



# ***Mujeres Libres: Reclaiming their predecessors, their feminism and the voice of women in the Spanish Civil War history***

By Mònica de Ayguavives

Submitted to Central European University

Department of Gender Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies

Main supervisor: Dr. Francisca de Haan. Central European University

Support supervisor: Dr. Suzanne Clisby. University of Hull

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the Spanish women's organization, *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women), founded at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and emerged from the anarchist movement. The aim is to recognize the organization *Mujeres Libres*, the founders and the relevant members from different branches. There are three main questions that I have addressed in this thesis; the first one is if *Mujeres Libres* was the only to fight the struggle for the emancipation of women and against the institutions to what I have underlined the pioneer role of Teresa Claramunt and Teresa Mañé by the end of the nineteenth century. I asked whether *Mujeres Libres* could be referred to as a feminist organization since the founders/relevant members did not identify themselves as feminist in the 1930's but scholars made references to *Mujeres Libres* as a feminist organization since the 1970's. I have discussed some of the feminist and anarchist claims of *Mujeres Libres* to show that it indeed needs to be considered as a feminist organization. It can be also described as an anarcho-feminist organization, as done by some scholars. The last question that I ask is if *Mujeres Libres* is part of the Spanish history within context of the Spanish Civil War, where I discuss that though women are absent in the history textbooks in High School; from the 2000's the predecessors of the founders and *Mujeres Libres* are starting to be mentioned in some anarchist historical books. In Catalonia, an autonomous region in Spain, since the late 1990's there had been oral history projects to recover the historical memory of the people mainly of women who lived through the Spanish Civil War and the Franco Regime (1939-1975). Things are going in the right direction but there is still a lot of work to do in order to represent women equally in the Spanish historiography.

I have based my analysis in primary and secondary sources; and sometimes other published literature based on them. I have also done interviews that have helped me understand this area of study better but an elaborate discussion on the interviews is beyond the scope of this thesis.

**Key words:** *Mujeres Libres* (Free women), women, Spain, Spanish Civil War, Spanish anarchist movement, Spanish feminism, women's movement, emancipation for women.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to express my gratitude towards my main supervisor, Dr. Francisca de Haan, since without her dedicated involvement at every step, throughout the process, this thesis would have not been the same. I also want to thank my support supervisor, Dr. Suzanne Clisby, for being very flexible and positive about the work I was doing. I would also like to show my gratitude towards the teachers of Central European University and University of Hull since it has been a nice learning experience through the two years of the *Master Erasmus Mundus in Women and Gender Studies* that I am concluding with this thesis.

I do not have words to express how fortunate I am to have a family that has unconditionally supported me in many ways, and has always been there when I have needed them. I want to especially thank my dad, Ladislao, my mother, Tessa, my sister, Tessy, and my aunt M<sup>a</sup>Angeles. I also would like to thank my friends in Barcelona, particularly Vanessa Muñoz, Ofelia Diaz and Berta Nueno.

Through these two years I have met many people and made great friends. I could not have imagined a better learning experience without them so I am grateful that our paths crossed in Budapest or in Hull. I want to give a very big thank you to Ghazaal Bozorgmehr and Rimple Mehta for being always there to help, and to my also ‘third world women’ friends’ Sahar Mousavi, Ela Habibi and Eylem Nazli, because with all of them this experience had been so enriching. To my ‘gemmarian’ family with especial thanks to Jelena Jovanovic and the two musketeers, Erriche Mohamed and Bess Doornbos. More generally I want to thank my friends around the world because each one has taught me something valuable.

Finally, I want to thank, the historians Mary Nash and Laura Vicente; and two members of the *Consell dels savis*, Roser Rosers and Roser Font; that let me interviewed them. To Marisa from Biblioteca de Mujeres de Madrid, Jordi Bages historian teacher and Francesc Cardona, coordinator of *Consell dels savis*, for their collaboration on the project. To conclude, I want to dedicate this thesis to the founders and members of *Mujeres Libres*, to all women who lived through the Spanish Civil War period and especially to my two grandmothers because it is their stories have inspired me to do this research.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	ii
INTRODUCTION .....	1
Background.....	1
Structure of the thesis .....	2
CHAPTER 1. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	5
1.1 Feminism .....	5
1.1.1 Feminism on the left .....	5
1.1.2 Feminism and anarchism .....	6
1.2 The Spanish case, Mujeres Libres literature.....	7
1.2.1 Primary materials.....	7
1.2.2 Secondary sources .....	9
1.3 Contributions to the existing literature .....	11
CHAPTER 2: THE SPANISH CONTEXT DURING THE SECOND REPUBLIC (1931-1939) .....	15
2.1 The Second Republic (1931-1939) with specific mention of the Spanish Civil War .....	16
2.1.1 The Spanish Civil War .....	17
2.2 The situation of women during the Second Republic and the Spanish Civil War	20
2.3 The anarchist movement in the first part of the 20 <sup>th</sup> century and the relation with women .....	23
2.4 Women in the anarchist movement .....	24
CHAPTER 3. MUJERES LIBRES .....	27
3.1 The founders of Mujeres Libres .....	28
3.2 The magazine, the starting point of Mujeres Libres .....	29
3.2.1 Not declaring themselves in the magazine as anarchist .....	30
3.3 The foundation of the organization Mujeres Libres in 1937 .....	31
3.4 Aims and goals, challenging three different sources of subordination.....	33
3.5 Relationship with other organizations .....	35
3.5.1 The relation with the anarchist movement .....	35
3.5.2 The relation with women's organizations .....	37

