Women Diplomats during the Interwar Period: the Case of Palma Guillén

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Abstract

This article analyzes the diplomatic career of Palma Guillén, the first woman to represent Mexico in high-ranking diplomatic positions during the interwar period. Guillén was Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in Bogotá, Colombia (1935–36) and Copenhagen, Denmark (1936–37), and Technical Advisor to the Mexican Delegation at the League of Nations in Geneva, Switzerland (1938–41). The article aims to elucidate the activities she undertook and the issues she focused on, as well as to compare her experience dealing with governments, the press and diplomatic peers to that of other female diplomats and consuls from Europe and the Americas during the interwar period.

Keywords

history of women – women diplomats – new diplomatic history – Mexican diplomacy – postrevolutionary Mexico – global perspective

Introduction

This article aims to explore the diplomatic career of Palma Guillén (1898–1975) during the interwar period with a global perspective. Guillén was the first woman to represent the Mexican State in high-ranking diplomatic positions in the first half of the twentieth century. After the Mexican Revolution took place (1910–20), the State went through a process of stabilization (1920–28) and institutionalization (1928–40) in which the Constitution of 1917 was used...
as the framework for action. The Constitution established rights for workers and peasants, strengthened secularization, and promoted economic nationalism and the modernization of the country. In international terms, the Postrevolutionary State became a defender of national sovereignty, non-intervention, self-determination, and juridical equality between nations.1

During the administration of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40) – characterized by a progressive and pragmatic diplomacy that did not only focus on the defense of national sovereignty but on the respect of borders and self-determination of weak nations – Guillén represented her country as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in Colombia and Denmark, and worked as Technical Advisor to the Mexican Delegation at the League of Nations. Internally, Cárdenas’ administration was characterized by important socialist and nationalist reforms that allowed the State to strengthen links with workers and peasants; for example, 18 million acres of land were distributed, and the oil industry was expropriated in 1938. The expropriation of oil affected relations with the United States and the United Kingdom while it increased economic links with the Third Reich.2

Guillén’s diplomatic career has been studied, but there has yet to be a focused account of her relation to other women, especially to women from beyond the Spanish-speaking world. James D. Huck has given an account of her as the first Mexican Ambassador (although she never had that rank) and has argued that this was vital for promoting the idea of a Postrevolutionary Mexico that was inclusive for women.3 Jean-Marc Delaunay briefly mentioned the diplomatic career of Guillén when comparing the participation of Spanish and Mexican women in diplomatic activities throughout the twentieth century.4 Gabriela Cano has mentioned Guillén’s diplomatic career while

exploring the role of women in Postrevolutionary Mexico and especially while analyzing Lázaro Cárdenas’ egalitarian discourse.\(^5\) Amelia Kiddle has explored how Guillén was hemmed in by the culture of diplomacy, demonstrating that since she was a woman she was not able to make the same use as her male peers of the practice of dueling – both actual and journalistic – to defend herself and the Mexican Revolution when being scrutinized by the conservative press in Colombia.\(^6\) Ángel Gilberto Adame has presented Guillén as part of a group of women who had an important role in the public sphere (politics, education, diplomacy, arts, etc.) and by extension in the reconfiguration of the Mexican State.\(^7\) Georgina Pompa Alcalá has covered Guillén’s role in education and diplomacy in the interwar period, also describing her reception as a diplomat in Colombia and Denmark.\(^8\) Alexandra Pita González has connected Guillén’s career in international relations with that of Gabriela Mistral, Concha Romero, and Victoria Ocampo, Latin Americans who worked in organizations focused on intellectual cooperation and applied cultural diplomacy during the interwar period.\(^9\)

While these authors have mentioned Guillén’s diplomatic appointments in Colombia, Denmark, and Switzerland, they have not explained the activities she undertook and the issues she focused on. Neither have they concentrated on connecting Guillén’s diplomatic experience with that of other women from Europe and the Americas who joined foreign services in the interwar period and had high-ranking diplomatic or consular positions. In general, studies on Guillén have not transcended the national historical and historiographical barriers, something this article aims to do by considering the global panorama. The only exceptions are Delaunay and Pita González; the former only briefly mentions Guillén’s experience in connection to female Spanish diplomats, and the latter has connected the career of Guillén with women from Mexico,

Chile, and Argentina who collaborated in multilateral spaces of intellectual cooperation.

This article aims to explore the work of Guillén as a diplomat during the interwar period, looking at the activities she undertook and the issues she explored while being chief of mission in Colombia and Denmark and as technical advisor to the Mexican Delegation at the League of Nations. Her experience as a diplomat will be connected to that of other women from Europe and the Americas. By doing so, this article also aims to contribute to the research agenda that focuses on the role of women in international relations over the last five centuries which has been established in the last two decades by the work of scholars such as Jean-Marc Delaunay, Yves Denéchère, Helen McCarthy, Glenda Sluga, Carolyn James, Karin Aggestam, and Ann Towns, among others. Furthermore, it aims to contribute to New Diplomatic History, which focuses on studying diplomats and other actors who contribute to diplomacy, paying special attention to these actors’ political, social, and cultural environments and the institutions, norms, and practices they participate in.

In order to explore the diplomatic career of Guillén from a global perspective, this article will first present a panorama of the entry of women into foreign services in Europe and the Americas during the interwar period as well as the challenges they faced. It will then offer a brief biography of Guillén and move on to an analysis of her work as a woman diplomat, considering not only her activities, but also the political and social milieux in which she undertook said activities, as well as how her experience related to that of other women diplomats.

