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# Elvia Carrillo Puerto and the Yucatecan Mayan women: social control and defence of the Indigenous population

Izaskun Álvarez Cuartero<sup>1,\*</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Department of Medieval, Modern and Contemporary History, Faculty of Geography and History, University of Salamanca, Salamanca, Spain

\* Correspondence: [izaskun@usal.es](mailto:izaskun@usal.es)

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## Abstract

Elvia Carrillo Puerto (1878–1968) was a teacher, feminist and deputy for the Socialist Party in the Yucatán regional congress. She was the driving force behind the First Feminist Conference of Mexico and other initiatives, such as the improvement of working conditions for women in all trades and the creation of nursery schools. She also campaigned for an end to prostitution and founded more than 50 feminist leagues throughout the state. As the governor's sister, she was in a privileged position to introduce policies to improve the living conditions of Mayan women. In this article, I will discuss how these measures were implemented, using original documentation from the period of the socialist governments of Salvador Alvarado and Felipe Carrillo Puerto. I will focus on the process that led to the realisation in practical terms of the socialist and feminist ideas of the Carrillo Puerto siblings.

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**Keywords** Yucatán; Salvador Alvarado; Felipe Carrillo Puerto; Elvia Carrillo Puerto; Margaret Sanger; Socialist Party of the Southeast; feminism; birth control; Indigenous population

Y fuera de la ley vivía el hacendado que disponía de la persona del indio,  
exactamente igual que del cuerpo de una res, herrada con su marca.

General Salvador Alvarado<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction: Yucatán and henequen in the revolutionary context

If I had to describe the political and social context in which the two years of Felipe Carrillo Puerto's government (1922–4) developed, there would be no shortage of words, for example, violent, ideologically convulsive and uncertain about the future. This is not only because it came immediately after the armed conflict that put an end to Porfirio Díaz's government, but also because Francisco Madero's arrival to power marked the beginning of a period in which political disorder became usual.<sup>2</sup> Both the revolutionary president Francisco Madero and Vice-president José María Pino Suárez were assassinated, right after Victoriano Huerta came to power (1913–14) through a *coup d'état* in the midst of the disturbing events of the 'Decena Trágica'.

At the same time, Europe was fusing together its resentments in the First World War, which brought about changes in the way states thought about their administrations. One such example was the Russian Revolution, where socialism sought to subvert the economic and political structure known until then. Conversely, the United States approached the events of the Mexican Revolution with the hypocrisy and double-dealing characteristic of its foreign policy. This was of extraordinary importance in the case of Mexico, which had been considered almost as an unredeemed territory since its independence from the Hispanic monarchy. The beginning of the twentieth century not only convulsed the political pillars known up to that point but also bore witness to shifts in the social order, such as the birth of feminism, with the first groundbreaking demand for women's suffrage. Nor can we forget the emergence of trade unionism, anarchism and, above all, nationalism, one of the most enduring ideological bastions on all continents which has had an unusual capacity to reinvent itself and launch attractive discourses capable of captivating citizens over the last three centuries.

Mexico experienced its own version of these events. There the social precepts conquered by the revolution were enacted in exceptional examples of practical policy during Obregón's government. The lights and shadows of these policies, such as José Vasconcelos's promotion of public education or the measures to control the Catholic Church endorsed by Plutarco Elías Calles, meant that eventually not all were successful, which led to the Cristero wars. This period, which saw the development of Mexican state architecture and the construction of its institutional apparatus, was a centrifuge of the colonial heritage maintained for almost a century. This occurred much to the chagrin of Don Porfirio and the conservative social sectors, whose values made them incapable of accepting a transition to modernity.

Yucatán suffered the stigma of being considered by the capital's elite as an outcast territory. Viewed with suspicion by Mexico due to its pro-independence leanings, it was at the same time envied because of its henequen economic boom. This growth was made possible by the oppressive conditions and servitude endured by the Mayan population and the Indigenous labour force from other parts of the country. During the 35 years of the Porfiriato, the Yucatecan oligarchy had benefitted from the extraordinary economic rewards from the sale of sisal to the United States. The producers, catapulted by Olegario Molina and his liberal clique, including his son-in-law, Laredo-born Avelino Montes, and Governor Enrique Muñoz Arístegui, were the perfect allies of Porfirio Díaz in Yucatán and managed their businesses as they pleased.<sup>3</sup> The extraordinary demand for henequen and an abundant labour force, who endured deplorable working conditions, almost semi-slavery, favoured an agro-industrial and socially feudal structure that enjoyed astonishing profits.<sup>4</sup> Let us recall the testimony of the journalist John Kenneth Turner in his *México bárbaro* (Barbarous Mexico), which shocked the public with its account and denouncement of the 'Díaz system' centred on the Yucatecan peninsula and the National Valley and the Yaqui, Pima and Opata Indians and, obviously, for Mayas themselves.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the region

continued to be caught up in the Indigenous uprising that had begun in Tepich in 1847 and led to the Caste War (1847–1902), a conflict that partly coexisted with the golden period of henequen production (1850–1940).

This schizophrenic reality, where an increasingly prosperous agro-industrial hacienda coexisted with the *cruzoob* – a group of Mayan insurgents confined to the easternmost area – stigmatised the Mayan population. The hacienda was their only means of survival, driven by a sense, reinforced by their masters, that servitude was their only possible way of life. Security and food were offered in exchange for protection from the ‘otherness of the wild Maya’ and the rebellion was portrayed in stark contrast to the ‘peaceful’ Indigenous people, who were ‘protected’ by the ‘beatific’ and hypocritical mantle of the master. The possibilities of monoculture left little room for a dignified life. Especially in the agrarian aftermath of the war, the hacienda provided protection in exchange for absolute submission, thus ensuring dependence.<sup>6</sup>

In this regard, the letter from José Vales Castillo, President of the Yucatán Chamber of Agriculture, to General Obregón, in which he complained about the disastrous effect of Salvador Alvarado’s policy on the production and marketing of henequen, is very revealing. It was Vales Castillo who created the Henequen Market Regulation Commission to guarantee the prices of the fibre, which led to him being despised by the producers’ lobbies. His words confirm the theory of ‘ungrateful’ and ‘useless’ land. As is well known, he argued that it was thanks to this crop that wealth arose on the peninsula:

Yucatán es, puede decirse, estéril; gran parte de su suelo es una enorme piedra apenas cubierta con una ligera capa de tierra vegetal. En consecuencia, la producción de cereales es ínfima y obtenida a costa de grandes trabajos. En tiempos pasados, cuando aún no existía la industria henequenera y el Estado, en razón de su pobreza solo podía subsistir de lo que produjera, el hambre se dejaba sentir periódicamente porque, según las estadísticas lo han demostrado, de cada cuatro cosechas, se perdía una totalmente, se mediaban escasamente dos y una apenas se lograba. Nuestra historia, hasta hace cincuenta años, está llena de relatos que pintan dolorosamente la vida yucateca que era un verdadero e interminable vía crucis.<sup>7</sup>