3.6 The extent of <i>Mujeres Libres</i> 's work around Spain .....	37
CHAPTER 4. <i>MUJERES LIBRES</i> 'S PREDECESSORS AND COLLABORATORS ..	40
4.1 The vanguards of the anarcho-feminist ideology in Spain by the end of the 19 <sup>th</sup> century and beginning of 20 <sup>th</sup> century: Teresa Claramunt and Teresa Mañé .....	40
4.1.1 Teresa Claramunt (1862- 1931).....	41
4.1.2 Teresa Mañé (1865 - 1939) .....	46
4.2 An important woman in the Spanish anarchist movement in the 1930's: Federica Montseny (1905 - 1994) .....	50
4.2.1 Federica Montseny's ideas about the 'woman question' and her relation with <i>Mujeres Libres</i> .....	52
CHAPTER 5. <i>MUJERES LIBRES</i> : A FEMINIST/ ANARCHO-FEMINIST ORGANIZATION? .....	57
5.1 Feminism .....	57
5.1.1 Did <i>Mujeres Libres</i> identify with the term feminism? .....	58
5.1.2 Five relevant members of <i>Mujeres Libres</i> give their opinion in relation to feminism .....	61
5.1.3 The feminist ideology of <i>Mujeres Libres</i> by the statements of the founders and the articles in the <i>Mujeres Libres</i> 's magazine in the 1930's.....	63
5.1.4 Anarcho-feminism .....	68
CHAPTER 6. THE IMPORTANCE OF RECOVERING WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR .....	72
6.1 Towards the recovery of the historical memory after the imposed amnesia during the Franco regime .....	73
6.2 The lack of recognition of women in Spanish history: examining textbooks, books and articles.....	75
6.3 Contemporary oral projects in Catalonia that aim to recover the role of women during the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime .....	78
6.3.1 <i>Dones del 36</i> (The Women of [19]36): An oral history and educational project .....	78
6.3.2 <i>Consell dels savis del Museu d'Història de Catalunya</i> (The board of sages from the Museum of Catalan History): A project of oral history .....	79
CONCLUSION .....	82
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	86
APPENDIXES.....	A

*“La luz de nuestra fuerza y de nuestra razón sigue encendida en manos de quienes no se conforman y continúan luchando contra la tiranía de los poderosos. Sólo el olvido sería nuestra derrota”* (Liaño in Quiñonero, 2005: 290)

(The light of our strength and our reason is on, in the hands of those who do not resign and continue to fight against the tyranny of the most powerful people. To be forgotten would be our only defeat) (Liaño in Quiñonero, 2005: 290)

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to give more visibility to women who took part in the anarchist movement in Spain from the end of the nineteenth century to the end of the Spanish Civil War. Concretely, I am studying *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women), an autonomous women's organization within the anarchist movement that fought for women's emancipation, and struggled against the State. *Mujeres Libres* has been considered from the 1970's a feminist organization, and sometimes is referred to as anarcho-feminist. In this thesis I examine the contributions towards the advancement of women's rights and feminism by the pioneers Teresa Claramunt and Teresa Mañé; Federica Montseny, a relevant woman in the anarchist movement; the organization *Mujeres Libres*, as well as the founders (Lucía Sanchez Saornil, Mercedes Comaposada and Amparo Poch) and some of the most relevant members.

The goal of this thesis is to show the important role and the impact that *Mujeres Libres* had on the society during the Spanish Civil War, as a way to recognize their claims and their struggles, to argue that *Mujeres Libres* should be represented as a relevant organization within the Spanish historiography.

### **Background**

The organization *Mujeres Libres* is very little known by the general population in Spain. One reason could be the absence of references to them for example in textbooks in Compulsory Secondary Education (mandatory for students), and the lack of references in the published literature about Spanish anarchism. This, though, does not mean that there is no published literature about *Mujeres Libres*, because such literature does exist, but it is rather difficult to come across the organization initially. Once found, the references of the book or article would lead the reader to other published literature as articles, chapters and original documents.

The methodology used to gather information has been through three different levels that interact in between themselves. The first level are the primary sources; articles, letters and interviews from the founders and members of *Mujeres Libres* during the Spanish Civil War and after the Franco regime, and the seven issues of the *Mujeres Libres's*



magazine that I had access to. The second level are the secondary sources, books published based on the original documentation; and the third level are other scholars who base their analysis on the secondary sources and sometimes on the primary sources as well. Some of the limitations that I have encountered through the research is lack of or difficult access to certain primary sources; the fact that certain original documentations are still missing (for example, a book edited by Mercedes Comaposada, founder, and the three first issues of the *Mujeres Libres's* magazine) and the impossibility to offer new original documentation from the founders and members in the form of interviews, since most of them have passed away.

Through the different stages of the thesis I have considered the opinion of two historians, Mary Nash and Martha Ackelsberg, as essential and therefore I have made many references to them; but I have also considered the original documentation when available and integrated the analysis of other historians or scholars about *Mujeres Libres* in the study. My contribution, though, goes further than simply summarizing what others have said; I am presenting the information from a critical point of view, I am filling some small gaps and claiming different arguments that others did not while opening doors for new debates, as I will explain in chapter 1.

