goal: the overthrow of the capitalist system. Regardless of "however small the contingent that women lend may be, together we shall form a phalanx and will accomplish as much as our male comrades. Rise, female proletarians! Long Live the Work of *Regeneración!*"³⁷ The final article bearing her signature appeared in September 1912, which announced her departure from the editorial; however, she continued organizing liberal clubs from where she lent support.

The work of these women did not just impact the interrelations of the Party's representatives—men and women—, but also directly influenced the values, dynamics, and relationships of those who made up the base of the Party, from the most important of militants to mere sympathizers. In *Regeneración's* records one can read the following note: "'Liberty' is the name given to the girl given birth to on November 17 in Colgate, Okla., her parents, Herlinda Martínez and Severino announce that it is a provisional name while Liberty grows and chooses a more agreeable one."³⁸

The following example reflects how the Party's base gradually internalized and applied into their daily lives the culture and values of libertarianism such as a rejection of the civil and religious institution of marriage:

There was a simple ceremony. It dealt with a couple who lived in free union: Jesús Rincón and Luisa Rincón, who, inspired by free-thought, wished to baptize a girl, the fruit of their union. The girl was given the name of *Regeneración*, dressed in red, the color of the universal liberty of the proletariat.³⁹

They were values adopted solely by adult women, little girls and teenagers also took part in the propaganda of libertarian values and lessons. From Florence, California, Julia Monreal, daughter of the militant Santana Monreal, began at eleven years old to read *Regeneración* and "upon learning of the egalitarian and just ideal it propagated, became enamored of said ideals".⁴⁰ Unfortunately, Julia died at the age of fifteen, the funeral procession that was her farewell was described within the pages of the paper:

Dressed in red and surrounded by flowers, as pure and innocent as her, with smiling lips and serene face, the girl-gadiator of grand and combative soul, has died, brethren

³⁵ Fabra Ribas, Antonio, "La guerra civil en México. Una lucha fratricida. Cuál debe ser la actitud de los revolucionarios", *L'Humanité*, Paris, (1912), p. 1.

³⁶ Doillon, David, *El magonismo y la Revolución mexicana en la prensa ácrata y radical francófona*, Mexico, National Institute of Anthropology and History, 2013, p. 130-135.

³⁷ Bretón, Sofía, "¡Guerra al déficit!", *Regeneración*, 4th era, # 105, (1912), p. 1.

³⁸ *Regeneración*, 4th era, # 167, (1913), p. 3.

³⁹ M. González, Jesús, "Siempre adelante", *Regeneración*, 4th era, # 21, (1911), p. 1.

⁴⁰ "Julia Monreal", *Regeneración*, 4th era, # 205, (1915), p. 2.

... She died this past March 18th, and on the 20th, her body was accompanied to the cemetery by many comrades of both sexes, Mexicans, Spaniards, and Americans. At her house, en route to the cemetery, and over her tomb, songs of revolution were sung in a worthy farewell to the strong fighter.⁴¹

Aside from those already mentioned, the Colombian libertarian Blanca de Moncaleano joined PLM and the editorial team of its press organ. She emphasized the necessity of woman's education and denounced the double exploitation to which they were subjugated to at the start of the 20th century. Given the articles she published in such as *Ravachol*, *Regeneración*, *Pluma Roja*, *Fraternidad*, *¡Tierra!*, and *La Protesta*, edited in Colombia, the US, Cuba, and Argentina respectively, we've managed to reconstruct a little of her life.

Thanks to the information she left in the press we know that Blanca originated from Colombia, and, according to the memoirs of Nicolás Bernal, a PLM militant, she was in Barcelona, Spain, contributing to the educational project of the Modern School of Francisco Ferrer Guardia between the years of 1902 and 1905; later, after Ferrer's assassination, she returned to Colombia in 1906. She settled in Bogota and became romantically involved with the anarchist Juan Francisco Moncaleano,⁴² with whom she founded and published the paper *Ravachol*.⁴³

Ravachol was an anticlerical newsweekly dedicated to exposing testimonies of the immoral practices of the representatives of the Church. One of the more polemical cases occurred in Bogota where a friar became the lover of the wife of Luis Umaña Jimeno, a renown doctor in the city, but was also his cousin's simultaneously. When Umaña Jimeno learned of the friar's actions, he killed him after stabbing him thirty three times. Apparently, the exposing of such testimonies caused Blanca and Juan Francisco to flee Colombia and take refuge in Cuba in 1911.