The progressive political bias imposed from 1915 would become one of the most interesting examples of real socialism in the first half of the twentieth century. As Gilbert Joseph points out, the reforms undertaken by the general from Sonora were a revolutionary laboratory for Carranza’s government, which considered the export of henequen to be a strategic national resource; Alvarado’s government in Yucatán would be an example of revolution from above.<sup>8</sup> Following the socialist line imposed by Alvarado, Carrillo Puerto’s policy was based on a revolution from below, with political strategies based on centuries of the Yucatecan peasantry’s oppression. Unfortunately, his assassination, the counterrevolution and the complexity of relations between the political actors and the ‘divine caste’ prevented the development of his revolutionary experiment.<sup>9</sup>

For the Indigenous colonial Maya, the independence of Mexico did not include their recognition as full citizens. Despite the change of political regime, the mental immobilism and racism of the Yucatecan elites persisted. They maintained their perception of the Indigenous people as colonised individuals, fit only to be exploited and, of course, excluded from the political decisions that affected their territory. The Caste War entrenched this biased perception even more: the degradation of the Indigenous population, which endured an effective negative discourse on the part of the political and economic powers, contributed to their exploitation and submission by a regime that was little different from the colonial one.

In fact, the viceroyalty of New Spain had more legal tools for the protection of Indigenous people than the so-called status of citizenship granted to them with independence. From 1821 until the beginning of the revolution in Yucatán, we witness a long period – almost a century – of insidious and perpetual colonialism, of a mirage of freedom for the Maya Indigenous people and the practice of ‘infrapolitics’ as a tool of resistance.<sup>10</sup> This is some of the background to the challenges that Carrillo Puerto’s socialist government had to face.

## 'Encontré a Yucatán en plena servidumbre': Salvador Alvarado's government and the visibilisation of women

It is impossible to understand Carrillo Puerto's socialist period and the work undertaken by his sister Elvia without explaining Salvador Alvarado's legacy in a territory with particular internal dynamics.<sup>11</sup> In order to contextualise the situation on the peninsula, it is therefore essential to briefly mention some of the milestones of his government.<sup>12</sup> He was a promoter of social justice among the Maya and the most disadvantaged classes. To him we owe the formation of the revolutionary leagues and tireless pedagogical work to bring education and revolution to all the peoples of the state. His words in *Mi actuación revolucionaria en Yucatán* are illustrative of the relationship of dependence and subalternity that the Indigenous Mayan communities were subjected to by the henequen oligarchy:

Encontré a Yucatán en plena servidumbre. Miles de desgraciados, por culpa de instituciones tradicionales y de vicios sociales tan frecuentemente enraizados que parecían indestructibles, languidecían de generación en generación con la vida vendida a los 'amos'; con los músculos relajados en enriquecer a la casta de los señores; con el alma y la conciencia sujetas al hierro invisible de una amarga esclavitud, en la cual habían aprendido, de padres a hijos; que no podían tener otro sueño de alegría que el del alcohol, ni otra esperanza de liberación que la muerte.<sup>13</sup>

Alvarado was inflexible with the 'divine caste' and considered that 'in order to make the Indian definitively free, it was necessary to educate him'.<sup>14</sup> He denounced the masters' *jus primae noctis* (right of the first night) applied to the daughters of the hacienda workers and the ongoing and historical abuses of the clergy. In response, he resorted to the establishment of schools and libraries:<sup>15</sup> 'La obra de la desfanatización se completó con la fundación de escuelas laicas y competentes, y con el establecimiento de cerca de cien bibliotecas populares'.<sup>16</sup> The sale of alcohol and cockfighting and bullfighting were banned. The cruelty and corporal punishment of workers by overseers, the '*tiendas de raya*' (company stores), debt peonage, the behaviour of the sons of the oligarchy – more concerned with travelling to Paris and New York and indulging in brothels than with working – and the impunity of the masters before the law, whom Alvarado accused of bribing the authorities and the forces of public order, were all denounced. He estimated that more than 60,000 'servants' had been reintegrated into revolutionary life. Particularly notable was his denunciation of the plight of women, who had to be incorporated into the new citizenship. He considered that 'mientras no elevemos a la mujer, nos será imposible hacer patria'.<sup>17</sup> Alvarado was aware of the domestic servitude of Indigenous and mestizo women in the houses of the rich who, 'que con apariencias de paternidad, era de hecho una positiva esclavitud'.<sup>18</sup> They lived in confinement, unpaid, receiving only shelter, clothing and food, with no right to a personal life and no possibility of enjoying a social or family environment:

No podía pasar adelante la obra de la Revolución, sin detenerse a libertar a todas estas infelices. Y la Revolución, por mi mano, les abrió las puertas de sus ergástulas, les hizo saber, que eran libres y que tenían derecho a la vida, y las trasladó a la condición de seres conscientes, dueños de sí mismos, haciendo que se remunera su trabajo y que fueran respetados sus fueros de hijas de un país republicano.<sup>19</sup>

He went even further with revolutionary measures such as the prohibition of brothels and drew attention to the hypocrisy of a state that collected money from the fines imposed on the prostitutes arrested in the course of their work.<sup>20</sup> Later, his commitment would undoubtedly, facilitate Elvia Carrillo's work in her struggle to improve the living conditions of Indigenous and Yucatecan women, especially through the impetus she provided for the organisation of several feminist congresses and the foundation of birth control clinics. Similar events spread throughout Latin America. For example, Elvia was a representative, together with Susana Betancourt and Gloria Mireya Rosado, at the Pan-American Women's Congress, held in the capital in 1923.<sup>21</sup> It is impossible to understand the support for women's rights without Felipe Carrillo's decisive promotion of the feminist leagues, which he skilfully used to propagate socialist ideals, and without Alvarado's stated programmatic goals. In his *Carta al pueblo de Yucatán* he stated:



que la mujer tiene aptitudes para desempeñar las ocupaciones que hasta ahora se han asignado al hombre, y que sólo la educación torcida que ha venido recibiendo a través de los tiempos ha impedido el desarrollo de sus facultades y aptitudes en sentido general.<sup>22</sup>

It was in this politically unstable and tense period, after the social reforms undertaken by General Alvarado and successive Yucatecan governors, such as Carlos Castro Morales (1918–19), that Felipe Carrillo Puerto came to power (1922–4). The situation was also influenced by the manoeuvres of Victoriano Huerta and confronted by the Sonoran lobby, with Álvaro Obregón at the helm of the federal government (1920–4).<sup>23</sup>