### ***Structure of the thesis***

The thesis is divided into six chapters. Every chapter covers a theme related to the organization *Mujeres Libres* that is divided into different sections and often into subsections in order to address different points in a clearer way.

The first chapter is the literature review of the thesis where I explore the different materials used. Chapter one is divided into three sections. Section 1 is about feminism, where I examine how female left organizations have understood feminism. In 1.1, and in 1.2 I look at the relation between feminism and anarchism. In the second section I discuss the relevant literature written about *Mujeres Libres* through primary and secondary sources. In Section 1.3, I explain how the thesis will contribute to the existing literature.

In chapter two I place the organization in a historical background to briefly explain the general context of the Second Republic (1931-1939), giving specific attention to the

Spanish Civil War (1936- 1939) in section 2.1; then I continue in 2.2 analyzing the anarchist movement in Spain mainly in the 1930's, and I conclude with the advancement of women's right during the same period in 2.3.

The third chapter is entirely dedicated to *Mujeres Libres*. I first introduce the three founders in 3.1; in 3.2, I describe how the project of the founders started with the creation of the magazine *Mujeres Libres*, and in 3.3. I explain how with the start of the Spanish Civil War, they founded the organization. In 3.4 I look at the goals of *Mujeres Libres* regarding the emancipation of women; I examine what were the relations between the organization and the anarchist movement as well as with the women's organizations in the left, 3.5; and in the last section, 3.6, I underline the impact that *Mujeres Libres* had in the Spanish context, reaching 20.000 women by the end of the Spanish Civil War.

Chapter four aims to give visibility to some women who struggled for women's rights previously to *Mujeres Libres* and beside them, concretely I mention three women. The chapter is divided into two sections. In 4.1, I recognize the important task by two predecessors, the anarchists Teresa Claramunt and Teresa Mañé, who fought for the emancipation of woman from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and I present their lives, their contributions to the anarchist movement and what they aimed for. The second section, 4.2, is about the relevant female anarchists Federica Montseny, and specifically how she changed her ideas over time in relation to the 'woman question' and her collaboration with *Mujeres Libres*.

Chapter five is divided in four sections that are related to the feminism of *Mujeres Libres*. The first subsection, 5.1.1, is about the non-identification of *Mujeres Libres* with feminism first approached by the historians Nash and Ackelsberg with an inadequate analysis of the statements of Federica Montseny that I address differently with arguments of the founders of *Mujeres Libres*. Since the arguments of the founders are not concluding, in the following section, 5.1.2, I examine what five relevant members mentioned about the feminism of *Mujeres Libres* in interviews done from the late 1970's, to conclude that *Mujeres Libres* was not defined as feminist by their founders/relevant members, however it has been defined so by scholars since the 1970's. In 5.1.3, I relate some of the claims of *Mujeres Libres* with the feminist and anarchist movement. The last section is about *Mujeres Libres* being defined as anarcho-feminism by some scholars but not all (as for example Ackelsberg).

The last chapter discusses the invisibility of women in Spanish history. In 6.1, I explain how the Franquist dictatorship aimed for a collective amnesia towards their crimes during the Spanish Civil War and also during the regime. In this section I also discuss the strength of the civil society that has been pressing the Spanish government to take action to uncover the truth about the victims of Franquism, and that lately these claims have been reinforced by an international organization. In the second section, 6.2, I review how women are represented 40 years later, by the end of Franco regime, in textbooks; more concretely I look at the portrait of women during the Second Republic (1931-1939) in High School history textbooks. The last section, 6.3, is about two oral history projects in Catalonia that have emerged by the end of the 1990's with the goal to give voice mostly to women who survived the Spanish Civil War and went through the Franco regime.

To conclude, some of my biggest findings are that if we aim to make women visible in the Spanish history, or in particular in the anarchist movement, we have to recognize the previous relevant women. In the case of *Mujeres Libres*, it is then important to not only mention but describe the task done by Teresa Claramunt and Teresa Mañé, who struggled for the emancipation of women. Another important point is that we need to refer to the voice of the founders and relevant members who were part of the organization, therefore in the analysis of the feminism it is important to show those voices. The last point that I want to mention here is that it is necessary to address the historical contexts, in this sense *Mujeres Libres* suffers from a double collective amnesia; the amnesia imposed on the ones who lost the Spanish Civil War during the Franco regime, and because of their condition as women.

## CHAPTER 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I explore the most relevant literature for my study of *Mujeres Libres* that is divided into three bigger sections. In the first section, I focus on one of the main themes about the organization of *Mujeres Libres*, that is their feminism, in a first subsection I discuss how some female left organizations have understood feminism and in a second subsection, I examine the relation between feminism and anarchism.

The second section is divided into two subsections as well. The first is about primary materials that are published articles in the *Mujeres Libres*'s magazine and other anarchist journals, minutes of the first conference of *Mujeres Libres* and internal reports during the 1930's and the 1980's. In the second subsection, I examine the secondary sources about *Mujeres Libres* after the Franquist dictatorship, based on original documentation and interviews.

In the third section and to conclude I explain how the thesis will contribute to the existing literature, providing examples of the existent gaps that I cover and opening new discussions in relation to the feminism of *Mujeres Libres*.

### 1.1 Feminism

#### 1.1.1 Feminism on the left

There is a broad literature about feminism on the left but here I want to mention three books/articles in order to argue that the fact that the majority of founders and members of *Mujeres Libres* did not identify as feminists in the 1930's is not unique. There has been an ongoing tension between feminism and the left movement where women although realizing the need for feminism in the organization, have not identified with the concept of feminism since they saw it attached to a narrow middle-class view of the emancipation of woman.