Women in Diplomacy during the Interwar Period

Once the Great War finished and the new international order was established, some countries in the Americas and Europe opened their foreign services for women to become part of diplomatic and consular activities. International organizations also opened their doors to women. The recently separated
countries Austria and Hungary opened places for women in 1918; for example, Hungarian Rózsa Bédy-Schwimmer was sent as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in Bern, Switzerland to obtain diplomatic recognition for Mihály Károlyi’s government. However, her diplomatic activity only lasted three months due to several issues: most of Károlyi’s government rejected her appointment; the president of Switzerland did not agree with breaking the tradition of diplomacy being a male space; she was isolated by the U.S. Delegation in Bern (for misinterpreting a meeting she held with Woodrow Wilson); and was falsely accused of being a Bolshevik.\textsuperscript{12}

In the Americas, also in 1918, Brazil opened its Foreign Service to women (although access was prohibited from 1938 to 1954). From 1918 to 1937, 87 women worked at the Itamaraty Palace, headquarters of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and some obtained important roles. For example, in 1936 several women were appointed to various departments: Wanda Vianna Rodrigues to the Protocol Office, Leonina Cardoso and Beata Vettori to Economic Affairs, Myriam Pereira to Border Demarcations, and Odette de Carvalho to the Cabinet. Additionally, Brazilian women became visible in the Consular Service from 1923 onwards; Maria José Mendes Pinheiro de Vasconcellos, Wanda Vianna Rodrigues, Celina Porto Carrero Slawinska, and Zorayma de Almeida Rodrigues Nogueira Porto already worked in Consulates before Brazilian women obtained the right to vote in 1932.\textsuperscript{13}

In the 1920s, women from the United States and Chile were allowed to join the foreign services, and a few held high-ranking positions. For example, Lucile Atcherson, the first woman to pass the written and oral exams of the U.S. Foreign Service in 1922, worked at the Legation of the United States in Bern, Switzerland from 1925 to 1927 and worked some months in the Legation in Panama in 1927. In 1925 she was temporarily in charge of the Legation in Bern. She resigned from the Foreign Service in 1927 after not being promoted and getting married.\textsuperscript{14} For her part, Frances Elizabeth Willis was in charge of the Viceconsulate in Valparaiso, Chile from 1928 to 1931, which was the first position


she held during her 37-year diplomatic career in which she achieved the rank of ambassador by the 1950s. Ruth Bryan Owen was Minister in Denmark from 1933 to 1936, thanks to a direct appointment from President Franklin Roosevelt, which made her the first U.S. woman to hold that high-rank position. However, she had to resign from the position when she got married.

To exemplify the Chilean case, we have Olga de la Barra Bordalí who was in charge of the Viceconsulate in Glasgow, United Kingdom from 1927 to 1930 and then was consul attaché in the Consulate in London, United Kingdom in 1930, while Inés Ortúzar Bulnes was in charge of the Viceconsulate in Hull, United Kingdom from 1928 to 1930. During the 1920s, Gabriela Mistral participated in the activities of the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation in Paris and the International Educational Cinematographic Institute in Rome. She later worked at the Consulate in Madrid, Spain as Honorary Consul from 1933 to 1935 and in Lisbon, Portugal as Second Class Consul from 1935 to 1937.

Also in the 1920s, French women were allowed to sit the exam to become part of the Foreign Service, but the only one who was admitted was Suzanne Borel in 1930. The situation only changed once French women obtained the vote in 1944. In the same decade, Russian politician and feminist Alexandra Kollontai represented the Soviet Union diplomatically. First, supported by Stalin, she was attaché of the Soviet economic commission (1922–24) and then Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in Oslo, Norway (1924). She represented the Soviet Union as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in Mexico City, Mexico (1926–27), in Oslo, Norway (1927–30) and in Stockholm, Sweden (1930–43), later becoming Ambassador in Sweden (1943–45). While the Soviet Union was part of the League of Nations (1934–39) Kollontai participated in the activities of the Soviet Union's Delegation in Geneva, Switzerland. Her diplomatic career was an exception in the Soviet Foreign Service.

15 Willis, N.J. Frances Elizabeth Willis. Up the Foreign Service Ladder to the Summit – Despite the Limitations of her Sex (Carmel: Nicholas J. Willis, 2013); Nash, P. Breaking Protocol, 161–86.
In the 1930s, not only did some women obtain high ranking positions, as demonstrated by the careers of the previously mentioned Brazilian, U.S., Chilean, and Russian women, but more foreign services opened their doors to women. Women were allowed to join diplomatic and consular activities in Turkey (1932, although they were again denied entry from 1934 to 1957), Denmark (1934), Mexico (1934), and Norway (1939). In 1932, the Second Spanish Republic also began having women as diplomatic representatives, for example Isabel Oyarzábal diplomatically represented Spain in Sweden and participated in the activities of the Spanish Delegation at the League of Nations. In Cuba, the first government of Ramón Grau San Martín (1933–34), nominated Olivia Zaldívar as Minister Plenipotentiary in Norway and Flora Díaz Parrado as Consul General in Paris.

As can be seen, women worked in legations, consulates, viceconsulates and international organizations situated in the Americas and Europe, more precisely in Chile, Mexico, Panama, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Spain, and Portugal. This occurred due to the elimination of legal barriers which had previously prevented the presence of women in foreign services and international politics. However, this happened at different paces and depended not only on the change of the law regarding foreign services, but also on national political rights and discussions. Women from the United Kingdom were not allowed to represent their country during the interwar period. In 1934, the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Admission of Women to the Diplomatic and Consular Services pondered whether women would serve as diplomats or consuls, but it decided that it was not yet the time after hearing the opposition by diplomats and consuls who considered women would not be able to serve effectively. The cases of Kollontai and Owen were taken into account: Kollontai was described as an exceptional/uncommon woman and Owen as excessively sentimental and unable to have informal encounters with male diplomats which, were they to happen, would be inappropriate.

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24 Ibid., 95, 102–3.
During the interwar period, male diplomats, consuls, and political authorities showed misogynist tendencies when questioning the capacity of women to fulfill diplomatic and/or consular functions, sometimes going so far as to suggest that women debilitated their countries’ diplomacy. This has been studied for the case of the United States by Molly M. Wood and Philip Nash. In U.S. diplomacy there were “gendered fears about women’s inability to keep secrets, or their supposed tendency to gossip, as well as growing concerns in the turbulent 1930s about the dangers of sharing too much idle talk.”

Hence, “women were considered inherently lacking in skills and attributes fundamental to diplomacy.”

There were also concerns that women would not be able to obtain certain political and commercial information since they would not be able to join social spaces in which these topics were discussed because these were designated exclusively for men (e.g. clubs and business circles).

Furthermore, there were fears that designating women as diplomats in countries without that practice would undermine the prestige, influence and competence of the United States.