## Elvia Carrillo: revolutionary feminism or social justice?

As mentioned above, Governor Alvarado was concerned about women's issues and enacted the so-called 'feminist laws'. He granted women legal equality, passed the divorce law and supported feminism by convening the First Feminist Congress (1916) and a second congress 11 months later, also in 1916.<sup>24</sup> His mandate, of a clearly revolutionary nature, was continued by the first socialist governor of Yucatán, Carlos Castro Morales (1918–19), while Felipe Carrillo Puerto presided over the Socialist Party of the Southeast (previously known as the Socialist Workers' Party).<sup>25</sup> Alvarado's social policies, centred on education and improving the living conditions of the henequen workers and the Indigenous peasant population, were later decisive in consolidating the policies of the Socialist Party of Yucatán (PSY).<sup>26</sup> With Carrillo Puerto, the trade union organisation of the henequero proletariat, cooperativism, the distribution of land and the dignification of work and the life of the peasant population reached its peak.<sup>27</sup> The creation of the leagues of resistance – trade union organisations of peasants and workers that aimed to defend their rights and, above all, guarantee the constitution and democratic processes – was the highest expression of the PSY and the vanguard of the struggle against the oppression of the Yucatecan landed oligarchy. These leagues were dependent on the Central League located in Mérida.<sup>28</sup> An excellent definition of these organisations' role is given in the party's journal *Tierra*:

una Liga de Resistencia, demuestra que el proletariado yucateco está ya apto para ejercer la democracia. Los socialistas tienen un criterio bien definido y consideran un deber el comportarse correctamente en las elecciones y en todas las manifestaciones públicas en que se va a ejercer un derecho.<sup>29</sup>

It is also noteworthy that in 1916 the First Feminist Congress of Mexico was held in Mérida, promoted from the shadows by Elvia Carrillo Puerto (1878–1978).<sup>30</sup> Undoubtedly one of the leading figures of Mexican feminism, she fought tirelessly for the recognition of women's right to vote,<sup>31</sup> divorce, sexual freedom and birth control (see Figure 1). Mexican bourgeois feminism, especially that found in the capital, always looked with suspicion on the theories of the Yucatecan schoolteacher, which were very advanced and extremist for the time, and its disdain for her bordered on the personal. As Lemaître points out, the Yucatecan was beautiful, radical, small-town, a friend of the Indians, self-taught, a socialist, a Bolshevik and a Red suffragette.<sup>32</sup> The assassination of her brother did not bring an end to her feminist militancy.<sup>33</sup> Her reputation for defending her ideas with extraordinary vehemence and oratory was one of her hallmarks. At the International Congress of Women of La Raza, held in Mexico in 1925, Elvia was described as the 'most radical feminist at the conference':

Comenzando sus trabajos el Congreso en medio de un ambiente cordial que hacía augurar fructíferos resultados del mismo; pero la intransigencia de algunos elementos radicales y la violencia de las discusiones de ciertos asuntos de carácter político y religioso originaron que la reunión feminista viera torcidos sus fines y que la Mesa directiva, formada por elementos moderados, declarara la clausura del Congreso a los ocho días de inaugurado, suscitándose con ello un cisma entre los elementos componentes de la asamblea.<sup>34</sup>

Her work among Mayan peasant women led her to carry out intense awareness-raising work in the countryside, which included organising literacy campaigns, promoting birth control, providing health care for women and children as well as leading the fight against alcoholism, which led to the abuse

of women, abandonment of the home and absenteeism.<sup>35</sup> Concern over the consumption of alcohol and, above all, the consequences for women who suffered ill-treatment as a result of their partner's drunkenness, was a priority. In 1920, the Socialist Feminist League and the League of Farmers complained to General Álvaro Obregón about the sale of alcohol in the village of Muxupip, in the department of Motul:

Esta Liga Central considera que el uso indebido del alcohol constituye un principalísimo factor en contra de nuestro progreso y por ende, el origen y la causa de nuestro atavismo histórico, y que los más elementales principios de la moral y de la ley condenan tan repugnante vicio, que hace de los hombres seres inconscientes llevándolo más allá del crimen.<sup>36</sup>

Child protection was also a priority, especially after the passing of the divorce law, which led to a scandalous neglect of child support and care obligations. In June 1923, the Casa del Niño was created with the following objective: 'el sostenimiento y educación de los niños menesterosos, [y realizará] una obra que restará huéspedes a las prisiones y a los hospitales, fortaleciendo seguramente a las generaciones venturas'.<sup>37</sup> The ideology of this establishment was closely related to the theories of the time which linked vagrancy and poor living conditions to criminal acts; the idea of converting them 'en seres aptos para la lucha por la vida y útiles a la sociedad' mainly affected the subaltern classes.<sup>38</sup>

**Figure 1. Tierra, Mérida, 2 September 1923, 11**



The defence of women's rights in the city prompted a struggle for the improvement of working conditions in all trades, the creation of nursery schools, hygiene and health campaigns, the establishment of a homeopathic hospital<sup>39</sup> and, above all, the abolition of prostitution. Carrillo Puerto decreed a law requiring men who sought the services of a prostitute to present a health certificate.<sup>40</sup> Putting an end to this practice was one of the most significant revolutionary challenges undertaken.

En la generalidad de los casos poseen sentimientos nobles y si la oportunidad nos hace tener un rato de conversación con ellas, casi siempre no encontramos con una madre que, no habiendo sido preparada para la lucha por la vida, necesita vender su cuerpo para alcanzar unas cuantas monedas con que alimentar a sus pequeños.<sup>41</sup>

Social progress through rationalist education was one of the great aspirations of the Carrillo siblings.<sup>42</sup> Centuries of oppression had conditioned the Indigenous Mayans to an endemic illiteracy that favoured all kinds of abuse (see Figures 2 and 3). The choice of rationalist education – an educational model promoted by the Casa del Obrero Mundial (World Worker's House) and with clear anarchic origins – was

to enjoy great popularity in the southeastern states. At the First Socialist Workers' Congress, held in 1918 in Mérida, this method of teaching was adopted to alleviate the serious educational backwardness of the state. Rationalist education based on the acquisition of knowledge in a free and natural way confronted the more traditional pedagogies based on memory, empiricism and examination. Under Alvarado's initiative, a Congreso Pedagógico Nacional (National Pedagogical Conference) was convened for the first time in 1915.<sup>43</sup>

**Figure 2. *Tierra*, Mérida, 9 September 1923, 26**



Elvia's many initiatives led to the creation of about 50 Ligas Feministas (feminist leagues) throughout the whole state.<sup>44</sup> Their deployment was so intense that it was covered by the journal *Tierra*.<sup>45</sup> Together with the socialist militant Rosa Torre, Elvia inspired the founding in Mexico City of La Liga Feminista Rita Cetina Gutiérrez (1919), named in honour of her teacher and the pioneer of women's rights in Yucatán.<sup>46</sup> In 1922, the state government's socialist drive resulted in the establishment of 'Red Mondays' in the form of reading meetings aimed at raising women's awareness of their rights, while 'Agrarian Thursdays' focused on advocating for the equal distribution of land between men and women.<sup>47</sup> The 'de-literacy' courses offered a prize of 50 pesos to the teachers who taught 20 women to read and write within three months.<sup>48</sup>