The scholarly literature related to the narrowness of feminism is depicted in Erik McDuffie's book *Sojourning for Freedom* (2011). McDuffie says "Communists during the Old left period reviled 'feminism' as bourgeoisie and separatist" and "Communists

wanted nothing to do with this type of feminism.” So we see that female communists did not want to be named as feminists, but McDuffie argues that it has analytical sense to do so since the communist women recognized their oppression by three different sources that were intersecting: gender, race and class (McDuffie, 2011: 5). Cheryl West in her chapter ‘Common Themes, Different Contexts: Third World Women and Feminism’(1991), argues that ‘third world women’ did not find the definition of feminism relevant to their struggle since they saw the concept as too narrow; in their view it was necessary to add race and class to the analysis (West, 1991: 315- 316).

The previous mentioned literature show that not all women who struggled for women’s rights considered themselves as feminists. Novikova in her article ‘Communism as a vision and practice’ (2007) discusses the need that exists to categorize women, and how lately many scholars “are trying to trace feminist activism in their national histories”. Novikova argues that this fact can be seen as if we were ‘colonising’ but that at the same time calling those women feminists is a way to give visibility to the women’s actions as feminism (Novikova, 2007: 202-203). This last point is very useful since the goal of naming them as feminist is to include them in a bigger struggle where they can be recognized and become visible. This published scholarly literature is useful to understand that *Mujeres Libres* were not the only women who fought against women’s oppression but did not claim to be feminist, instead that happened in other women’s organizations with other contexts and realities.

### **1.1.2 Feminism and anarchism**

There is much literature that addresses separately the two traditions, anarchism and feminism; but there is only a small amount about anarcho-feminism. Anarchism and feminism share some goals and it could be said that both traditions share an antipathy towards hierarchies, in the case of feminism towards male domination/gender hierarchy. However there has been a tension between anarchism and feminism and this is well explained in the article ‘Anarchism and feminism: a historical survey’ (1996) by Sharif Gemie, historian. Gemie describes that anarchists were gender blind, and continues to argue that the anti-feminism of some anarchist was rooted in anarchist political theorists as Proudhon and others who did not address the subordination of women. He concludes

that this insensitivity towards female emancipation happens in traditions as Marxism and reformist socialism as well as in anarchism (Gemie, 1996: 417- 426).

Other works that study the historical relationship between anarchism and feminism are presented in the section, 1.2.2 on secondary sources since they focus on the development of *Mujeres Libres* as an organization that gathered both traditions of anarchism and feminism.

## **1.2 The Spanish case, *Mujeres Libres* literature**

### **1.2.1 Primary materials**

There are three different primary sources of *Mujeres Libres*, the magazine that they published and two books that have collected original documents about *Mujeres Libres*. The *Mujeres Libres*'s magazine can be found in the 'Centre d'Estudis Històrics Internacionals – Pavelló de la República' (Center of International History Studies-Republican pavilion) and from 2014 the 'Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona' (*Historic Archive from the City of Barcelona*) have digitalized the magazines and are available on a CD. Out of the thirteen edited numbers of the magazine, in Catalonia there is access to the following numbers: December 1936 (no. 4), March 1937 (no.7), May 1937 (no.8), June 1937(no. 9), July 1937 (no.10), January 1938 (no. 11) and May 1938 (num. 12). The size, the price and the number of pages changed over time, the topics as well but the most relevant areas were about: recognizing women (for example Teresa Claramunt, Emma Goldman, etc), the double struggle and the women's entry into the labor market, motherhood, education, women contributing to the war and the activities and branches of *Mujeres Libres*. In 2012 the CGT<sup>1</sup> decided to give a tribute to *Mujeres Libres* for her 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary and reproduced the *Mujeres Libres*'s magazine that was called 'Antología de *Mujeres Libres*' (Anthology of *Mujeres Libres*). They reproduced the covers and from page 11 to 47 the content is a replica of different articles published in the different numbers of *Mujeres Libres* with the same structure, colors and letter types.

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<sup>1</sup> CGT is the Confederación General del Trabajo (General Confederation of Labour), is an anachronistic syndicalist trade union that emerged from CNT (Confederación General del Trabajo) (General Confederation of Labour)

In 1975, the Irish historian Mary Nash, who has been chair of the contemporary history department at the University of Barcelona since many years ago, published her first book about *Mujeres Libres*, titled *Mujeres Libres: España 1936-1939*. The book is divided into six sections, the first section, written by Nash is about the organization, the situation of women and introduces the next sections. In this section, Nash also states that before *Mujeres Libres* became interested in the ‘woman question’ there were other anarchist women concerned about this issue, such as Teresa Claramunt and Federica Montseny. The other five consist of original documentation from the 1930’s that include articles published in two anarchist journals *Solidad Obrera* (Labourer Solidarity) and *Tierra y Libertad* (Land and Freedom), articles published in the *Mujeres Libres*’s magazine, internal reports of *Mujeres Libres* organization and pamphlets. Some of those documents were written by the *Mujeres Libres* founders Lucía Sánchez Saornil and Mercedes Comaposada; plus other relevant members. There are five sections because Nash collected material under different themes: the organization of *Mujeres Libres*; the tasks of the organizations during the Spanish Civil War; the feminism of *Mujeres Libres*; the opinion of *Mujeres Libres* towards the ‘sexual question’ and children’s education. I want to underline that Nash mentions that *Mujeres Libres* was part of the feminist movement and that it was critiqued for this by the anarchist movement (Nash, 1975: 20).