Moreover, it was feared “that women were neither up to nor could properly be exposed to the physical or even deadly risks that could arise overseas,” for example dealing with troubled men (drunk or aggressive) who could ask for help in legations or consulates. Additionally, it was assumed that women would let their emotions interfere in “tough” negotiations.

Nonetheless, women demonstrated their capacity to work in diplomacy. For example, Lucy Atcherson, who was rejected by her U.S. male peers, worked two years in the Legation in Bern, where she “spent much of her time reading French and German newspapers, reporting on local political conditions, dealing with regular passport work and taking care of routine legation correspondence.”

Moreover, she attended social activities common to the diplomatic sphere, “the teas, golf outings, dinners and parties, as well as calls on and from colleagues at other legations, the local elite and the American expatriate community.” While she was accomplishing her tasks, she was not promoted as her male peers were.

Despite their proven ability, women’s familial obligations (i.e. as mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters) were assumed to be an obstacle to them being

30 Ibid., 26.
abroad and were seen as a reason not to hire them or offer them high diplomatic and/or consular ranks. As Rogério de Souza Farias shows, this can be seen in the case of Brazil, where, during the 1930s, the argument was that “Women needed exclusion from government positions because they were emotive, tired faster, and were naturally suited to home activities and raising children. They had a ‘social destiny’ in performing these tasks.”32 These ideas were so strong that, after 20 years of admitting women, in 1938, the Brazilian Foreign Service’s reform closed its doors to them and only opened again in 1954. While in the United States the Foreign Service was not closed for women, those who decided to marry were asked to resign.

De Souza Farias has also mentioned that “female diplomats were subject to much more scrutiny than their male colleagues, including about their physical characteristics.”33 For example, Maria José Castro Rebollo Mendes was described by the journal A Noite in 1918 as “a slender girl, in black, with her hair parted high on her forehead, so that it fell down to show her forehead in a pale triangle. She had a nervous gesticulation and thin fingers, a gold saint on her neck, not a spot of rice powder in the collar of her blouse, and a feverish look. It was a physiognomy of intelligence and tiredness, contrasting singularly with that of girls whose serene profiles are reflected by the mirrors of the tea-houses, in a constant game of frivolous graces.”34 Similarly, Ruth Bryan Owen, as Minister in Denmark, had to contend with press coverage that reflected sexism. The Berlingske Tidende compared her with U.S. male diplomats: while the latter were described as “serious steel and iron men from the great Dollar land,” she was presented as “President Roosevelt’s new lady Minister [who] disembarked with her associates smiling and laughing, with arms full of roses, small Danish and American flags and a beautiful grandchild with yellow curls.”35 One Danish newspaper even called her “Denmark’s girlfriend.”36

Like other women diplomats from the Americas and Europe, Guillén had to deal with legal and social barriers to the exercise of diplomatic activities. In order to analyze those barriers, a brief biography of her will be presented in the next section.

32 De Souza Farias, R. “Do You Wish Her to Marry?,” 48.
33 Ibid., 53.
34 Roeder Friaça, G.J. Mulheres diplomatas no Itamaraty, 67.
36 Ibid., 41.
Palma Guillén was born in March 1898 and died in April 1975 in Mexico City. Her childhood took place during the last decade of the Porfirian regime (1876–1910) and her adolescence during the armed conflict of the Mexican Revolution (1910–20). The former was characterized by a liberal project of economic modernization based on the exploitation of natural resources and workers by the elite that led to urbanization and industrialization, while the latter aimed to democratize the country by offering the middle class, peasants, and workers a space in the political arena, promoting an economic modernization that incorporated their social rights and economic interests.37

Guillén studied to become a teacher at the Escuela Normal de Maestros (Teachers Training College) and graduated in 1914. Teaching was a safe place for women to develop professionally in a context in which they were seen as only part of the private sphere in which they should focus to secure “healthy, loyal and productive subjects” for the State and the market.38 After becoming a teacher, Guillén continued her studies at the Escuela Nacional de Altos Estudios (National School of Higher Studies), studying courses on Philosophy, Latin, Psychology, Ethics, Aesthetics, and Logic. In 1917 she started teaching at the Escuela Normal. She obtained her PhD from the National School of Higher Studies in 1918.39 It is important to mention that it was common for women diplomats to have undergraduate studies, but not to hold PhDs. However, she was not the only woman diplomat who hold a PhD: American Frances E. Willis earned a PhD in Political Science from Stanford University in 1923 and held teaching positions at Goucher and Vassar Colleges, after which she passed the Foreign Service examinations in 1927 and began a long-term diplomatic career.40

During the first half of the 1920s, Guillén worked with José Vasconcelos, Minister of Public Education (1921–24), who directed the cultural and educational project of the Postrevolutionary State. The project aimed to increase literacy of the Mexican population, to make it conscious of its history, and to create

40 Nash, P. Breaking Protocol, 162.
a strong national identity which would protect the ideas of the Revolution. In this effervescent context, Guillén oversaw the installment of libraries for the general public and specialized in Psychology and Sciences of Education at the Universidad Nacional de México (National University of Mexico). In 1921, Guillén was sent by Vasconcelos on a commission to study in European countries (France, Belgium, and Switzerland), thanks to which she learned about ways to reduce illiteracy, among other things. One year later, in 1922, she taught courses at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria (National Preparatory School) on Logics, Psychology and Ethics. While Chilean poet and educator Gabriela Mistral was in Mexico (1922–24), invited by Vasconcelos, Guillén accompanied her on a tour to understand the educative situation in the rural and urban areas and to propose ways to improve it. This was the start of a long-term friendship and collaboration on topics of education and culture, in which Mistral was a friend and mentor for Guillén. In 1924, Guillén was sent again to Europe to learn about education.

In 1926, thanks to an invitation from Gabriela Mistral, Guillén cooperated with the activities of the Literature Section at the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation in Paris, where she stayed until 1928. This international organization promoted intellectual cooperation to secure peace. There, Guillén continued to work next to Gabriela Mistral and Alfonso Reyes (Mexican Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in Paris). The three Latin Americans were interested in securing the translation and publication into French of works by Ibero-American writers.