Following her work at La Liga, Elvia published two magazines, *Feminismo* and *Rebeldía*. In 1922, the teacher Rosa Torre González was elected Mayor by Mérida City Council, becoming the first Mexican woman to be elected to a municipal political office by popular vote. After her brother's assassination in 1924,<sup>49</sup> Elvia moved to the country's capital city, where she remained for the rest of her life. There, however, her work did not diminish. Among further expressions of her feminist activism, she founded the Liga Orientadora de Acción Femenina (1925), the Liga Orientadora Socialista Feminista (1927) and, finally, the Liga de Acción Femenina (1933), which had disappeared by 1938, to fight for the political rights of women.<sup>50</sup>

Figure 3. *Tierra*, Mérida, 26 August 1923, 21



## If love enslaves ... damn love!

Yucatecan socialist feminism cannot be understood without the support it received, especially in the United States, from Alma Reed (1889–1966) – the governor’s companion and *New York Times* correspondent (see Figure 4 that shows the cover of *Tierra* framing Reed’s portrait) – and travel writers such as Maude Mason Austin (1861–1939), who journeyed through post-revolutionary Mexico in the first two decades of the twentieth century and came to be familiar with the changes that were taking place on the Peninsula.<sup>51</sup>

Margaret Sanger (1879–1976) was a pioneer of American birth control and family planning policies and the founder of the American Birth Control League, a movement integrated into the suffragette movement in the United States. Sanger was a controversial figure because she was a proponent of negative eugenics, a social philosophy that argues that the species can be improved by social intervention.<sup>52</sup> Her work is associated with that of the chemist Gregory G. Pincus, who in 1958 tested an ovulation inhibitor derived from yams on 1,308 ‘volunteers’ in Puerto Rico.<sup>53</sup> His project was encouraged by Margaret Sanger, who believed that women should be in control of their bodies and their pregnancies, hence her strong support for contraception contrary to the religious beliefs of the time. She was a staunch feminist and a radical socialist.<sup>54</sup> Her theories were greeted with enthusiasm by the new government. One of the first issues of *Tierra* magazine contained an excerpt from an article published in the monthly pamphlet ‘Birth Control Review’ (Sanger was responsible for coining the term ‘birth control’), which reproduced text that was rather provocative in early twentieth-century Yucatán, such as the following:

Cuando las madres son tuberculosas, sifilíticas, o están agotadas por un alumbramiento anterior y próximo, del cual no han tenido tiempo de recuperarse, no están y no se les puede pedir que estén a propósito para producir hijos saludables.<sup>55</sup>

Another passage advocating the criminalisation of abortion and criticising the Catholic Church was also selected, since the Alvarado government exercised unrelenting opposition to revolutionary, not to say socialist, policies, especially those referring to birth control:

En verdad que, tan grande es la convicción de que se hace mal produciendo niños, a los cuales las madres no les pueden proporcionar los cuidados necesarios, que cada año, miles de miles de madres se echan encima la responsabilidad del crimen de aborto a pesar de saber que les puede causar la pérdida de la salud o de la vida y, aun creyendo que el precio que por ello tendrán que pagar sea la maldición eterna.<sup>56</sup>

We cannot ignore the fact that throughout her life, Sanger endured a despicable, relentless propaganda campaign that led to her exile in Canada and several legal battles. Her reputation as amoral, obscene and socialist crossed the borders of the United States and undoubtedly reached Mexico. *Tierra* published several articles about the success of her proposals in Europe to underscore socialism's clear commitment to her theories.<sup>57</sup>

Sanger's *La Regulación de la Natalidad o La Brújula del Hogar*, a pamphlet of just 13 pages, was published by Carrillo Puerto in Mérida in 1922.<sup>58</sup> It was widely distributed, with 5,000 copies published in the first print run and 10,000 in the second. The booklet was financed by the Liga Central del Partido Socialista del Sureste (Central League of the Southeastern Socialist Party) and from the first moment it was criticised by the most reactionary groups in the city, such as the Knights of Columbus, as Alexander Sanger, her grandson, recounts.<sup>59</sup> The journalist Esperanza Velázquez Bringas was the first to publicise birth control at a meeting of the feminist league Rita Cetina Gutiérrez.<sup>60</sup> Bartra notes that Sanger's ideas may have been promoted through the feminist Evelyn Trent, the wife of the Mexican Communist Party member of Indian origin Manabendra Nath Roy, whom Elvia Carrillo and Elena Torres had met in Mexico.<sup>61</sup>

*La Brújula* was a revolutionary publication for its time, particularly for Mayan women, who had not been introduced to the possibility of preventing unwanted pregnancies. The first challenge in this sense was access to pharmacological methods for contraception, and the second was whether any Indigenous woman could read and interpret the pamphlet. As a result, *La Brújula* functioned primarily as an oral text, with its contents most likely being transmitted verbally during the league meetings. It is also crucial to note that the pamphlet was written for American working-class women, not for Indigenous women. However, both shared the same need regarding birth control: 'la mujer debe hacer uso de su derecho de negarse a poblar la tierra de esclavos y a llenar el mercado de niños explotados'.<sup>62</sup> The remainder of the text provides practical guidance on methods for preventing pregnancy, ranging from the popular vaginal douches with antiseptic solutions to French pessaries, vaginal suppositories, sponges and condoms or 'rubber cots'. All of these methods shared a common goal: to destroy the male sperm or prevent its entry into the womb.<sup>63</sup> While these techniques were readily available in the United States, they were not accessible to low-income Yucatecans. As a result, the clinics were heavily reliant on government subsidies.

In mid-1923, Sanger was invited by her friend Dr Ernest Gruening, an associate of the Council of the American Birth Control League, to open several birth control clinics in Mérida.<sup>64</sup> Gruening, a journalist and Democratic senator from Alaska, was one of Mexico's most ardent advocates in the US government. He knew the country well, greatly admired Felipe Carrillo Puerto – who had invited him to visit Yucatán – and was a passionate supporter of his public policies. Gruening was also the editor of the left-wing newspaper *The Nation*, from which news was translated for publication in *Tierra*. Along with Robert Haberman, a socialist lawyer and key figure in Carrillo Puerto's government, who was also the director of the Department of Foreign Languages at the Ministry of Education, Gruening contributed to the translation of *La Brújula del Hogar*.<sup>65</sup> In his 1928 book, *Mexico and Its Heritage*, Gruening's admiration for Mexico is clearly evident:

In twenty-two months of governorship Carrillo Puerto brought prosperity to his state. He built more roads in Yucatan than all the governors since the Conquest – the best highways

in Mexico. He gave education a tremendous impulse and put into practice a series of vital social reforms. Nowhere did the fire of revolutionary idealism burn more brightly than in the shining personality of this beloved Mayan.<sup>66</sup>

Sanger declined the invitation to visit Yucatán in favour of Anne Kennedy, the League's secretary, who arrived in Mérida on 15 August, staying in the city for 10 days and then travelling to Mexico to establish two family planning centres.<sup>67</sup> Her relationship with both Elvia – whom she instructed 'about the practical methods of contraception'<sup>68</sup> – and with her brother became very close throughout her stay:

Tuve muchas conversaciones con él, acerca del establecimiento de dos clínicas de la limitación de la natalidad; las cuales serán intervenidas por doctores y estarán bajo el control y la dirección del Gobierno: ellos estaban profundamente interesados y, el resultado fue, que se establecerían dos clínicas bajo la supervisión de la Junta de Sanidad.<sup>69</sup>

One clinic was dedicated exclusively to the care of prostitutes and the second was opened in the O'Horan Hospital, which had a women's department with a maternity ward.<sup>70</sup> Dr Eduardo Urzaiz Rodríguez, a physician, a confirmed socialist and friend of Carrillo Puerto, included in his medical classes 'la del control de los nacimientos y las aplicaciones más modernas de métodos prácticos'.<sup>71</sup> Concern for the health of prostitutes was a recurring theme for Elvia Carrillo and Rosa Torres. In 1921, on the occasion of the Second Workers' Conference in Izamal, in theme XIII – dedicated to raising the economic level of the socialists as well as their intellectual and moral level – they denounced the fact that women 'se ven precipitadas para poder subsistir a usar medios indecorosos que ustedes los hombres conocen', meaning that women were forced into prostitution in order to support their families.<sup>72</sup>

**Figure 4. Cover of *Tierra*, Mérida, 30 September 1923**



The Junta de Sanidad put Dr Francisco Caamal in charge of the clinic. For him, the cost of this decision was a bomb being detonated in front of his house on 25 November 1923.<sup>73</sup> The clinic's objectives were to check the women's family circumstances and the number of children that justified 'restricting the birth

rate in their homes' and to provide medicines at cost price to the families in need of these practices.<sup>74</sup> One of the problems Kennedy noted was the difficulties in gynaecological practice due to 'the shyness of women to submit to an examination by a male doctor. There are no graduate nurses.'<sup>75</sup> At the same time he warned, in a very biased way, of the high number of cases of venereal disease:

Los mayas (una raza de indios que fue el pueblo originario de Yucatán) tenían pocos casos de enfermedades venéreas pero, los mexicanos, tanto los blancos como los mestizos, todos padecen de sífilis, y les falta un cuidado médico apropiado para esa enfermedad.<sup>76</sup>

Initially, the clinics aimed to provide contraception for young proletarian couples who did not want to have more than two children; Carrillo Puerto thought this project would be one of the key elements of his social policy and the implementation of real socialism. According to Armando Bartra, 'the Yucatecan revolutionaries built a Mayan road to socialism by hand'.<sup>77</sup> Birth control as a biopolitical practice was intended to help improve the living conditions of the women and families of the henequen workers, who were burdened with a high number of children, leading to problems for the family ranging from malnutrition, substandard housing and disease, to domestic and sexual violence.<sup>78</sup> In turn, the Yucatecan socialist state had to face one of its most serious social problems – the high number of children among the Indigenous population. These circumstances exceeded the possibilities of public welfare, such as decent housing, compulsory education, public health and work for all, and made it impossible to eradicate one of the endemic evils of every modern society, namely vagrancy, which is why Sanger's ideas were so well received. Cases of violent sexual abuse perpetrated against Mayan and mestizo women were commonplace, particularly in the henequen haciendas. It is important to note that a significant percentage of the accused served sentences, in spite of the difficulty of documenting the masters' *jus primae noctis*, which they and their descendants perpetrated against the young maids in their service.<sup>79</sup>

Information about Kennedy's trip was picked up by *Birth Control* magazine in October 1923 and translated in *Tierra*. The magazine, not surprisingly, was vehemently supportive of contraceptive policies in the face of propaganda from other media financed by the Catholic lobby. It seems that concerns about the influence of the Catholic Church were at the root of Kennedy's mistrust:

El 99 por ciento de las gentes de México son católicos, pero, durante la revolución en Yucatán y el gobierno del pueblo, los clérigos han quedado reducidos a 31; las iglesias, están vacía y, existe una decidida decadencia en la influencia de los clérigos.<sup>80</sup>

The Junta Superior de Sanidad, the driving force behind the natalist policies, denounced, like Kennedy, the attacks of 'timorous and ignorant spirits hindered by the shackles of Christian modesty and an erroneous concept of morality'.<sup>81</sup>

## Conclusion

The assassination of Felipe Carrillo Puerto prevented the continuation of the socialist project. Despite the traumatic aftermath of the governor's death, Elvia did not cease in the struggle for the rights of Mexican women. The period of Carrillo Puerto's revolutionary government continues to receive little coverage by historiography beyond the Mexican borders, and people like Elvia Carrillo are still largely invisible. For her feminist struggle and her political ideals of equality and social justice, she is remembered as the 'Red Nun of the Mayab', an emblematic figure who not only advocated for women's rights but also promoted education, empowerment and the active participation of women in the political and social life of the region.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Alvarado, *Mi actuación*, 37: 'And outside the law lived the landowner who disposed of the Indian person in the same way as the body of a cow, shod with its brand.'

<sup>2</sup> Espadas, 'Socialismo y violencia'.

<sup>3</sup> Zuleta, 'Las fibras', 4.