The third book I want to mention is *Mujeres Libres. Luchadoras libertarias* published in 1999 by the Fundación Anselmo Lorenzo (Foundation Anselmo Lorenzo). The book is edited by *Mujeres Libres*’s relevant members who were the ones that started this project to give visibility to the organization. The members gathered original documents such as internal documents and articles published by founders and members in *Mujeres Libres*’s magazine, *Tierra y Libertad* and the CNT magazine. The book *Mujeres Libres Luchadoras libertarias* contains 36 documents whose main themes are: women’s situation in the 1930’s, the organization *Mujeres Libres*, women at war, the branches of *Mujeres Libres*, the *Mujeres Libres*’s magazine, prostitution, education, the libertarian movement, female workers and the exile. The original sources are from the 1930’s and 1990’s. An example from the 1930’s is the article by Lucía Sánchez Saornil, one of the founders of *Mujeres Libres*, ‘La mujer en la Guerra y en la Revolución’ (Woman in the war and in the revolution), in which Sánchez explains the emergence of the organization, its characteristics and the work that they did, mentioning the help provided from CNT since it was published in the CNT no. 531 in January 1937 (Sanchez

in Liaño, 1999: 41-46). The articles from the 1990's are written by different members as for example, Conchita Liaño, with 'Acerca del grupo de intelectuales que dieron nacimiento a las agrupaciones de *Mujeres Libres* 1935- 1939' (In relation to the intellectual group from which the group *Mujeres Libres* rise, 1935-1939) where she explains the development of *Mujeres Libres* from her perspective in 1994 from Venezuela, where she went into exile (Liaño, 1999: 57-60).

### 1.2.2 Secondary sources

The first publication after the Spanish Civil War in which *Mujeres Libres* appeared was an article by the American historian Temma Kaplan, 'Spanish Anarchism and Women's Liberation', published in 1971, when the Franquist dictatorship still existed. Kaplan frames *Mujeres Libres* within the context of the anarchist movement in Spain, mentions the progress in women's rights from the Second Republic, but states that the real change came when "the special situation of women became a political issue as a result of the activities of the anarchist Minister of Health and Social Service, Federica Montseny, and of the women's group, *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women)" (Kaplan, 1971: 105). Kaplan mentions Montseny and *Mujeres Libres* together but there is no clear statement about their relationship or collaboration. Kaplan critiques the organization because it did not challenge the division of labor between men and women (Kaplan, 1971: 105-109). Kaplan does not identify the organization as feminist, there is no comment in relation to it, and does not mention where the ideology of *Mujeres Libres* may have come from; she does not mention Teresa Claramunt and Teresa Mañé either. Kaplan bases her analysis on articles published in the anarchist journal *Tierra y Libertad* and in *Mujeres Libres's* magazine; articles that I had access to. This is why I have mostly relied on those sources and not much on her article, although Kaplan's article helped me to understand the organization better, since it is a clear and well-structured article.

Martha Ackelsberg is an American-historian who is a faculty member of Smith College in Massachusetts, USA. She initially published an article in 1985 about *Mujeres Libres* "'Separate and equal?' *Mujeres Libres* and anarchist strategy for women's emancipation." In this article Ackelsberg explores the Spanish anarchist movement, contextualizes *Mujeres Libres* within them and underlines their autonomy. She also explains their aims, and discusses their tasks and the necessity of their movement within



the anarchist movement. In 1991 Ackelsberg published '*Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the struggle for the emancipation of women*' in English, in 1999 the book was translated to Spanish and in 2005 the second edition of the English version came out (the one I am using for my analysis). In this book Ackelsberg starts with a complete description of the context in which *Mujeres Libres* emerged, the anarchist movement and the Spanish Civil War. From chapter three the author then explains the organization, the magazine, and their feminism, she also mentions the relation with Federica Montseny and Emma Goldman, the use of education to empower women, and issues relevant to *Mujeres Libres* such as decent pay, motherhood, children's education and sexuality. Ackelsberg also explores *Mujeres Libres's* relation with other women's organizations and the anarchist movement. Ackelsberg refers as to Teresa Claramunt two times, as well as Teresa Mañe by her pseudonym Soledad Gustavo (2005: 44, 52). This limited inclusion makes these essential figures for *Mujeres Libres* quite invisible in Ackelsberg's otherwise important book.

Mary Nash published *Defying male civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War* in 1995, translated to Spanish in 1999. This book is about women's role during the Spanish Civil War and contains a specific section about *Mujeres Libres* (in contrast to her book in 1975), but throughout the book there are different references to them. For example, when she discusses the rise of feminist consciousness from the 1910's to the 1930's, Nash mentions Teresa Claramunt and *Mujeres Libres* (Nash, 1995: 33). In the section, dedicated to *Mujeres Libres*, Nash defines them as feminist although she acknowledges that 'they' did not want to be called so. However here she quotes Federica Montseny instead of giving the opinion of the founders of the organization. Nash calls the organization anarcho-feminist but does not discuss the concept.

