

The General's Daughter: Ana Zapata, Mexican Suffragist, and Agent of Social Change

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Abstract

Many historians have written extensively about Emiliano Zapata, one of the best-known generals of the Mexican Revolution and one of the most significant figures in Mexico's history. However, there are no scholarly works that elaborate on his daughter, Ana Zapata, as someone who strove for the official recognition of Mexican women's citizenship. In spite of cultural and gender stereotypes, Ana Zapata actively participated in Mexican politics throughout her life. Even though Ana Zapata maintained good relationships with the ruling party politicians, at a young age she became seriously engaged in at least two struggles that were not synchronized with that party's agenda: the women's suffrage movement and a presidential campaign for an opposing candidate. She was the most prominent suffragist in the State of Morelos (Mexico). This work shows how the social and symbolic capital that Ana Zapata learned to accrue since she was young strengthened her agency. She made alliances with other suffragists and with the ruling party politicians. Yet she used her symbolic and social capital to benefit people in her community.

Keywords: Suffrage movement, Mexico, politics, Mexican History, women

1. Introduction

Mexico was one of the last countries in Latin America to officially recognize women's rights to vote and be elected. These rights were finally achieved through the suffrage movement led by women from different regions of the country and through international pressure exercised on the Mexican government. Nevertheless, little is known about the suffragist movement in the State of Morelos.

The State of Morelos is located south of the Federal District, best known as Mexico City—the country's capital. It is one of the smallest states in Mexico, and the birthplace of Emiliano Zapata. Zapata was one of the most important generals of the Mexican Revolution and a significant icon in Mexico's history.

Despite the fact that he was murdered in 1919, Emiliano Zapata has remained a major revolutionary symbol among the people of Morelos and in various southern regions of the country. Throughout the state of Morelos, there are statues and monuments in his honor. The Cuauhnáhuac museum, the most significant and largest museum of the State, houses Diego Rivera's painting of Zapata as a major Revolutionary hero. Even nowadays, it is common to see Emiliano Zapata's image painted on public walls or printed and hung inside houses, restaurants, and all kinds of businesses. Another example of Emiliano Zapata's symbolic charge is reflected in an anecdote told by his daughter, Ana Zapata, which indicates how some low-income people view him as a saint:

One day, I went to the place where the Plan de Ayala was signed and the people realized that I was the General's daughter. They collected wildflowers and gave them to me, they hugged me, they took me to their houses, and I saw that they had pictures of Zapata on a shelf along with religious candles. They told me that he used to do miracles for them. They sow, they pray to my father, and the maize grows¹. (Taboada, 2010)

¹ All translations are mine unless stated otherwise.

1. *The General's Daughter*

The daughter of Emiliano Zapata and Petra Portillo-Torres, Paulina Ana María Zapata Portillo (1915–2010) was born in Cuautla, Morelos. As reported by Ana Zapata, her childhood was sad. She was four years old when her father was murdered. After his assassination, her family was persecuted and some members of the family took Ana with them and moved to Chietla, in Puebla (Taboada, 2010).

The social and symbolic capital that Ana Zapata learned to acquire since she was young strengthened her agency. Montes-de-Oca-O'Reilly and Yurén (2010) have suggested that increasing symbolic and social capital aids in a person's development of agency. Emirbayer and Mische (1998:970) define agency as "the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal-relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations."

Yet, gender had a positive influence on Ana Zapata's childhood and subsequent agency. None of Emiliano Zapata's children were as popular among the Mexican political class as Ana Zapata. According to her daughters, the fact that Ana was born a girl brought her closer to her aunts and grandmother on her father's side (Manrique-Zapata J., 2012; Manrique-Zapata, Martha). As reported by the Manrique-Zapata siblings, Ana's brother, Nicolás, did not experience such closeness. Martha Manrique-Zapata (2012), Ana's daughter, said that after Emiliano Zapata was murdered: "Because my mother was a girl, my aunts used to take her along with them everywhere and she really got along with my grandfather's sisters, María de Jesús and María de la Luz."