- <sup>4</sup> See Joseph, *Revolution from Without*; Joseph and Wells, 'Summer of discontent'; Pérez de Sarmiento and Savarino Roggero, *El cultivo de las élites*; Victoria, *De la imagen*. Diane Roazen's study of Molina's government is very helpful; see Roazen, 'Las élites de México'. For further reading on this topic, see Pérez de Sarmiento, *Historia de una elección*; Vázquez Pasos, 'Élites e Identidades'; Wells, *Family Elites*.
- <sup>5</sup> Turner, *México bárbaro*.
- <sup>6</sup> The connection between Yucatecan soil quality and low production has recently been reviewed by Chelsie Fisher. She argues that environmental injustice is rooted in the colonial belief and narrative of 'useless' land that led to the dispossession of Indigenous property and the creation of henequen haciendas. See Fisher, *Rooting in a Useless Land*.
- <sup>7</sup> 'Yucatán is, it may be said, barren; much of its soil is a huge rock barely covered with a light layer of topsoil. As a result, cereal production is minimal and obtained at the cost of great labour. In former times, when the henequen industry did not yet exist and the state, because of its poverty, could only subsist on what it produced, famine was periodically felt because, as statistics have shown, out of every four harvests, one was totally lost, two were barely averaged and one was barely achieved. Our history, up to fifty years ago, is full of stories that painfully depict Yucatecan life, which was a veritable and interminable *via crucis*.' 'Cartas del Sr. José Vales Castillo, de la Cámara Agrícola de Yucatán, al Gral. Álvaro Obregón, informando del desastre que la política del Gobernador Salvador Alvarado ha acarreado a la industria henequenera'. Primera sección del periódico *Excelsior* en el que está marcado un artículo sobre el mismo tema, sin autor, Mérida, 9 de septiembre de 1920, in Fondo Álvaro Obregón, Fondos y Colecciones Especiales de la Biblioteca Daniel Cosío Villegas de El Colegio de México, México [MX CM\_FCE 0011\_3\_3.4\_2123], p. 2.
- <sup>8</sup> Savarino Roggero, 'El legado ancestral'.
- <sup>9</sup> Joseph, *Revolution from Without*.
- <sup>10</sup> Scott, *Los dominados*, 217–22.
- <sup>11</sup> The bibliography on Elvia Carrillo is extensive. The following references are essential reading: Lemaître, *Elvia Carrillo Puerto*; Peniche, 'Elvia Carrillo Puerto'; and Peniche and Martín, *Dos mujeres fuera de serie*.
- <sup>12</sup> For a compilation of his writings, see Alvarado, *Pensamiento revolucionario*; Alvarado, *Carta al pueblo de Yucatán*; and Alvarado, *A dónde vamos: las cinco hermanas*.
- <sup>13</sup> Alvarado, *Mi actuación*, 33: 'I found Yucatán in full servitude. Thousands of wretched people, through the fault of traditional institutions and social vices so often rooted that they seemed indestructible, languished from generation to generation with their lives sold to the "masters"; with their muscles relaxed in enriching the caste of the lords; with their souls and consciences subjected to the invisible iron of a bitter slavery, in which they had learnt, from father to son, that they could have no other dream of joy than alcohol, and no other hope of liberation than death.'
- <sup>14</sup> Alvarado, *Mi actuación*, 49.
- <sup>15</sup> According to data provided by the statistics section of the Department of Primary Education of the state of Yucatán, the number of women attending official rural schools, night schools, official primary schools, private elementary schools, private upper-primary schools in Mérida and foreign schools was 10,927, compared to 15,426 men. For total figures, see the magazine *Tierra*, Mérida, 3 June 1923, 20.
- <sup>16</sup> *Tierra*, Mérida, 3 June 1923, 58: 'The work of defanaticisation was completed with the foundation of secular and competent schools, and with the establishment of nearly a hundred popular libraries.'
- <sup>17</sup> *Tierra*, Mérida, 3 June 1923, 45: 'As long as we do not promote women, it will be impossible for us to create a homeland.' On the importance of the Indigenous component in the revolutionary national architecture, see Eiss, 'Deconstructing Indians'.
- <sup>18</sup> Alvarado, *Mi actuación*, 46: 'which, with the appearance of paternity, was in fact a positive slavery'. For a detailed discussion of this topic, see Peniche Rivero, 'Mujeres, matrimonios y esclavitud'.
- <sup>19</sup> Alvarado, *Mi actuación*, 47: 'The work of the Revolution could not go forward without stopping to liberate all these unhappy women. And the Revolution, by my hand, opened the doors of their *ergastulas* to them, let them know that they were free and had the right to life, and brought them to the condition of conscious beings, masters of themselves, ensuring that their work was remunerated and that their rights as daughters of a republican country were respected.'
- <sup>20</sup> Smith, 'Salvador Alvarado'.
- <sup>21</sup> *Tierra*, Mérida, 8 July 1923, 8–9.
- <sup>22</sup> Alvarado, *Carta al pueblo*, 63: 'that women have the aptitude to carry out the occupations which have hitherto been assigned to men, and that only the crooked education they have been receiving through the ages has prevented the development of their faculties and aptitudes in a general sense'.
- <sup>23</sup> Buchenau, *The Sonoran Dynasty*.
- <sup>24</sup> The first congress was held from 13 to 16 January 1916; see Alejandre and Torres, 'El primer congreso feminista'.



- Sierra, 'El partido socialista del Sureste'.
- The literature on Salvador Alvarado is abundant. The first appraisal can be found in Salvador Alvarado; Boils, 'El movimiento'; Paoli Bolio, *Yucatán y los orígenes*; Navarrete, 'El sueño'; Valadés, 'Ideas políticas'.
- Other countries viewed Carrillo's government with admiration. He was, from the beginning, surrounded by a Messianic halo: 'Felipe Carrillo Puerto, el presente Gobernador socialista del Estado, que entre intermitencias de 'limpias', prisiones y destierros, predicaba su evangelio de emancipación a los indios de las haciendas, junto con los cuales trabajaba de crepúsculo a crepúsculo, y que luego en las noches reunía ocultamente a media docena de catecúmenos para leerles trozos de *El Dolor Universal*, *El hombre y la Tierra*, *La Conquista del Pan* y algún número borroso y cuarteado de *Tierra*, de La Habana' ('the present socialist governor of the state, who between intermittent "limpias", prisons and banishments, preached his gospel of emancipation to the Indians of the haciendas, with whom he worked from dusk to dusk, and who then in the evenings would secretly gather half a dozen catechumens to read them extracts from *El Dolor Universal*, *El hombre y la Tierra*, *La Conquista del Pan* and some blurred and cracked number of *Tierra*, from Havana'). This excerpt corresponds to an analysis of the political and social situation in Mexico and Yucatán published in the magazine *Cuba Contemporánea* by the novelist and socialist activist Loveira, 'El socialismo', 37. For an overview of this period and of Carrillo's standing, the following works are essential: Joseph, 'Caciquismo'; Irigoyen, *Felipe Carrillo Puerto*; Quintal, 'Vida y obra'; Sandoval and Mantilla, *Felipe Carrillo Puerto*; and Sarkisyanz, *Felipe Carrillo Puerto*.
- Paoli Bolio and Montalvo, *El socialismo olvidado*; Savarino Roggero, *Pueblos y nacionalismo*.
- 'A League of Resistance shows that the Yucatan proletariat is now ready to exercise democracy. Socialists have a well-defined criterion and consider it a duty to behave correctly in elections and in all public manifestations in which a right is to be exercised': *Tierra. Diario Socialista de la Tarde*, Órgano de las Ligas de Resistencia de Yucatán, 9 October 1923. The first issue of the magazine *Tierra* in its third incarnation was published on 1 May 1923 as an organ of the Central Resistance League of the Socialist Party of the Southeast, affiliated to the Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers (Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana). *Tierra* published 33 issues between May and December 1923. The director was Ricardo Mimenza, the editor-in-chief was Aurelio Velázquez and the head of the cultural department was Professor Edmundo Bolio. Every issue is available at the Centro de Apoyo a la Investigación Histórica y Literaria de Yucatán (CAIHLY). The journal has also been digitised thanks to the work of the University of North Florida: <https://revistatierra.org/>. About the origins of the publication, see Leyva, 'La revista Tierra'.
- The sessions of the First Feminist Congress were held at the Peón Contreras Theatre in Mérida between 13 and 16 January 1916, during the government of Salvador Alvarado (1915–18). There were 617 women delegates, including Consuelo Zavala Castillo, who was responsible for organising it, Dominga Canto, Adolfinia Valencia de Ávila, María Luisa Flota, Beatriz Peniche, Amalia Gómez, Piedad Carrillo Gil, Isolina Pérez Castillo, Elena Osorio, Fidelina González, Candelaria Villanueva, Lucrecia and Adriana Badillo, Rosina Magaña and Consuelo Andrade. At the end of the same year, the second Congress was held from 23 November to 2 December, with just 234 delegates. The bibliography on the beginnings of feminism and suffrage in Mexico is extensive. For a panoramic view, see the following works: Cano, 'La ciudadanía de las mujeres'; and Cano, 'Revolución'. The following works are also essential: Lau, 'Los limpios anhelos de las mexicanas'; Ramos, 'La participación'; Gutiérrez Castañeda, *Feminismo en México*; Macías, *Contra viento y marea*; and Morton, *Women Suffrage*. On the first feminist congresses held in Mérida, see *Primer Congreso Feminista de México, 1916*; Cortina, 'Los congresos feministas'; and Soto, *Emergence*.
- The struggle for women's suffrage was gradual, starting with petitions from Maderista feminists and a campaign in the 1920s that secured certain voting rights in Yucatán, San Luis Potosí, Chiapas and Tabasco. During President Lázaro Cárdenas's term, there was temporary advocacy for women's suffrage, but the focus shifted to raising awareness among rural women through women's leagues, which aimed to provide economic resources and enhance political participation by empowering women as group leaders and encouraging support for candidates, despite their lack of voting rights. Women's suffrage was officially granted in Mexico in 1953 under President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines; see Buck, 'La organización de las mujeres', 239–48.
- Lemaître, *Elvia Carrillo Puerto*.
- Castro, 'Felipe Carrillo Puerto'.
- Revista hispanoamericana de ciencias, letras y artes*, Madrid, July 1925, 270: 'The Congress began its work in a cordial atmosphere that augured fruitful results; but the intransigence of some radical elements and the violence of the discussions of certain political and religious matters caused the feminist meeting to see its aims twisted and the Executive Committee, made up of moderate elements, declared the Congress closed eight days after its inauguration, thus causing a schism between the elements that made up the assembly.'
- Between 1916 and 1931, a series of anti-alcohol laws were passed in the country with the aim of creating an efficient and vice-free working class. One of General Alvarado's most trusted men, the former governor of Tabasco, Tomás Garrido Canabal, successfully promoted the Dry Law among the people of Tabasco. Not surprisingly, the same measures were implemented in Yucatán. Elvia Carrillo's knowledge of the reality of