Fifteen years after the publication of *Defying male civilization* (1995), Nash published a chapter in the book *Tierra y Libertad* named 'Libertarias y anarcofeminismo' (Libertarians and anarcho-feminism). In this chapter, Nash claims the importance of the term anarcho-feminism that emerged as an answer to the patriarchal society, a society in which anarchism did not understand feminism and where *Mujeres Libres* incorporated the two ideologies, anarchism and feminism (Nash, 2010: 149-158). Moreover, Nash not only mentions Teresa Claramunt (Nash 2010:144-146) and Teresa Mañe (absent in 1995) (Nash, 2010: 147-148), but also refers to the importance that the two figures had (Nash, 2010: 144-148).

### 1.3 Contributions to the existing literature

The existing literature is quite exhaustive, which created a challenge for me to provide a new analysis when the original sources were the same. Nevertheless I have developed questions that have not been explored before. I am looking at how one article published in the *Mujeres Libres*'s magazine in the 1938 (*Mujeres Libres*'s magazine, no. 11, January 1938: 23) about the recognition of *Mujeres Libres* by the well-known anarchist Montseny can represent a shift in the opinion of Montseny towards the necessity of the *Mujeres Libres* organization. It is a shift on the way of thinking since until that moment Montseny had collaborated with the organization *Mujeres Libres* but did not recognize its role, as the anarchist movement did not do either. I explore this in chapter 3.

In chapter 4, I will consider if Teresa Claramunt and Teresa Mañé, with their claims towards the emancipation of women, could be considered as the predecessors of *Mujeres Libres*'s founder's and if so, what was their opinion in relation to feminism and why they are not more recognized by other scholars.

Nash and Ackelsberg in their studies of *Mujeres Libres* claim that the group did not identify with feminism; however they refer to Montseny's ideas. The fact that they are quoting Montseny has not been commented on by any other scholar and I consider that it is not suitable to refer to Montseny since she was not part of the organization; moreover, she did not recognize it as necessary until the beginning of 1938. Here I ask how my analysis of the arguments of the founders and relevant members will improve the understanding of the identification or non-identification of *Mujeres Libres* with feminism; and if we can define *Mujeres Libres* nowadays as feminists? To answer those questions, in chapter 5, I will examine the ideas developed by the founders in anarchist journals and interviews done with five relevant members of *Mujeres Libres* since the 1970's. To claim if they can or cannot be defined as feminists I will examine the most famous claims by the founders that were published in their magazine. Moreover I will examine the adequacy of the term anarcho-feminism to define *Mujeres Libres*, in the second subsection of chapter 5.

In chapter 6, I will explore how the context of the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime could have affected the invisibility of a group of women who lost the war. I will

also try to find out how my reading of the historian textbooks in the High School from last years could lead me to argue that women are invisible in the Spanish historiography and bring a new analysis of the published literature not reviewed before.

Along those lines, I will consider how two oral projects, in Catalonia, that aimed/aim to promote mainly the voice of women (and also men) during the period of the Spanish Civil War and Franco regime in Spain could influence the recovery from the amnesia that has afflicted the Spanish history since that time; but at the same time I will look into how the lack of published literature of *Dones del 36* (Women of [19]36) only in Catalan language and for *Consell dels savis del Museu d'Història de Catalunya* (The board of sages from the Museum of Catalan History), the non existent published literature, makes those two projects invisible?

To conclude, Nash in her introduction mentions that with her book about women during the Spanish Civil War (1995), she is filling a gap because there is a lack of sources on this topic in the English language (Nash, 1995: 6); on those lines although Nash and Ackelsberg published their books in the early 1990's, much of the other relevant books and articles are in the Spanish language; therefore this thesis is as well a contribution to the published literature about *Mujeres Libres* and in general about Spanish women on the left from the 1900's to 1939; with the goal that more people from different countries could become aware of the important role of *Mujeres Libres*.

## **Conclusion**

Above I have reviewed the existent published literature in relation to *Mujeres Libres*. First I mentioned the opinion of women on the left about feminism and specifically looked at anarchism and feminism. From that I have moved to explore the published literature about *Mujeres Libres* that I divided into two sections; first I have analyzed the original documentation and I want to underline its importance. The *Mujeres Libres* magazines, published articles by the founders or members in other anarchist journal and the internal reports that were saved during the Spanish Civil War and the Franquist dictatorship, are incredibly valuable for this study. Those documents have been key for the recovery of the history of *Mujeres Libres*, their goals and tasks. The work done in the archives by the historians Mary Nash, Temma Kaplan and Martha Ackelsberg, is extremely important

since at the time they wrote about *Mujeres Libres* they made them less invisible and thanks to those historians more people know about the organization *Mujeres Libres*.

## **SECTION 1. *Mujeres Libres***

## CHAPTER 2: THE SPANISH CONTEXT DURING THE SECOND REPUBLIC (1931-1939)

This chapter aims to briefly explain what happened in the 1930's in Spain in order to achieve a better understanding of the context in which the organization *Mujeres Libres* was founded. The chapter is divided in four sections, the first one explores how the Second Republic started and analyses the three different governments with their own particular characteristics, from 1931 to 1936. I discuss the Spanish Civil War (1936 - 1939), and in chronological order I explain how the Franquist troops advanced through the Republican Spain. Meanwhile the government of the Republic tried first to win, then to gather support from outside, and towards the end attempted to push an armistice of peace that did not succeed.