Ana's closeness to her aunts and grandmother made her learn about her own symbolic capital at a young age. According to Bourdieu (1985:197) symbolic capital is related to "reputation, prestige, renown, etc." In Ana Zapata's case, her grandmother and aunts were proud of Emiliano Zapata's achievements and so since she was a child, Ana developed a certain image of her father's identity and, therefore, of her own: the daughter of a hero. She once said, "Since I was ten years old, I have been aware of my relationship to politics. My grandmother used to tell me about my father and about his battle: the Revolution" (Caracas, 2008). Ana Zapata also learned how to acquire social capital since she was very young. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 119): "Social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition". Julieta Manrique-Zapata (2012), Ana's daughter, described how Ana accrued a network of people who respected her:

In Anenecuilco, where my grandfather was born, they [the Zapatas family] were very well known and respected. People thought that because they carried [Emiliano] Zapata's last name, they could help solve any problem. My aunt used to take my mother along with her to solve all sorts of problems. As my mother grew up, because she was Zapata's daughter, people began to respect her. She became engaged in politics.

Ana Zapata's symbolic and social capital is evident in an anecdote involving former Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas. As Ana herself acknowledged, she began to like politics at a young age. She must have been between nineteen and twenty-four years old when then President Lázaro Cárdenas visited Cuautla, Morelos. Ana recalled, "We went to welcome him and he asked me, 'What plans do you have?'" Ana stated that she planned to unify the widows, daughters, mothers, and sisters of the veterans who died during the Revolution so that the government could give them a pension. In her interview with Taboada (2010) she said, "I organized an assembly at the Morelos Theater in Cuernavaca. More than 800 women came from the States of Guerrero, Mexico, Veracruz, and Puebla. General Cárdenas was very nice, very understanding [...] He was very impressed."

2. *Ana Zapata, The Suffragist*

Even though Ana Zapata maintained good relationships with the ruling party politicians, at a young age she became seriously engaged in at least two struggles that were not synchronized with that party's agenda: the women's suffrage movement and a presidential campaign for an opposing candidate. The Mexican suffragist movement had its peak during the 1930s, that is, during Lázaro Cárdenas's presidency (1934–1940). Many women's organizations participated in the struggle for the official recognition of their citizenship. Women articulated their efforts as a single common objective.

Some Mexican suffragists also had a relationship with suffragists in the United States. Margarita Robles de Mendoza was one of them. She was probably the most internationally well-known Mexican suffragist during the 1930s. Robles de Mendoza became President of the Mexican Section of the Union of Women of the Americas (Unión de Mujeres Americanas/UMA).

The UMA Mexico Chapter was also associated with the Revolutionary National Party (PNR),² the ruling party at the time. This women organization played a major role in the struggle for the vote during those years. It gathered women from different socioeconomic status and places. According to a UMA member, “It was like a salad” (Urrutia, 1983: 9).

Ana Zapata became a significant member of the UMA. The UMA included several organizations. Among them was the Southern Women’s Union (Unión de Mujeres Surianas), the president of which was Ana Zapata (*El Universal*, 1937; Urrutia, 1983). According to López (2003), the UMA Morelos Chapter was founded in the State of Morelos in 1935. The author claims that under Ana Zapata’s leadership as President of the UMA Morelos Chapter, members of this organization strove for the official recognition of Mexican women’s citizenship. Celia Montaña (daughter of General Otilio Montaña), Colonel María Félix Méndez, Colonel Rosa Bobadilla, and Celia Muñoz Santarrega were members of this organization.

During the 1930s, even though Cuernavaca was the capital of the State of Morelos, Ana Zapata’s home city of Cuautla was the center of Morelos women’s political activity. Ana organized women to fight for the vote and kept a notebook containing more than 500 names of members of UMA Morelos Chapter. The notebook was signed by Ana Zapata on January 1, 1936. The women whose names are recorded in the book came from different towns and cities in the State of Morelos: Cuautla, Jojutla, Huitzilac, Axochiapan, Tenextepango, and Tepalcingo, among others. There were also women who lived in Tixtla, a town in the southern State of Guerrero. The UMA had its own stamp, which read: “Union of Women of the Americas. Cuautla, Morelos. Peace and Equality. State’s Central Section. General Offices” (“Unión de Mujeres Americanas. Cuautla Morelos. Paz e Igualdad. Sección Central del Estado. Oficinas Generales”).