peasants' lives led her to support and promote the revolutionary anti-alcohol policy. On this topic, see Fallaw, 'Dry law'; and Méndez Reyes, 'De crudas y moralidad'.

<sup>36</sup> 'This Central League considers that the misuse of alcohol constitutes a major factor against our progress and, therefore, the origin and cause of our historical atavism, and that the most elementary principles of morality and law condemn such a repugnant vice, which makes men unconscious, leading them beyond the point of crime': *Carta de la Liga Central de Resistencia del Comité Central del Partido Socialista al General Álvaro Obregón*, Mérida, 20 September 1920, in Fondo Álvaro Obregón/3 Sección: Primera campaña política/3. Serie: Comités de apoyo (subserie original), Fondos y Colecciones Especiales de la Biblioteca Daniel Cosío Villegas de El Colegio de México, México [MX CM\_FCE 0011\_3\_3.3\_2015\_2\_2].

<sup>37</sup> *Tierra*, Mérida, 24 June 1923, 5–6: 'the support and education of needy children ... [and will perform] a work that will reduce the number of guests in prisons and hospitals, and will surely strengthen the future generations'.

<sup>38</sup> *Tierra*, Mérida, 24 June 1923, 5: 'into beings fit for the struggle for life and useful to society'. The work by Urías, *Indígena criminal*, is essential to understanding the success of these theories in this period.

<sup>39</sup> There was an attempt to close the Hahnemann homeopathic hospital in 1932. The news was reported in the publication *El Sol de Meissen*. *Órgano oficial de la Liga hispano-americana pro-homeopatía*, March–April 1932, 62–3. It is interesting to read the esteem in which the governor was held for opting for such progressive medicine for the time: 'Recordemos la frase del extinto Gobernador constitucional del Estado, la gran figura de Felipe Carrillo Puerto, amigo de los desheredados de la fortuna y de las minorías oprimidas al apoyar las demandas de los homeópatas yucatecos: "Tanto derecho tienen los que se curan por la alopatía para tener su hospital, como lo tienen los que se curan por la homeopatía para tener el suyo"' ('Let us remember the phrase of the late constitutional Governor of the State, the great figure of Felipe Carrillo Puerto, friend of the disinherited of fortune and of the oppressed minorities when supporting the demands of the Yucatecan homeopaths: "Those who are cured by allopathy have as much right to have their hospital as those who are cured by homeopathy have to have theirs"'). Access to public health care was a priority for the government; see McCrea, *Diseased Relation*.

<sup>40</sup> *Tierra*, Mérida, 4 November 1923, 23.

<sup>41</sup> *Tierra*, Mérida, 30 September 1923, 26: 'In the majority of cases they possess noble sentiments, and if the opportunity arises to have a little conversation with them, we almost always meet a mother who, not having been prepared for the struggle for life, needs to sell her body to obtain a few coins to feed her little ones.'

<sup>42</sup> Laris, 'Propaganda'.

<sup>43</sup> The revolutionary government of Salvador Alvarado closed many of the Catholic schools and centres of learning and promoted rationalist schools more suited to educating revolutionary men and women. Curiously, he allowed the school belonging to Consuelo Zavala, the organiser of the Feminist Conference, to remain open, but pointed out that: 'el liberalismo de color rosa de la Srta. Zavala resulta muy pálido comparado con el rojo vivo de nuestro radicalismo revolucionario' ('Ms. Zavala's pink liberalism pales in comparison to the bright red of our revolutionary radicalism'); see Urzaiz, 'Historia de la educación', 205.

<sup>44</sup> As Cortina observes: 'The Liga Feministas was a project initiated by Alvarado; as he outlined in his *Mi sueño*, its objective was to engage women in voluntary activities such as literacy, nursing, the establishment of economic kitchens, family hygiene programmes and assistance to underprivileged women'. In Cortina Quijano, 'Los congresos', 186.

<sup>45</sup> *Tierra*, Mérida, 19 August 1923, 4.

<sup>46</sup> The teacher Rita Cetina is considered one of the pioneers of feminism in Mexico. The magazine *Siempreviva*, for which she was responsible, and her work as Head of the Instituto Literario de Niñas, are essential to understand the context of women in Yucatán at the end of the nineteenth century. See Peniche Rivero, *Rita Cetina, la Siempreviva*; Peniche Rivero, *Siemprevivas*; and Menéndez, *Rita Cetina Gutiérrez*.

<sup>47</sup> Elvia utilised 'Agrarian Thursdays' – when land was allocated to communities – to deliver awareness-raising speeches. Carrillo Puerto distributed 433,866 hectares to 22,525 peasants as part of the agrarian reform during his government; see Joseph, *Revolution from Without*.

<sup>48</sup> *Tierra*, Mérida, 5 August 1923, 6.