In the second section I explore the same period of time but my focus is on women's situation. The Second Republic brought changes for women; with the Constitution of 1931 approved in the Parliament women gained new rights as the right to vote and the right to divorce. Although some reformist laws were passed, the roots of the patriarchal society were very deep and the behaviors, the way of thinking, and the culture did not change from one day to the other. So Spain continued to be a patriarchal society in which women were relegated to the private sphere as food providers and family care takers.

The third section is about the anarchist movement and why this was exceptional at the beginning of the twentieth century. The anarcho-syndicalism became a mass movement led by CNT<sup>2</sup> (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo) (National Confederation of Labor). To conclude this chapter, the fourth section describes how women were treated within the anarchist movement.

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<sup>2</sup> CNT was founded in 1910 (Bookchin, 1977: 160)

## **2.1 The Second Republic (1931-1939) with specific mention of the Spanish Civil War**

Prior to the Second Republic there was a monarchy in Spain, ruled by Alfonso XIII since 1902, from that time to 1930, Spain became modern, it grew economically, there was an increase in the population from 18.6 million to 24 million; the life expectancy also rose from 35 to 50 and illiteracy rate was reduced from 60 to 35 per cent (Casanova, 2013: 2-4). It is as well important to mention that besides the monarchy; from 1923 there was a dictatorship established in Spain by Primo de Rivera that went on until 1929. The 12<sup>th</sup> of April 1931 elections were called to choose between a monarchy and a republic (Casanova, 2013: 5). The republicans won 41 out of 50 provincial capitals and proclaimed the Republic, after which King Alfonso XIII and the queen left Spain (Casanova, 2013: 6). This first interval of the Second Republic from 1931 to 1933 was run by the republican Manuel Azaña (Nash, 1995: 45) who became the first prime minister of the Second Republic. This period was called 'Bienio reformista' due to the new political reforms passed as the 9 December 1931 Constitution was accepted by the Parliament. The Constitution defined Spain as a "democratic Republic of workers", the secular state was established together with laws accepting civil marriage, divorce, women's right to vote and it was forbidden to teach religion in schools (Casanova, 2013: 7). Casanova claims that although the laws passed by the Parliament "were moderate in principle and in many cases unworkable", some people still felt threatened by them and started to organize themselves against the Republic (Casanova, 2013: 9).

In November 1933, new national elections were held and it was the center-right government, the *Confederación Española de Derechas Autonomas* (CEDA) (Spanish Confederation of the Autonomous Right) who won them and stayed in power until 1935 (Casanova, 2013: 9). This government, as Ackelsberg describes, "lifted many of the new restrictions on traditional powers and instituted more severe repression of leftist revolutionary activity" (Ackelsberg, 2005: 89-90). This period has been named as 'Bienio conservador/negro', the name 'conservador' because of the conservative rules that were established, 'negro' (black) since all the previous advances by the government were cancelled and 'bienio' because it lasted two years as the previous.

In February 1936, there were again national elections in Spain and this time it was the *Frente Popular* (Popular Front), a coalition of the left parties, that won narrowly. From there the “renewal of the reformist policies of former years” started (Nash, 1995: 46). There was a social tension during the years of the Republic (Nash, 1995: 46) that divided even more the positions between the Left and the Right (Ackelsberg, 2005: 90). The new government started to put in action liberal reforms but the military coup burst in on July 17-18, 1936 by Generals Franco, Mola, Quiapo de Llano and Goded (Ackelsberg, 2005: 90). It was not the first coup since there had been another attempt by the military in 1932, but in 1936 the strength of the coup came from “the emergence and growth of mass political opposition to Republican reformists among civilian sectors in Spanish society”, these reforms where mainly connected to the secularization of the Republic that “upset deeply Catholic sensibilities in this region” (Graham, 2005: 10).

### **2.1.1 The Spanish Civil War**

The coup d'état against the Republic on July 17, 1936, was carried out by General Francisco Franco (Franco). It started in North Africa and spread to the peninsula. Franco's goal “was to eliminate the democratic regime and restore political power to the hands of the traditionally hegemonic Right”, but the military coup failed because of the resistance of the republicans and thus the Spanish Civil War began (Nash, 1995: 47). It is interesting to mention that although the government, *Frente Popular*, expected the coup, they did not arm the workers since they were afraid the workers could attack the government. People then took any weapons that they had and occupied the streets (Ackelsberg, 2005: 91). By July 20, 1936 a new Republican government was formed by José Giral (Casanova, 2013: 17) who would be replaced later on by two other prime ministers (Largo Caballero and Juan Negrín) before the Republic was defeated (Casanova, 2013: 102).

Franco had a troop called ‘The Army of Africa’ formed by mercenaries, professional soldiers from Morocco. ‘The Army of Africa’ attacked the South of Spain and it was difficult to stop them since they were well prepared while the other side, the republicans or the Reds, were defended by a civilian population that did not have a previous training, neither were armed by the government (Graham, 2005: 32-34).



In August 1936 the troops from Africa had gained territory<sup>3</sup> while republicans were losing it; ‘The Army of Africa’ reached the South of Spain and this gave them control over Extremadura and some areas of Castilla-La Mancha (Casanova, 2013: 110-111), but their goal was to reach Madrid. On 14<sup>th</sup> of August, Badajoz was taken by ‘The Army of Africa’ and nothing was left behind since their motto, in Casanova’s words, was “success on the war front was only achieved by leaving no possible enemies in the rear”, so they shot all the republicans, a massacre, in other words (Casanova, 2013: 111). Violence was very present on the rebels’<sup>4</sup> side, “killing was widely perceived as a cleansing action designed to rid the community of sources of ‘pollution’ and the dangers they supposed”; Franco’s troops killed everyone who could be related to cultural change since they saw them as threats. On the other side, the republicans also shot people “as a means of achieving *tabula rasa* and with it a brave new world” (Graham, 2005: 29-30).