Once on the island they contributed to the Havana paper *¡Tierra!*, and contributed to the creation of various Modern School projects where they sought to put to practice the lay and anticlerical education inspired by free thought, regardless of sex, class, or race. Hoping to replicate this learning dynamic throughout the Americas, Juan Francisco Moncaleano traveled and reached Mexico in June 1912.⁴⁴ Together with other comrades with whom he had previously had contact with such as Jacinto Huitrón and Pioquinto Roldán, on 30 June of the same year, they inaugurated the *Anarquista Luz* (Anarchist Light) group, and published a paper under the same name.⁴⁵

While Juan Francisco stayed in Mexico, the anarchist militants in Cuba organized to raise funds so that Blanca and their children to join him. Finally, when Blanca traveled to the city of Mexico, she received news that Juan Francisco had been arrested and expelled by Francisco I.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² According to historian Jorell Meléndez, Juan Francisco Moncaleano died 1 January 1916, all subsequent trace of Blanca and their children is lost thereafter.

⁴³ Melgar Bao, Ricardo, "Juan Francisco Moncaleano: Colombia y la revolución mexicana", *La Jornada. Morelos*, # 460, 27 March 2011. Moncaleano chose the name *Ravachol* for his paper in honor of the propagandist activity of François Claudius Koëningstein who used the pseudonym of "Ravachol," and carried out three attacks using dynamite against different authority figures in Paris 1891. From *Ravachol*, Moncaleano spread Francisco Ferrer's pedagogy; advocated to promote worker education as the step before insurrection and emancipation. Blanca published *Pluma Roja* from 1913-1915, where she promoted woman's emancipation from Church control, the State, and the patriarchy.

⁴⁴ Sánchez Platero, David, *Anarquistas, mercachifles y viajeros*, Andes University. Social Science Faculty, 2015, p. 41. <https://repositorio.uniandes.edu.co/bitstream/handle/1992/17350/u713456.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

⁴⁵ Ribera Carbó, Anna, "La Escuela Moderna en México". *Una azarosa aventura revolucionaria*, p. 274. <https://raco.cat/index.php/BoletinAmericanista/article/view/98635 >

Madero's government, making the project of establishing a Modern School in Mexico under the leadership of the Moncaleanos impossible.

The Cuba-Mexico voyage marked the posture Blanca took against the Mexican government, given that, well, one of her fundamental principles was to be *against all authority*, the expulsion of Juan Francisco Moncaleano hit her in personal and sentimental manner, both her and her children, so she joined PLM in open war against Maderismo. In 1913, with the death of Madero, she told of her experience in Mexican territory:

I suffered alone with my children the consequences of your cursed ruling, reaching to the extremes of seeing my children sleep on cold pavement ... But today fortune has changed hands, you, lie executed and your family cower in fear, and I, cheerful and excitedly fight alongside my companion. Dead as you are, curse you.⁴⁶

The majority of articles written by Blanca were aimed at women, therein she explained that anarchism was a practice that modified the forms of relating to one another and where she reflected on many of her proposals of free union and the ability of women to have a choice over their own bodies. She declared that, beginning with small actions, anarchism sought the emancipation of woman through the collective work and instruction of all. In the same breath, convinced of the necessity to educate women and children, together with Juan Francisco and some members of PLM, she embarked on the project of *Casa del Obrero Internacional* (House of the International Worker, COI) in the city of Los Angeles, where she worked as a teacher.

However, and despite the seemingly good relations between the members who pushed forth the project, we can say that it wasn't a group without conflicts. Such that Blanca, in the same year of 1913, broke off contact with various PLM members; particularly those who had accused Juan Francisco Moncaleano of wishing to take over *Regeneración* and the House of the International Worker.

In such circumstances and without a means of propaganda, Blanca edited her own paper, *Pluma Roja*, which circulated until 1915. *Regeneración* as well as *Pluma Roja* stressed that woman should educate herself since this would allow her to rebel against any sort of authority, understand that she had the same rights as man, and that her social function is not reduced to the sole reproduction of the species.