From 1930 to 1932, Guillén cooperated with the Mexican Delegation at the International Educational Cinematographic Institute in Rome, which oversaw the production, dissemination, and exchange between countries of educational films to secure a peaceful world. For Mexico, it represented a space to be up to date with education through visual aids since films were being used

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41 Pompa Alcalá, G. “La labor diplomática de Palma Guillén,” 151.
to educate the population on varied topics (history, hygiene, agriculture, and sports) throughout urban and rural spaces.46

At the beginning of 1935, while she was staying for holidays at Honorary Consul Gabriela Mistral’s home in Spain, Guillén was invited by President Lázaro Cárdenas to represent Mexico abroad. Guillén spoke, read, and translated English, French, Italian, Catalan, and Portuguese.47 She joined the Mexican Foreign Service on February 1, 1935, which in 1934 had established a law not allowing women to hold office as diplomats since women did not have full citizenship.48 No other Mexican woman was invited to diplomatically represent the country abroad, but she was not the only one that participated in international organizations: Concha Romero worked in the Division of International Cooperation of the Pan American Union in Washington during the 1930s.49

Guillén was offered the highest-ranking position in a Legation: Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary (which meant chief of mission). She was first asked if she was interested in being in charge of the Legation in Venezuela, which she was, but she was finally sent to the Legation of Mexico in Colombia (April 1935–August 1936) and then to the Legation in Denmark (September 1936–December 1937). Afterward, she became Technical Advisor at the Mexican Delegation in the League of Nations (February 1938–November 1941). Guillén returned to Mexico in January 1942.

Then, Guillén became Counsellor at the Mexican Embassy in Havana, Cuba (April–September 1942), and worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Mexico City (October–December 1942). Guillén officially finished working for the Mexican Foreign Service in March 1943 and continued her work at the Ministry of Public Education and at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). She was Cultural Attaché in Rome in 1952 and became Professor of International Relations at UNAM in 1954, later holding the position of Consul General of Mexico in Milan and representative of Mexico at the

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1964. She retired in 1971 and died in 1975 due to a road accident.\textsuperscript{50}

While Guillén’s diplomatic career (twice holding the rank of Minister, then the ranks of Counselor, Attaché, and Consul General) was an exception inside the Mexican Foreign Service, her participation in education was not. She was part of a trend of women who joined the activities of the Mexican Postrevolutionary State, and by doing so helped modernize the public sphere which was seen as an exclusively male space before the Mexican Revolution happened.\textsuperscript{51}

After this general panorama of Guillén’s career in education and diplomacy, it is now time to focus on the ways in which she experienced being a woman diplomat during the interwar period, the activities she undertook and the issues she explored, connecting her case with that of other women diplomats from Europe and the Americas.

Guillén’s Diplomatic Activities during the Interwar Period

Palma Guillén’s diplomatic appointment as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary before the Colombian government in 1935 was seen as an important step towards political equality between women and men, in a context in which President Cárdenas supported the cause of women’s suffrage but was afraid women would vote conservative, debilitating the Postrevolutionary State.\textsuperscript{52} Hence, Margarita Robles de Mendoza, Mexican feminist and founder of Unión de Mujeres Americanas (Union of Women from the Americas), wrote a telegram to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Emilio Portes Gil, to congratulate President Cárdenas for “having appointed the first woman minister. Mexico confirms the prestige of the country, which is fully geared towards a glorious

\textsuperscript{50} Adame, A.G. “Diplomática y apasionada de la educación,” 122–24.


future of definitive social gains.” As Georgina Pompa Alcalá argues, Guillén’s appointment “was taken as an example [for women] to be recognized as citizens” and also, as Stephanie Mitchell argues, “Guillén’s appointment was calculated to create an international perception that Mexico was progressive and modern.”

Guillén’s appointment as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in Bogota and Copenhagen led to the publication of several articles in Colombian and Danish newspapers. Articles highlighted the presence of a woman as a diplomat: this was the first time Colombia saw a woman diplomat and the second time for Denmark (the first one was Ruth Bryan Owen). The articles did not only focus on Guillén’s career in education, the Mexican Revolution (agrarian legislation; labor rights; the religious question; the expansion of education, painting, music, and theater), and the role of women in the public sphere, but also on questions regarding her body and clothing. In contrast, her appointment as part of the League of Nations was not considered to be an important enough event to report. After all, the League of Nations was an international space where some women already worked in committees and national delegations. This happened thanks to Article 7 of the Covenant which in 1919 stated that all positions should be open to men and women, and in 1932 it was confirmed that this also applied to higher positions. For instance, British nurse and social reformer Rachel Crowdy was Chief of the Department of Opium Traffic and Social Issues Section of the League of Nations from 1919 to 1931, and Sophy Sanver headed the Labour Legislation Section in the International Labour Organization’s Research Division until 1924. Additionally, Marie Curie-Sklodowska, Kristine Bonnevie, Elena Gleditsch, Cecilia de Tormay and Victoria Ocampo were part of the International Committee for Intellectual Cooperation. There were also women in the League doing different activities “as shorthand typists, clerks, translators, secretaries, copyists, verbatim reporters, clerical assistants, tea messengers, telephonists, document distribution officers, cleaners and duplicating operators.”

56 Herren, M. “Gender and International Relations though the Lens of the League of Nations (1919–1945).” In Women, Diplomacy and International Politics since 1500, eds. G. Sluga and C. James, 182, 188.
57 McCarthy, H. Women of the World, 123.
59 Herren, M. “Gender and International Relations,” 191.
What was Guillén’s experience being a woman diplomat representing a postrevolutionary government in Colombia, Denmark, and at the League of Nations? What activities did she focus on and what were the challenges she faced while dealing with foreign administrations, the press, and diplomatic peers? The following subsections will give an account of each position Guillén held as a diplomat during the interwar period, focusing on her experiences, activities and the challenges she faced.

Guillén in Colombia

Guillén presented her diplomatic credentials on April 26, 1935 at the Presidential Palace in Bogota. Outside the Presidential Palace many people showed support to Mexico and its revolutionary government. At the same moment, Acción Social Católica (Catholic Social Action) protested against Guillén as representative of a revolutionary government. Her arrival also led to several articles in the Colombian press in which her career in education was recognized. Newspapers such as El Tiempo and El Diario Nacional welcomed her and applauded the decision of the Mexican government to send such an important cultural figure to Colombia. For example, El Tiempo expressed that it was an honor to welcome such a relevant figure and compared this situation with the challenge other newspapers had to face when writer and diplomat Alfonso Reyes was appointed to Brazil or writer and politician Genaro Estrada to Spain. In an interview to El Diario Nacional, Guillén stated: “The friendly and cordial way I have been welcomed in Colombia has made me feel truly recognized and I would not know how to tell you how much gratitude I feel to the press of this country for the way it has talked about me.”