A letter published in Mexican newspapers on August 31, 1936—listing the names of various UMA leaders, including those of Margarita Robles de Mendoza as Organizer and Founder of the UMA and Ana María Zapata as UMA’s spokeswoman for the State of Morelos—was addressed to Mexico’s President as well as senators and federal representatives. In that letter, UMA leaders requested women’s vote and questioned the revolutionary identity of those in power. They claimed that the Electoral Law violated Article 34 of the Constitution and therefore, that the Electoral Law needed to be reformed (*El Universal*, 30 August 1936 p. 9; *El Nacional*, 31 August 1936, p. 8). They also contended:

We are sure that if you are true revolutionaries, in your consciences you know that women should have the same rights of citizens as men. The representatives of the Republic have sworn to respect the Constitution and defend its institutions, and it will not be possible to fulfill such a promise if you outrage an immense group of people of the Mexican homeland. (*El Universal*, 1936:1)

By becoming one of the UMA most significant representatives, Ana Zapata aimed to position herself as one of the major women’s rights advocates at that time. She intended to influence not only the women of Morelos, but also those from other states such as Guerrero and Puebla. It has been mentioned that Guerrero women participated with the UMA Morelos Chapter under Ana Zapata’s leadership. Apparently, Ana also assumed the Presidency of the UMA Puebla Chapter. A newspaper photograph (undated) shows Ana Zapata (in the middle) along with her aunt (Emiliano Zapata’s sister) and Margarita Robles de Mendoza. The caption indicates that they visited the newspaper facilities and that Ana was the President of the UMA Puebla Chapter. Another newspaper photo shows a group of people including Ana Zapata, Margarita Robles de Mendoza, and President Lázaro Cárdenas. The caption says that Robles de Mendoza gave a medal to Cárdenas in Atlixco, Puebla.

² In 1938, the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (Revolutionary National Party/PNR) changed its name to Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (Party of the Mexican Revolution/PRM). In 1946, its name was changed again, to Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party/PRI).

Ana Zapata continued the struggle for the vote inside the PNR. According to (López, 2003), she worked together with Colonels María Félix Méndez and Rosa Bobadilla, as well as teachers Celia Muñoz Santarreaga and Celia Montaña, to exercise pressure within the party on behalf of women's voting rights. The author has stated that in 1938, at the time when Elpidio Perdomo was Governor of the State, the UMA Morelos Chapter changed its name to Union of Revolutionary Women of the State of Morelos (Unión de Mujeres Revolucionarias del Estado de Morelos).

I did not find evidence that Ana Zapata continued to struggle for the vote after Lázaro Cárdenas's term ended. According to Julieta Manrique-Zapata (2012), López (2003), and Guerra (2008, n/p), when President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines visited the State of Morelos between 1952 and 1953, Ana Zapata was among the people who were invited to welcome him. They stated that the day of his arrival, Ana gave him a letter requesting the vote for women.

3. Ana Zapata's Other Political Activities

Ana Zapata continued to be a central figure in Morelos political life. Ana's symbolic and social capital allowed her to support causes that were against the ruling party interests. Even though Ana Zapata maintained good relationships with the PRM politicians, when she was between twenty-four and twenty-five years old, she organized women to support Juan Andrew Almazán's 1940 presidential campaign (Member of the CPHC, 2012). Almazán was the opponent of the PRM's candidate.