<sup>49</sup> Along with Governor Carrillo Puerto, Elvia's three other brothers, Benjamín, Edesio and Wilfrido, were assassinated on 3 January 1924.

<sup>50</sup> Lemaître, *Elvia Carrillo Puerto*; Peniche and Martín, *Dos mujeres*.

<sup>51</sup> The story about Alma Reed in *Tierra*, not surprisingly, was extremely obsequious: 'Alma, con su risa de oro y su elegancia elástica, es una gentil escritora que desde las columnas de un serio y poderoso órgano de la prensa americana ofrece a los lectores obras de erudición, obras de pensamiento alto y de saber profundo' ('Alma, with her golden laugh and her elastic elegance, is a gentle writer who, from the columns of a serious and powerful organ of the American press, offers readers works of erudition, works of lofty thought and profound knowledge'): *Tierra*, Mérida, 30 September 1923, 1. For insights into the relationship between Alma Reed and

Carrillo Puerto, see the following works: Reed, *Peregrina*; Schuessler 'La correspondencia'; and Schuessler and Gómez Tepexicuapan, *Tuyo hasta que me muera*. For other testimonies by correspondents and travellers, see Vásquez Montaña, 'Periodismo'. Maude Mason Austin, who lived in El Paso, was married to William H. Austin, the great-nephew of Stephen F. Austin, the founder of Texas. Austin, *En Yucatán* serves as an insightful testament to the revolutionary society of Yucatán.

<sup>52</sup> 'Negative eugenics held ideas such as restricting immigration; segregation and sterilisation of the mentally retarded; and closing borders to "retarded" aliens, the insane, syphilitics, epileptics, criminals or prostitutes. Some of these ideas can be read in "Plan for Peace"', *Birth Control Review*, New York, 1932, a magazine edited by Sanger herself. Her work remains controversial, especially among reactionary Christian groups. See Villela and Barahona, 'Margaret Sanger'; and Ortiz, 'El 'Espíritu Femenino'.

<sup>53</sup> Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*; Briggs, 'Discourses'.

<sup>54</sup> Margaret Sanger's writings have been collected in an extraordinary edition. See *The Selected Papers of Margaret Sanger*; to find out more, please consult the website: Margaret Sanger Papers Project, <http://www.nyu.edu/projects/sanger>. It is sponsored by the Department of History at New York University.

<sup>55</sup> *Tierra*, Mérida, 5 August 1923, 14: 'When the mothers are tubercular, syphilitic, or are exhausted by a previous and near birth from which they have not had time to recover, they are not and cannot be asked to be fit to produce healthy children.'

<sup>56</sup> *Tierra*, Mérida, 5 August 1923, 14: 'Indeed, so great is the conviction that one does wrong by producing children, to which the mothers cannot provide the necessary care, that every year thousands upon thousands of mothers take upon themselves the responsibility for the crime of abortion even though they know that it may cause them the loss of health or life, and even though they believe that the price they will have to pay for it will be eternal damnation.' To understand the reactionary efforts to neutralise birth control policies, it is essential to read Buck, 'El control de natalidad'. The opposition of Catholics to the revolutionary changes was soon apparent. The archbishop of Yucatán, Martín Tritschler y Córdova, who was openly opposed to Felipe Carrillo, was behind these actions; see Pérez de Sarmiento, 'Los mensajeros de Job', 85–95; and Pérez de Sarmiento, 'Levantar de las cenizas', 344–50.

<sup>57</sup> *Tierra*, Mérida, 19 August 1923, 13.

<sup>58</sup> The subtitle of Sanger, *La regulación (Regulation)* is: *Safe and Scientific Means to Prevent Conception*. See also Sanger, *The Pivot*; and Sanger, *My Fight*. On Carrillo Puerto's commitment to feminism and the contraception clinics, see Macías, 'Felipe Carrillo Puerto'. *La Brújula del Hogar* was republished in PDF format in 2016 by the non-governmental organisation Servicios Humanitarios en Salud Sexual y Reproductiva (Mérida). It has two forewords by Leticia Bonifaz Alfonzo and Alexander Sanger, the author's grandson. It is available at: <https://sangerpapers.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/la-brc3bajula-del-hogar.pdf>.

<sup>59</sup> Alexander Sanger reports on this in the foreword to this edition.

<sup>60</sup> Buck, *El control*, 9.

<sup>61</sup> Bartra, *Tiempo*, 114.

<sup>62</sup> Sanger, *La brújula*, 23: 'women must make use of their right to refuse to populate the land with slaves and to fill the market with exploited children'.

<sup>63</sup> Sanger, *La brújula*, 23–38.

<sup>64</sup> Macías, *Contra viento y marea*, 116.

<sup>65</sup> Bartra, *Tiempo*, 216.

<sup>66</sup> Gruening, *Mexico*, 473.

<sup>67</sup> Anne Kennedy (1885–1966) was the executive secretary of the American Birth Control League, based in New York City. She held other positions, including Legislative Secretary; member of the Congressional Committee; Field Secretary and member of the Board of Directors. Kennedy joined Sanger in London at the Fifth International New-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference in July 1922. On this question, see Buck, 'El control de natalidad'.

<sup>68</sup> *Tierra*, Mérida, 4 November 1923, 23.

<sup>69</sup> *Tierra*, Mérida, 4 November 1923, 9: 'I had many conversations with him, about the establishment of two birth control clinics; these will be operated by doctors and will be under the control and direction of the Government: they were deeply interested, and, the result was, that two clinics would be established under the supervision of the Board of Health.' On this question, see Buck, 'El control de natalidad'.

<sup>70</sup> Cervera, 'Breve historia', 151.

<sup>71</sup> *Tierra*, Mérida, 4 November 1923, 9.

<sup>72</sup> Partido Socialista del Sureste, 100: 'are being precipitated in order to subsist by using unseemly means known to you men'.

- <sup>73</sup> This was written in a letter from Carrillo Puerto to Reed; see Schuessler and Gómez, *Tuyo hasta que me muera*, 360.
- <sup>74</sup> *Tierra*, Mérida, 18 November 1923, 11.
- <sup>75</sup> *Tierra*, Mérida, 4 November 1923, 9.
- <sup>76</sup> *Tierra*, Mérida, 4 November 1923, 23, 'Mayas (a race of Indians who were the original people of the Yucatan) had few cases of venereal disease, but Mexicans, both white and mestizo, all suffer from syphilis, and lack proper medical care for the disease.'
- <sup>77</sup> Bartra, *Tiempo*, 81.
- <sup>78</sup> Smith, *Gender*.
- <sup>79</sup> Álvarez, 'Violencia sexual'.
- <sup>80</sup> *Tierra*, Mérida, 4 November 1923, 9, '99 percent of the people of Mexico are Catholic, but during the revolution in Yucatan and the rule of the people, the clergy have been reduced to 31, the churches are empty, and there is a decided decline in the influence of the clergy.'
- <sup>81</sup> *Tierra*, Mérida, 18 November 1923, 10.

## Declarations and conflicts of interest

### Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

### Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

### Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflict of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently blind the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

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