Moreover, two women published articles about Guillén in the Colombian press and paid attention to the importance of her role as a diplomat for other women. The first article, written by Colombian novelist Murzia de Lusignan for El País, said the following: “Welcome to the first woman in American diplomacy who opens the triumphant march, carrying in her hands – which are prodigious for the benefit of continental peace – the torch of the new woman and the brave shield of the Mexican nation.” According to De Lusignan, only a woman would be able to make Bolívar’s dream become reality because men

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60 AHGE-SRE, 26-25-4 (ii), 258 - Palma Guillén to Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bogota, April 27, 1935.
61 “Saludo a Palma Guillén.” El Tiempo, Bogota, April 7, 1935.
had failed due to formulas and etiquettes, while a woman offered the necessary interpersonal skills to achieve it. De Lusignan also paid attention to Guillén’s interests and clothing stating that she did not “pay great attention to galas and vanities that are, unfortunately, the constant worry and the supreme ambition of our sex.” She also mentioned her “modest tailored dress.”

The second article was written by Chilean educator, poet, and diplomat Gabriela Mistral, who was a friend of Guillén. Apart from presenting Guillén’s career in education and intellectual cooperation, she explained that she was a woman who was very interested in suffrage, as well as the prospects for women to assume political responsibilities, and agreed with feminist values such as the protection of women’s labor, equal pay, benefits, and assistance for children.

It is important to point out that Guillén did not consider herself a feminist but worked closely with circles that promoted the participation of women in the public sphere. In Colombia she established, with Luz González Cosío, the Unión Femenina Iberoamericana (Ibero-American Feminine Union) which aimed to create a network of women from Spanish America, the United States, Canada, Portugal, and Spain, to improve them morally and intellectually. This Union collaborated with the International Women’s Club and the Unión de Mujeres Americanas (Union of American Women). Guillén was not an exception; other pioneers for the entry of women into foreign services were not feminists. For example, when Brazilian Maria José de Castro Rebello Mendes applied to participate in the public examination to become an employee of the Foreign Service in 1918, she said on various occasions that she was not a feminist and even argued that women should remain at home, but that they had to work if there was no one to secure the household, like in her case where she did not have a father or husband to offer help. In another example, American Frances E. Willis denied on several occasions that she was a feminist and avoided public discussions on women’s issues during her long diplomatic career, insisting her success was due to her ability, not her sex. However, according to Nash there were two Willises: “the public Willis, who downplayed her sex and showed no interest in promoting women’s equality; and the private Willis, who was highly aware of her gender identity and sought, in her own way, to promote women’s equality.”

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64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
68 Roeder Friaca, G.J. Mulheres diplomatas no Itamaraty, 67–69; De Souza Farias, R. “Do You Wish Her to Marry?,” 42–43.
Guillén was also welcomed by cultural and labor circles in Colombia. The Universidad Libre (Free University) offered Guillén a Doctor Honoris Causa,70 the Sindicato de Artes Gráficas (Graphical Arts Union) held a series of cultural and artistic conferences in her honor, and the Organización Revolucionaria Obrera Intercontinental (Intercontinental Revolutionary Labor Union) named her Honorary President and requested her opinion on how to achieve justice for workers in Colombia and how to establish contact between Colombian and Mexican workers’ and peasants’ organizations.71 Hence, Guillén established connections to the broader society, practicing “people’s diplomacy” which aimed to put in contact peoples of different countries, not only its governmental elites.72 This was also done by U.S. diplomats who “were interested mainly in getting to know the entirety of their host countries and thereby strengthening bilateral ties at multiple levels.”73 For example, Florence Jaffrey Harriman, who was appointed by President Franklin Roosevelt to be U.S. Minister in Norway (1937–41), did several activities with Norwegians: she studied the language, learned to weave with a loom, donned oilskins, and participated in an annual cod-fishing expedition to the Lofoten Islands.74

In Colombia Guillén had the support from cultural, educative, and labor spheres, but “drew the ire of the conservative Catholic press, which objected both to the fact that she was a woman and to her representation of the Cárdenas government’s anti-clericalism.”75 For example, the newspaper El País published an article on April 12, 1935 titled “La señorita Palma Guillén debe respetar a Colombia” (“Miss Palma Guillén has to respect Colombia”) after she gave an interview on the religious conflict in Mexico and said it was an economic problem. According to the conservative press, Colombian legislators were following the principles of the Mexican government to create social and educative reforms which Guillén was promoting.76

The Mexican Minister of Foreign Affairs understood that these were unjust attacks and had no doubts about the seriousness of her work.77 The Colombian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jorge Soto del Corral, also recognized the situation and stated that the conservatives “have been trying to annoy you, no matter

71 ahge-sre, 26-25-4 (I), 86 - Palma Guillén to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bogotá, July 17, 1935.
72 Nash, P. Breaking Protocol, 4, 43.
73 Ibid., 43.
74 Ibid., 67.
75 Kiddle, A.M. “In Mexico’s Defense,” 44.
how worthy you are of your diplomatic role." He reminded her that his government and the Colombian people saw her as persona grata, who's activities had led to the rapprochement between countries, aided by the handling and discretion expected from a diplomat.

An important activity Guillén did as a diplomat was to send reports to the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This was something all chiefs of mission were expected to do, and it took a good part of their time since there were not many people working in Mexican legations. She sent monthly reports on Colombian national politics, international relations, and the economy. In regard to national politics, she paid special attention to changes in the cabinet, political parties, elections, controversies inside conservative and liberal groups, the power of the Church, and workers’ strikes. Regarding international relations, she reported on the economic relations of Colombia with the United States, Japan, Spain, and Venezuela; Colombia’s position regarding the Italo-Ethiopian conflict; and relations with the Holy See and the USSR. Regarding the economy, she highlighted the trade of products such as oil, gold, silver, sugar, cocoa, tobacco, and soy. She also reported on the banking system. These were topics of interest for the Mexican Postrevolutionary State, which had to demonstrate it was politically stable and was looking to increase its commerce while trying to find allies to defend the sovereignty of weak nations in the international arena. Guillén did not report on questions of the legal frameworks for workers and peasants or on the educative system of Colombia. These were the topics she was asked about by the Colombian press, as well as by members of intellectual and labor circles because Cárdenas’ administration had established socialist education and was working closely with agriculture and labor movements to improve their economic and social contexts.