According to Blanca women were doubly exploited. One the one hand, at home, where her husband represented an authority figure and where woman was destined to the service of man, who forced her to fulfill the routine of domestic labor, sometimes sexual, and the raising of the children. Additionally, she was also socially incapacitated to develop certain trades and work since she was considered inferior to the male gender, which is what led her to denounce the other side of the exploitation.

If woman doesn't educate herself, she is not free and has no say in why her material conditions are imposed as such. On the other hand, when she sells her strength, she suffers exploitation in the working sphere where she submits to pauperous conditions of work; including long working days, low wages, disrespect, and even unsanitary conditions.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ De Moncaleano, Blanca, "Ante el cadáver del verdugo Madero", *Regeneración*, 4th era, # 131, (1913), p. 3.

⁴⁷ De Moncaleano, Blanca, "Mujeres, eduquemos a nuestros hijos en la Escuela Racionalista", *Regeneración*, 4th

Everything together kept women in a state of economical dependence that forbade her, in different circumstances, to act freely. In June 1915, Blanca published an article titled “Por la Mujer y la Anarquía” (For Woman and Anarchy) in her paper *Pluma Roja*, as well as “Manifiesto a la Mujer” (Manifiesto to Women), in the only edition of *Fraternidad*,⁴⁸ edited by a group associated with PLM in Boston.

In both articles Blanca stressed woman’s role as the mother of humanity, and the secret of her liberty entailed the explanation of what motherhood meant.

Finally, we highlight that Blanca de Moncaleano was an internationally renowned woman, her articles were published in newspapers such as *Cultura Obrera* in New York; *¡Tierra!* in Havana, *La Protesta* in Argentina, among others, as well as those cited in *Regeneración* and *Fraternidad*. She participated in and organized cultural activities where she shined as a speaker,⁴⁹ she formed part of the militant movements that she came across the many cities in the United States, going on big propaganda tours with conferences that explained the goals of Social Revolution and raised funds in order to keep, initially, *Regeneración* going, and later her own paper *Pluma Roja* as well as the House of the International Worker.

Cultural Dynamics and Women

If in the first years since the foundation of PLM the majority of cultural activities were embarked by the men, when they were jailed in 1907 and in the following years, women took the baton in the organization and propagandistic dynamics. The following lines sketch out some of these dynamics in which the female sympathizers and militants of PLM took part in.

Although the list of female subscribers of the newsweekly was extensive, from peasants and workers to service workers, not all joined the cultural activities as a form of political protest. But militants such as Balbina Yáñez, Agustina Cantú Garza, Margarita Cendejas, Domitila Acuña, among others, publicly placed themselves in favor of the Party, in favor of the declarations made in *Regeneración* against the various other political factions of the Mexican Revolution, particularly against Madero’s faction, these women reproached Francisco I. Madero for the arrest of the militant Prisciliano Silva, and did so by saying:

We the undersigned, female workers freed of the stubborn worries that has kept humanity enslaved, applaud the stance that you (Ricardo) have taken against the traitor Francisco I. Madero who dared arrest comrade Silva.⁵⁰

They were women who constantly moved from one city to another and made great tours of propaganda that functioned as cultural events that served as important spaces where anarchist identity and culture was fostered, primarily among Mexicans, using symbols emblematic of their culture. For example, in the various tours women, men and children attended who were tasked with singing the hymn *¡Tierra y Libertad!* Written by Enrique Flores Magón and published in *Regeneración*, the singing of the hymn served as one of the main numbers of the tour’s program.

era, # 129, (1913), p. 3.

⁴⁸ De Moncaleano, Blanca, “Manifiesto a la mujer”, *Fraternidad*, (1915), p. 7.

⁴⁹ “Velada”, *Regeneración*, 4th era, # 126, (1913), p. 3.

⁵⁰ “Votos de adhesión y simpatía”, *Regeneración*, 4th era, # 28, (1911), p. 3.