As evidence of Ana Zapata's support of Almazán, there is a photograph of Almazán surrounded by a large group of people, including Ana, and the following words are hand-written on the picture: "For my favorite friend Anita Zapata with my deep affection and admiration for the memory of her father, J. Andrew Almazán." In her interview with Taboada (2010), Ana Zapata said the following about the PRM's presidential candidate Manuel Ávila Camacho at that time:

Ávila Camacho used to send people to convince me to support him, but I did not pay attention to him. The day of the election, a truck came by full with thugs looking for the ballot boxes. They did not find them because I had hidden them underneath my bed. Almazán won [the presidential election] but as always, they win, but they lose. He was not allowed to be president.

Ana Zapata was aware that her last name had great clout among politicians. She knew how to use her symbolic and social capital. There are many photographs of her with Mexican Presidents and other high-level public officials. She once said, "In the past, the candidates for governor used to come to see me, the presidents too. We were treated with a lot of respect. They knew that I could gather a lot of people. That's why they used to come, from Cárdenas to Salinas" (Taboada, 2010).³

According to Taboada (2010), during the 1950s, Ana served as a liaison between the government and the members of the movement led by Rubén Jaramillo. The Jaramillista crusade (1940–1962) was a social movement in the State of Morelos against the ruling party. Jaramillistas did not consider the ideals of the Revolution to have been fulfilled. According to Padilla (2008) some Morelos women actively participated in that movement. Ana recalled:

Rubén used to bring women with him and those women used to have pistols inside their *morral* bags. One day, he asked me to go with him to see Julián Adame,⁴ Secretary of Agriculture. Adame did not want to receive him. He despised Jaramillo but I insisted, "Receive him, it's in your best interest," because I knew that the women were carrying their pistols. (Taboada, 2010)

³ Ana Zapata refers to former Mexican Presidents Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940) and Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994).

⁴ She refers to Julián Rodríguez Adame, Head of the Ministry of Agriculture and Ranching during the presidential term of Adolfo López Mateos (1958–1964).

At the age of forty-three, Ana Zapata became the first Morelos woman to occupy a seat in the Federal House of Representatives. Ana was a PRI representative in the XLIV Federal Legislature from 1958 to 1961. Julieta Manrique-Zapata (2012) said, “When my mother was campaigning to become a Representative, my father accompanied her to many villages and towns in Morelos.”

Manuel Manrique-Zapata (2012), Ana’s son, claimed:

She continued with that (her political activities). At that time, there were only seven women [federal] representatives... Hilda Anderson, [was one of them] [...] My mother, Ana María, was a close friend of Macrina Rabadán’s, who had already passed away. She held her in high esteem, even though she belonged to a different party [...] and they used to get along pretty well. The two of them—along with Manuel Castillo, Cuernavaca’s representative—made a good team. Another [friend of Ana’s] was Aurora Arrayales de Morales. She was from the north. They all have passed away.

Ana Zapata was socially and politically active throughout her life. According to Guerra (2008), Ana Zapata was known in eastern Morelos as “La Jefa” (“The Female Chief”) because she used to help people solve problems related to government issues. Her children claim that their house was always full of people who looked for her help and she used to have food on hand for them. Ana Zapata was also regularly invited to welcome presidents and high-ranking politicians during their visits to the State of Morelos. Toward the end of her life, she claimed that she had always been politically active (Caracas, 2008).

4. Conclusion

In spite of cultural and gender stereotypes, Ana Zapata, the General’s daughter, actively participated in Mexican public life. She learned to accrue her social and symbolic capital since she was young. Those capitals strengthened her agency.

During her youth, Ana became engaged in at least two struggles that were not synchronized with the ruling party’s agenda. She advocated female suffrage and strove for the official recognition of Mexican women’s citizenship. She also supported the presidential campaign of an opponent of the regime.

She made alliances with other suffragists, as well as with women from different backgrounds who were also pioneers in the official political sphere. Ana also managed to maintain good relationships with the ruling party politicians. Yet she used her symbolic and social capital to benefit people in her community.

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- Anonymous member of the Consejo del Patrimonio Histórico de Cuautla (CPHC) (2012, September 2) Interview by Alejandra Montes-de-Oca-O'Reilly [Digital recording]