

# **Three Female Revolutionaries Deserve to be Rescued from Oblivion**

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María, Margarita, Valentina, protagonists of deeds, assures the Ensenada writer.

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Ensenada, Baja California, November 21st. By land, the sea of Baja California, did the remains of three female revolutionary protagonists rest who had done feats in the armed movement of 1910, that contributed to the defeat of the *porfiriato* and even inspired legends and songs among the contenders.

María Talavera Brousse, the lover of Ricardo Flores Magón, is buried in Ensenada's cemetery; the remains of Margarita Ortega Valdés, executed by firing squad by *porfiristas* when they weren't able to subdue her, not even with torture, were thrown at Laguna Salada in the desert near Cerro del Centinela, Mexicali, and Valentina Vázquez Ramírez, a cavalry colonel who was the inspiration of the famous song that played around the warmth of campfires,<sup>1</sup> was cremated and her remains spread at Mar de Cortés, in the waters of San Felipe, as per her wishes.

Talavera Brousse was born in Zacatecas in 1867, she was a militant of the Mexican Liberal Party. She and her daughter Lucille Norman were active propagandists of anarchist communist ideals. Together with Ricardo Flores Magón, she spurred on the from Los Angeles, California the rebellion in Baja California in 1911 in an ill-fated strategy of PLM to "create a liberated land in Mexico" as a base to extend the social revolution to the rest of the country.

María was apprehended and prosecuted in a United States federal court, accused of the non-existent crime of 'violation of the Spy Act'. She was accused, according to the notes published in *The Times*, of being part of a plot to kill the presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Porfirio Díaz.

She and Flores Magón met in Los Angeles, California. On February 21st 1909, Flores Magón wrote a letter to María asking her to remain by his side.

In love, they fought, suffered jail and repression together, facing the dictatorial government of Porfirio Díaz, they shared socialist ideals and together defied death; the remains of the ideological precursor of the Mexican Revolution rest in the Rotunda de Hombres Ilustres and his name is written in gold lettering on the Wall of Honor in the Chamber of Deputies; on the other hand, the mortal remains of María are in an abandoned tomb in the city cemetery of Ensenada, lost to the memories of Mexicans. Half a century after the death of Talavera, Peggy Bonilla, a writer from Ensenada, points out that, after many attempts, recovered in the archives of Ensenada's civil registry is a death certificate in which the name "María Widow of Flores Magón" is recorded. She hopes to obtain a copy for an essay that she's writing about the presence of Baja Californian women in the revolution.

Peggy Bonilla found testimonies of people who remember when María lived in the port up until September 9th 1947, when she passed away at 73 years old; according to Roberto Meneses, who passed away a month ago and was a neighbor to the revolutionary when he was a child.

Margarita Ortega Valdés was born in Sonora 1871 and assassinated in Mexicali in 1913. She joined the armed struggle starting in 1910, together with her daughter Rosaura Gortari, despite of her high social standing.

The origin of the *sonorense* was confirmed by Peggy Bonilla, given that it was wrongly believed that she had been born in Mexicali.

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<sup>1</sup> Transl note: Reference to *La Adelita*, symbol of the peasant female soldier who rose up to fight in the Revolution.

Margarita Ortega was not just a militant member in the ranks of PLM as a partisan, propagandist and nurse; aside from delivering weapons, munitions, provisions and letters to her comrades during the taking of Mexicali on January 1911, she also took part in the pitched battles: Flores Magón admired her bravery and prowess as a fighter.

After the defeat of the rebellion in Baja California in 1911, Margarita Ortega took part in a second attempt to take the city's plaza, but also failed and was exiled from Mexicali along with her daughter Rosaura Gortari by Rodolfo Gallegos, under orders of Francisco I. Madero.

Without food nor water, on foot and in calamitous conditions, both crossed the desert into Yuma, Arizona, where they were arrested, but they managed to escape and take refuge in Phoenix. There they changed their names to María and Josefina Valdés to avoid persecution of which they were victims of. Her daughter Rosaura did not survive the desert.

Margarita continued to organize the guerrilla struggle in Northern Sonora under orders of Ricardo Flores Magón; together with Natividad Cortés, a PLM member, she took the town of Sonoyta as their base of operations.

Margarita and Natividad were apprehended on November 20th 1913 by the federal forces of Victoriano Huerta. Natividad was executed in the act and she was transferred to Baja California to then be subjected to four days of torture in order to force her to squeal, fruitlessly so, on those who were organizing another uprising.

## **Valentina, the Colonel**

María Valentina de Jesús Ramírez Avitia took part in more than 20 battles, including the taking of Topia, Durango which lasted three days under the command of Ramón F. Iturbe. She marched dressed as a man and armed to the teeth.

Valentina joined the movement lead by Francisco I. Madero. She took part in the taking of Culiacan, Sinaloa on March of 1911. General Ramón F. Iturbe awarded this woman the rank of lieutenant.

"In my inquiries I have found three women who it is said is the real Valentina, but we have to believe the army", said Peggy Bonilla in remarking that Valentina's service record in is the Mexican Army and Air Force Museum, located in Filomeno Mata, in Mexico City.

"In the 70s I found Valentina in one of my journeys, she was going the same way and got off the bus that was taking us before I did, she lived in Valle de Guadalupe, a wine-making region of Ensenada. She was and old lady dressed as a soldier, a uniform that the army gave her, with insignias on her cap which showed her rank: three stars, Calvary colonel, veteran status had been granted since 1962, endorsed and signed by General Iturbe."

She died in a hospital in the neighboring city of Brawley, California, where she was confined for the rest of her last five years, at the age of 113. She asked to be cremated and her remains, as per her wishes, were entrusted to the San Felipe, Baja California sea.

Peggy Bonilla was left fascinated with the story of Valentina and wrote her a novel: she first edited a video, however the work is still in need of an editor.

The three revolutionaries deserve to be rescued from oblivion.

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