They held fundraisers, sold newspapers, and backed the formation of *Regeneración* clubs and groups. For example, in February 1911, María Talavera was in El Paso, Texas, where she was asked to back the formation of *Club Liberal Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez* (Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez Liberal Club), founded solely by women, whose representatives were Refugio Montero and Matilde Mota, subscribers to the newsweekly and party militants.⁵¹

Regeneración liberal clubs and groups created by women accomplished the same functions as those of the men. The female militants sold the newsweekly, organized fundraisers, gatherings and meetings in Mexico as well as in Southern United States. They were equally persecuted by the police of both countries. Matilde Mota and Basilisa Franco – the romantic partner of Fernando Palomarez⁽¹⁾ – were detained in Juarez City, Chihuahua on December 1912, when they were going to distribute the newsweekly copies:

Then the lackeys read us a stupid decree where it was let known that the distribution of *Regeneración* was forbidden within the domains of Don Francisco I. Madero. The result: we were expelled from Mexico because it was said that we belonged to God knows what secret society, the expulsion came with a sermon from the outlaws that Madero keeps on a payroll. Infuriated, we returned offense with offense and spat in the face of those wretched people.⁵²

The quote above from Matilde Mota and Basilisa Franco shows us that they were foundational in the forming of networks that distributed the newsweekly, as much in Mexico as in the United States. Another militant such as María Talavera, from Los Angeles, was charged with maintaining the registry and exchange of printed material with the Havana paper *¡Tierra!* as well as sending its editors the money gained from its respective sale in Los Angeles.⁵³

The female militants were not only important in the raising of funds for the party and its propagandistic means, but they also played a foundational role in the spreading and building of PLM's libertarian culture in the varied and formal social spaces where they held plays, read and wrote anarchist books and poetry, sang revolutionary hymns and songs, encapsulating the new language that they had quickly internalized since their publication in anarchist papers, *Regeneración* included.⁵⁴

Female management of public spaces was obvious when they gained ground and were seen as an example of strength, feeling confident in that their militant praxis was the way to become free of every form of oppression. At times they were praised, for example, on stage; the presence of Concepción Arredondo, also known as Concha Rivera, "caused long and prolonged applause, which was repeated throughout the evening every time her name was mentioned";⁵⁵ another

⁵¹ *Regeneración*, 4th era, # 24, (1911), p. 3.

⁵² Mota, Matilde, "La libertad burguesa", *Regeneración*, 4th era, # 66, (1911), p. 1.

⁵³ "Administración", *¡Tierra!*, Year XI, # 458, (1912), p. 4.

⁵⁴ Sánchez Cobos, Amparo, "Sociabilidad anarquista y configuración de la identidad obrera en Cuba tras la independencia", Lida, Clara and Pablod Yankelevich (Compilers), *Cultura política del anarquismo en España e Iberoamérica*, Mexico, College of Mexico, 2012, p. 220.

⁵⁵ "Gran gentío se congrega en el Simpson Auditorium, *Revolución*, Year 1, # 24, (1907), p. 3.

⁽¹⁾ Olvera Maldonado, Luis F., *The Social Revolution in Northern Mexico and the Anarchist Communes of the Mexican Liberal Party, 1911-1915* (forthcoming), Fernando Palomarez. Native Mayo and old guard anarchist, he took part of the 1906 strike in Cananea. He was PLM's point of contact to establish dialogue and alliances with the Yaqui and Mayo Indians in the northern region.

example is when, in the middle of a speech by Job Harriman, María Talavera went before the audience to dispel the notion that she was fleeing the authorities, which was what the official press was accusing her of.⁵⁶

Additionally, Arredondo and Talavera “would sell revolutionary international literature: *¡Tierra!*, from Havana; *Renovación*, from Costa Rica; *Cultura Proletaria*, from Montevideo; *La Protesta*, one from Peru and another from Buenos Aires.”⁵⁷ This demonstrates to us that women maintained a strong presence in formal and informal social spaces. Therein, they replicated activities as scenic representations where they showcased some part of everyday life with themes of misery, worker exploitation, and migration among others, questioning the role of gender and the values of bourgeois society. For example, in March 1911, Ethel Dolson, in her play *Al pasar la frontera* (Upon Crossing the Border), demonstrated the hardships that the Mexican people had in reaching the United States, with a critique aimed at the system and capitalist government.⁵⁸