In July 1936, Guillén was appointed as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in Copenhagen, Denmark. She had previously asked to be appointed to a European country, preferably one in Scandinavia, since the region’s progressive social-democratic programs were of interest to her. She explained that “the fact of being a woman has not created an obstacle for me and I even believe this has been a favorable element given the chivalrous, curious and harmless nature of the Colombian people.” She said authorities, students, workers, and intellectuals had been very supportive of her. However, “the weather of Bogota – the altitude plus the excessive humidity, the bad quality of water, etc. – are hurting me.” She also thought she could be more useful

78 AHGe-SRe, 26-26-4 (1), 96 - Jorge Soto del Corral to Palma Guillén, Bogota, June 25, 1936.
in a country from which she could report on social reforms of interest for the Mexican Postrevolutionary State.80

She left Bogota on August 18, 1936. J.A. Tamayo, a former Mexican revolutionary, wrote the same day to the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs accusing Guillén of not improving relations between Mexico and Colombia, focusing instead on banalities such as banquets.81 In contrast, the Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo* celebrated Guillén's time in its country and mentioned “Our gratitude to Mexico, for letting us closely appreciate the excellence of the Mexican woman, in this fine, living example of intelligence and discretion.”82

Evidently, having Guillén as the first woman diplomat in Colombia was seen as an honor by the liberal government and press. Intellectual and artistic circles also applauded her work as a diplomat, as well as the reforms of the Mexican Postrevolutionary State. In contrast, her work was criticized by conservative circles who accused her of imposing a revolutionary agenda. The comments by Tamayo show sexism against her and the easiness with which a woman diplomat could be attacked, using unfounded – rather stereotypical – images about women's irresponsibility when holding public office. Guillén did not only attend the activities organized by intellectual and artistic circles, which were important for Mexico's cultural diplomacy, but also concentrated on general topics of interest for the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs: the situation of Colombia regarding politics, international relations, and economics. Hence, Guillén's diplomatic practice included both the traditional (government-to-government) and modern (people-to-people) approaches.

It is important to mention that the diplomatic experience of Guillén in Colombia resembles that of another woman diplomat who represented a Postrevolutionary State in Latin America: Alexandra Kollontai's diplomatic experience in Mexico. Kollontai was appointed by Stalin as chief of mission in Mexico. Kollontai was able to achieve cultural rapprochements between the peoples of Mexico and the Soviet Union through the exhibition of avant-garde films and the contact she established with artistic and intellectual circles, for example with Diego Rivera and Tina Modotti. However, she also received accusations of disseminating revolutionary propaganda. The newspapers *El Universal* and *Excélsior* reported that Kollontai attempted to promote Soviet propaganda through the exhibition of films. Furthermore, Luis Morones, the leader of the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers), the most important union in the 1920s, argued she was supporting

81 ahge-sre, 26-26-4 (I), 110 - J.A. Tamayo to Eduardo Hay, Bogota, August 18, 1936.
82 “El viaje de S.E. Palma Guillén.” *El Tiempo*, Bogota, August 18, 1936.
communist circles that challenged the stability of the Mexican government. After six months in Mexico, Kollontai returned to Europe after requesting to be relocated due to health reasons (a weak heart and difficulties breathing due to the altitude in Mexico City).83

**Guillén in Denmark**

On October 1, 1936, Guillén arrived in Denmark and the newspaper *Berlingkse Aftenavis* pointed out that it was the second time a woman had been sent to Copenhagen as a diplomat “It was Mexico that followed the example of the U.S.A by sending a lady, who is already in this capital, as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary. Her name is Palma Guillén.”84 On the 17th she presented her diplomatic credentials to the Danish King, Christian X.85 Newspapers published articles on her appointment and parts of the interviews they had with her in which she explained the project of the Mexican Revolution to improve the lives of workers and peasants. Guillén mentioned in the interviews that she asked to be sent to Scandinavia because she considered their progressive social legislations, systems of cooperative organization and educative systems to be useful for Mexico’s program of reforms.86 Other women diplomats also expressed similar interests in Scandinavia. For example, Florence Jaffrey Harriman told the Norwegian King she was interested in social welfare, a topic in which Norway was at the forefront and that was of interest to President Roosevelt.87

The newspapers *Berlingske Aftenavis*, *Ekstrabladet* and *Sydsvenska* asked Guillén about voting rights in Mexico, something she was not asked in Colombia, and pointed out that a country where women could not vote had decided to appoint a woman diplomat. In contrast, Danish women had gained the right to vote in 1915. Guillén explained that Mexican women were allowed to vote in some states for local congresses, but not at the federal level.88 She went further, stating that “our women have access to almost any official positions.”89 She also said voting rights for women were not a concern for her, “the

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84 ”Ung Dame som Mexicos Gesandt i København.” *Berlingske Aftenavis*, October 1, 1936.
85 AHE-GRE, 26-25-4 (I), 130 - Telegram, Palma Guillén to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Copenhagen, October 19, 1936.
86 ”Ung Dame som Mexicos Gesandt i København.” *Berlingske Aftenavis*, October 1, 1936.
88 Some states allowed women to vote in municipal elections from 1923 onwards, but women were only nationally permitted to vote and be voted in municipal elections in 1947, and to vote in federal elections and hold national political office in 1953.
89 ”Ung Dame som Mexicos Gesandt i København.” *Berlingske Aftenavis*, October 1, 1936.
right to vote for our women is indifferent to me; it is enough for me to know that women in my country have opportunities to productively use their capacities in any activity. What else could be asked?" She clarified by saying that "frankly Mexican women are not feminists; each one takes care of her own and all work as best as possible for the welfare of our country."\textsuperscript{90} She also said that "Mexican women have all fields of activity open to them and their work is paid without any difference from those of men. Female personnel represent 60\% of public employments; in the factories this is only 25\%, but among school-teachers, and especially in rural districts, women reach 80\%."\textsuperscript{91} Clearly, as a woman diplomat, Guillén needed to position herself in regard to feminism and women’s issues.

More than in Colombia, Danish newspapers paid attention to her body and clothing. One newspaper wrote “She is very young, of southern type, with dark hair and black and intelligent eyes, very kind and smiley."\textsuperscript{92} Another wrote “Palma Guillen, dark-skinned lady with dark and serious eyes. We met with the Minister at the Hotel d’Angleterre, whose dark and simple dress proves clothing is an inferior question for miss Guillen, who has very different and way more important things to take care of."\textsuperscript{93} The newspaper \textit{Sydsvenska} went further and openly offered racist comments: “One imagines Mexican women in the “cowboy” style, with a tie in the hand and a cactus landscape in the background, or as indifferent matrons in a hacienda burnt by the sun, but one never thinks of encountering them at the Hotel d’Angleterre in Copenhagen, in the figure of a young lady, pleasant and well guided with respect of the conditions of her country. The new Minister of Mexico, Miss Palma Guillen, is well-educated and intelligent. I find her seated in a big armchair, she is small, dark-skinned, with dark eyes and dressed all in black, with green accessories around her neck.”\textsuperscript{94} These sexist and patronizing comments were not that different from the ones U.S. Minister Ruth Bryan Owen received from the Danish press.

Just as in Colombia, an important activity for Guillén as chief of mission was to send monthly reports on the political, economic, and social situation of the country. She highlighted the challenges faced by Denmark in the difficult European context, in which it was very hard to remain neutral in the face of the tensions between the United Kingdom, the Third Reich and the USSR. In order to position themselves neutrally towards these powers, they had to work

\textsuperscript{90} “Kvindelig Minister fra Land, hvor Kvinder ikke har Valgret!” \textit{Ekstrabladet}, October 1, 1936.
\textsuperscript{91} “Vi bras på vara indianska förfärder sager Mexikos kvinnliga minister.” \textit{Sydsvenska}, October 15, 1936.
\textsuperscript{92} “Ung Dame som Mexicos Gesandt i København.” \textit{Berlingske Aftenavis}, October 1, 1936.
\textsuperscript{93} “Kvindelig Minister fra Land, hvor Kvinder ikke har Valgret!” \textit{Ekstrabladet}, October 1, 1936.
\textsuperscript{94} \textit{Sydsvenska}, October 15, 1936.

\textit{Diplomatica} 5 (2023) 68–94
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alongside other Scandinavian countries. For Lázaro Cárdenas’ government it was very important to maintain international peace, hence it was attentive to the rise of problems in Europe. Guillén also reported on labor conditions. For example, she reported back to Mexico on the following issues: the Danish legislation regarding labor rights in respect to unemployment, the projects to establish infrastructure to diminish the number of unemployed people, and legal projects regarding education and agriculture. These were topics of great importance since the government was trying to collaborate with both the labor and peasant movements. She also reported on Denmark’s position of non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War; in contrast, Mexico supported the Spanish Republic by arguing that it was an international conflict and that the League of Nations had to act to stop the help Francisco Franco was obtaining from fascist governments.

Apart from writing the monthly reports, as a Minister she decided to renovate the Legation so that it would be a more suitable space to represent Mexico, which meant costs that led to criticisms inside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She also covered the payment of some administrative works such as translations. Thus, Guillén asked the Mexican Minister of Foreign Affairs for more resources for the Legation and for herself. However, due to economic problems, the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs reconfigured its system of representation and in December 1937 Guillén was removed from the post. This was something she lamented. The decision to cease Guillén’s appointment led to a complaint and show of support by Vicente Lombardo Toledano, General Secretary of the Mexican Confederation of Workers, who considered it to be of high importance for Mexico to continue having Guillén as a diplomatic representative. Since there were no legations in Europe in need of a chief of mission, she was soon appointed to the Mexican Delegation at the League of Nations in Geneva, Switzerland.

Guillén did not have to deal with pressures from the political spectrum in Denmark. The presence of a woman representing a Postrevolutionary State did not present a problem for a Scandinavian social democracy that was at the forefront when it came to securing the social rights for workers and peasants. However, Guillén’s presence was questioned since she was a woman coming...
from a country in which women did not have full citizenship. Moreover, her body and clothing were scrutinized by the Danish press, something that did not happen at the same level in Colombia. Guillén had asked to be in a Scandinavian country but was released due to economic reasons. After this appointment she returned to a multilateral space but this time with a diplomatic designation.

**Guillén at the League of Nations**

In January 1938, the Mexican Minister of Foreign Affairs decided to appoint Guillén as Technical Advisor to the national Delegation at the League of Nations. She was chosen as a person who would be capable of addressing topics regarding feminine social assistance and intellectual cooperation. Her appointment started on February 1, 1938 and ended in October 1941 when she was called back to Mexico due to the closure of the Mexican Delegation at the League of Nations in the context of the Second World War.

As Technical Advisor, Guillén was Third Secretary for Mexico in the xix Assembly of the League of Nations in September 1938 and in the xx Assembly in December 1939. In October 1938, she also attended the Permanent Committee for Literature and Arts from the Intellectual Cooperation Organization in Paris. In these multilateral spaces, Guillén worked with other women diplomats from the Americas and Europe.

In the xix Assembly, while Isidro Fabela (in charge of the Mexican Delegation) and Manuel Tello (First Secretary of the Delegation) were concerned with questions of peace and war, Guillén oversaw Mexico’s representation in the 5th and 7th commissions. The 5th Commission specialized on child protection, women and children trafficking, assistance to foreign indigents, criminal and penitentiary questions, and the suppression of prostitution. The 7th Commission focused on the works of the Organization of Hygiene, trade of opium and other drugs, modern methods to disseminate peace, international cooperation, the European Conference on Rural Life, accommodation, and nutrition. Fabela sent a report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the activities held by the Mexican Delegation at the xix Assembly and included the work done by Guillén in the commissions.