Other party female militants dedicated themselves to the translating of speeches in various languages in order to show them at forums, and many more went on propaganda tours. In one meeting, the American Starkweather improvised a speech in English that was recorded in *Regeneración*:

“Between the Mexican worker and the American worker I can’t help but notice a small difference,” said the passionate champion of the proletariat, “and that difference consists in that the Mexican worker knows, is convinced, that he is a slave and so valiantly fights for his liberty; meanwhile, the American worker considers himself free and, with shameful patience, suffers the yoke of Government and Capital.”⁵⁹

It’s important to acknowledge that it was the women who were the most active in those events, raising questions of common interest. They were present in every aspect of the party’s organizational life, from organizing dances to holding quick meetings in the plazas, generating income, recruiting militants, linking up with other libertarians and supplementing the editorial with plays, articles, poems, etc.

Other forms of propaganda and economic income came from the use of images. Francisca J. Mendoza didn’t just work in the writing of the newsweekly, she also founded the first female liberal clubs, proposed the printing and sale of photographs of various PLM members, primarily of Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón, Librado Rivera and Anselmo L. Figueroa, which were available at *Regeneración*’s offices; others were sent by mail and many more could be bought through the libertarian library La Aurora, located in the center of Los Angeles.

By looking through the list of buyers given by the newsweekly, we know that the majority who bought the photos were women, which is another sign of the contribution from female sympathizers of the party with the means available to them. With the financial backing of other libertarians, Francisca set out to showcase solidarity and class organization, given that, although, “all of us who are subject to the misery’s wage given by the bourgeoisie and have to live a life full

⁵⁶ “Protesta contra el encasamiento de los mexicanos”, *Revolución*, Year 1, # 24, (1907), p. 3. Concepción Rivera, mostly known for being Librado Rivera’s romantic partner.

⁵⁷ Lomnitz, Claudio, *El regreso del camarada*, p. 425.

⁵⁸ “Al pasar la frontera”, *Regeneración*, 4th era, # 20, (1911), p. 3.

⁵⁹ “Animado mitin del grupo Regeneración”, *Regeneración*, 4th era, # 20, (1911), p. 3.

of misery and abstinence, we sacrifice further more still, for our struggle is in direct opposition against capitalism,”⁶⁰

Some Final Considerations

Actually, why is it important to reclaim PLM’s history with the presence of the women? It is undeniable that we need to revisit the Mexican Liberal Party in order to bring its protagonists of their history and add them to historiography, and to transform the framework with which we understand social processes.

Exploring the feminine sector as active subjects within PLM and *Regeneración* was the motive that led me to the recover the work that the women did in the shadows and which, at various instances, was what helped the great male figures, which are read in the tone of a personality when in reality they are questions of gender.

If it is very well true that many of the female members of PLM’s movement fought for the emancipation of the workers, many others added to their programs the demand of sex reform and stressed the double exploitation of women. Many held that there was space within the separation of men and women itself where they might be able to meet. That point of harmony is, “the basis upon which the mass and the individual ... man and woman can meet without antagonism or opposition.”⁶¹ So, mutual understanding must be a foundational part between men and women; furthermore, they needed the freedom to command, educate, and know their own bodies.

Thus, the fight and the discourse took a turn because a reevaluation needed to take place in the language with which they talked to the reading public since different groups would discuss the postulates and demands of the feminine gender. It wasn’t just a sexual component, but rather a reevaluation of what they were conveying, of renovating the manner of educating one’s self and so including men and women in the message that was being democratized.

The female writers, militants, contributors, that’s to say, the women of *Regeneración*, left it clear in their writings that the fight for legal means would not solve the capitalism’s exploitation of the proletariat and, less still, the women question that’s bound to their bodies and desires. Although laws bring forth certain rights and duties, they will not reach complete freedom, for man kept on having supreme privileges over them; and before them still, Capital, Church and Authority.

⁶⁰ Mendoza, Francisca J., “Excitativa a los trabajadores”, *Regeneración*, 4th era, # 92, (1912), p. 3

⁶¹ Goldman, Emma, *The Tragedy of Woman’s Emancipation*. <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/emma-goldman-the-tragedy-of-woman-s-emancipation>

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