Due to the proposal of the Spanish Delegate Matilde Huici and Soviet Delegate Alexandra Kollontai, Guillén was assigned as rapporteur for Social Questions (child protection, women and children trafficking, and assistance to indigents). This is an example of woman-to-woman networking in international

organizations during the interwar period. At the end of the Assembly, Guillén was congratulated for her performance, and this was reported to the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs.102

As a rapporteur, Guillén reported to the Assembly on all the discussions held by the Advisory Committee on Social Questions. It decided it was necessary to establish permanent relations between The Advisory Committee on Social Questions, the International Labour Organization, and the Hygiene Section of the League of Nations to avoid the use of resources that duplicated information. It also confirmed the need to proceed with the publication of the Review of Social Questions (which would publish the first issue in 1939) in English and French, but eventually in Spanish and a Scandinavian language. Furthermore, Guillén explained that the Child Welfare Information Centre would continue collecting and distributing material regarding child welfare, which was already making progress on aspects such as the placing of children in families, cinema for the mental and moral development of the young, the legal position of illegitimate children, and the protection of children in time of war. She added the need to work on social assistance for the young, the training of persons engaged in social work and family desertion. Guillén also remarked upon the progress in international legislation regarding the problem of trafficking of women and children, as well as a new form for annual reports that was established to improve the acquisition of information regarding national and international trafficking, as well as steps taken to improve the situation. Another topic Guillén reported on was that of the rehabilitation of prostitutes and the prevention of prostitution. The Advisory Committee on Social Questions had already published two volumes on this topic in 1938: one on the early lives of prostitutes and another on social service and venereal disease. A third volume would focus on the prevention of prostitution, especially of minors. Also, Guillén noted that the Advisory Committee recommended the establishment of an Office for the Orient to collect and distribute information on women and children trafficking in that area of the world. The Fifth Committee also examined the question of aiding indigent foreigners and a Committee of Experts wrote a draft covenant with propositions on measures for the improvement of the precarious situation of indigent foreigners that could be used in bilateral and multilateral frameworks.103 These topics of international importance where also of interest for Cárdenas’ administration, that was attempting to

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103 AHGE-SRE, A-42–8, III-491–6, III-492-1.
increase the State’s social support and was admitting Spanish Republican refugees.

Once the Second World War started, Guillén remained as Technical Advisor to the Mexican Delegation at the League of Nations. She worked for a short period at the Consulate in Paris (February–May 1940) because Consul Gilberto Bosques asked the Mexican Minister of Foreign Affairs for her collaboration on some studies that attempted to understand the European situation while she dealt with personal issues. During the second half of 1940 and in 1941, Guillén acted as Chargé d’Affaires ad interim in the absence of Fabela and Tello in Geneva. As Chargé d’Affaires ad interim, Guillén wrote the monthly reports on the position of Switzerland before the Second World War, the situation of the International Labour Organization and the League of Nations. She also sent copies of documents from the League of Nations in which Mexico was mentioned (for example the Organic Law of Education) and asked for Mexican sources needed in Geneva (for example statistics on raw materials).

Evidently, at the League of Nations Guillén did not have to deal with social and political pressures from the Swiss government and press. Since she did not occupy a particularly high rank in the Mexican Delegation she could concentrate on the topics of intellectual cooperation and assistance. In the meantime, her male peers positioned Mexico against the Anschluss of Austria in 1938 and the Soviet invasion of Finland in 1939. However, once her male peers were no longer in Geneva, she did cover all types of questions (political, economic, and intellectual) when writing her monthly reports to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as she had done in Colombia and Denmark.

Conclusion

Palma Guillén was part of a trickle of women who joined foreign services during the interwar period. She did not apply to join the Mexican Foreign Service, but she was directly appointed by the highest political authority, President Cárdenas, just as Ruth Bryan Owen and Florence Jaffrey Harriman had been appointed by President Roosevelt. Just as other women from the
Americas and Europe, she was sent to represent her country in Latin America and Scandinavia, peaceful regions with no strong military or economic power during the second half of the 1930s. Colombia and Denmark were countries with which Mexico had peaceful relations but were not a priority for Mexico’s foreign policy. She also worked at the national delegation at the League of Nations, an international organization where other women worked too.

As a diplomat, Guillén did the same activities as her (male and female) peers: presented her credentials, wrote detailed reports on national and international politics and economy, collected information (legislation and projects) useful for the Mexican Postrevolutionary State, and offered interviews to the press. In Colombia she also made an important effort to connect with circles beyond the political elite, but she did not do so in Denmark, possibly due to the language barrier. In Geneva, she worked on topics of intellectual cooperation and social assistance that connected her with intellectuals and other women diplomats.

Her reception in Colombia and Denmark led to several articles in the press. Her career in education and intellectual cooperation was celebrated in both countries, and she was constantly portrayed as an exceptional woman that did not lose time in womanly things like clothes. By doing so, the press differentiated Guillén from other women as if other women were not able to perform diplomatic tasks – this was something the press and politicians also did in the cases of Kollontai and Owen. However, the Danish press did question her appointment when Mexican women had no full citizenship. It also put more emphasis on her body and clothing than the Colombian press did. Guillén’s physical appearance and attire were scrutinized, something other women diplomats also experienced, like Rebollo Mendes and Owen.

It is also interesting to note that Guillén’s diplomatic activities were only challenged in Colombia: on the one hand, by conservative circles who saw her as a threat to national sovereignty; on the other hand, by a former Mexican revolutionary who questioned the capacity of Guillén to exercise diplomatic functions. This resembles the experience of Kollontai in Mexico. Guillén’s work was not challenged in Denmark, although she was criticized inside the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs for spending too much money.

Lastly, it is worthwhile observing that while she was Technical Advisor at the League of Nations, her male peers asked her to focus on social questions that covered women, children, immigrants, prostitutes, and criminals, as well as intellectual cooperation. It was assumed that, since she was a woman, she would be able to represent Mexico in the advancement of the social agenda, which aimed to secure care for minorities, and not on the urgent topic of securing international peace which was covered by her male peers.
In conclusion, Guillén faced different challenges in Colombia, Denmark, and Switzerland, especially in her dealings with diplomatic peers, members of political circles, and the press. These challenges resemble those faced by other women diplomats from Europe and the Americas who entered diplomatic activities during the interwar period and were questioned for working in traditionally male spaces.

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