In August 1936, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Soviet Union came together to sign the “Non-Intervention treaty” that forbid the “state and private enterprise in signatory countries from delivering war material to Spain” (Graham, 2005: 40). Even though they signed the treaty and expressed their agreement, Germany and Italy continued to aid the rebels while the Republic did not get support (Graham, 2005: 37).

September 3, 1936 the rebels got access to Madrid by Castilla-La Mancha. In a month the fascist<sup>5</sup> troops had advanced around 500 kilometers (Graham, 2005: 35). Other cities that fell at the beginning of September were Guipuzcoa and San Sebastian in the north of Spain (Casanova, 2013: 112). Things were looking bad on the republican side, therefore the ex-prime minister of the Republic, José Giral, asked for help from France and the Soviet Union in order to stop the Franquist troops. From there the republicans started to give part of their gold reserves to the Soviet Union as pay back for their help (Casanova, 2013: 112); on the other side Franco received aid from Germany and Italy (Graham, 2005: 39).

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<sup>3</sup> In the appendix 1, pp. A, there is a map that shows the advancement of the fascist troops.

<sup>4</sup> The Franquist had been defined as rebels, nationalist and fascists.

<sup>5</sup> “The term Fascism was first used of the totalitarian right-wing nationalist regime of Mussolini in Italy (1922–43); the regimes of the Nazis in Germany and Franco in Spain were also Fascist. Fascism tends to include a belief in the supremacy of one national or ethnic group, a contempt for democracy, an insistence on obedience to a powerful leader, and a strong demagogic approach” (Oxford Dictionary).

On 4<sup>th</sup> of September 1936, Largo Caballero, a worker leader, became the next prime minister of the Republic with a coalition government with socialist, republicans and communists. November 4, 1936 after some negotiations, four anarchist leaders from CNT also joined the government (Casanova, 2013: 113-114). While the government was being formed, on 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1936, 'The Army of Africa' with the aid of German and Italian forces was trying to reach the center of Madrid; which was one of the reasons why by November 6, 1936 the government decided to move its seat from Madrid to Valencia (Casanova, 2013: 115).

The aid provided by the Soviet Union saved the republicans from defeat in November 1936. The Soviet Union brought to the republican side tanks and drivers, planes and trained pilots that gave an initial advantage in the battle for maintaining Madrid as republican in the winter of 1936 (Graham, 2005: 41). During the fight for Madrid, the International Brigades were for the first time included (Casanova, 2013: 116). The Brigades were formed by volunteers who came mostly from Europe and there were also some Canadians and Americans; in total there were around 35,000 volunteers who participated in the fight against the fascists (Graham, 2005: 42).

By the beginning of 1937, Largo Caballero, prime minister of the Republic, managed to control the progress of the Franquist troops while training the civilians into soldiers (Casanova, 2013: 117-118). The government coalition experienced political tensions inside, for example the communists did not want the anarchists in the government (Casanova, 2013: 118). This dispute between political parties on the republican side had started before the war and instead of putting the unresolved problems aside, the context of the war and the government coalition caused more opposition between them (Casanova, 2013: 121). In May 4, 1937 this tension between "members of the CNT and the socialist-led trade union, UGT; between socialists and communists, and between the rival branches of Catalan communism" ended in a violent street fight in Barcelona between them. Consequently a new government was appointed with Juan Negrín as Prime Minister (Graham, 2005: 67). Negrín's goal was to negotiate the peace internationally since with the 'Non-intervention treaty' it was impossible for the republicans to win the war (Casanova, 2013: 122). Negrín tried to convince France and the United Kingdom to pressure Franco to sign an armistice that would prevent revenge towards the republican side (Casanova, 2013: 127).

On 19<sup>th</sup> of June 1937, the Republic lost Bilbao to the fascists; the rebels continued towards the city of Santander and by October 1937 the republicans had lost the northern

part of Spain. The government of the Republic decided to move again, now from Valencia to Barcelona (Casanova, 2013: 125). The Republic continued to lose territory while the Franquist troops continued to advance; in March 1938 the fascists occupied the autonomous community of Spain, Aragón, and reached the Mediterranean coast on 15<sup>th</sup> of April 1938. The Franquists started the Battle of Ebro in the summer of 1938.<sup>6</sup> At that point the gold reserves of the Republic were about to run out, therefore the Soviet Union gave a loan of sixty million dollar to the Republic (Casanova, 2013: 127-128).

In spring of 1938, in Catalonia and Madrid the Republic could not provide enough food to all people since due to the lost of many territories it was difficult to access to those cities. Catalonia with a “massive number of refugees, suffered acute shortages” of food (Graham, 2005: 105-106).

Catalonia fell in February 1939, and after that Negrín started to defend what was left in order for Madrid to have more time to push negotiations with Franco. Franco, however, was only interested in an “unconditional Republican surrender” (Graham, 2005: 111) and when the Franquist troops entered Madrid the fascists eventually won the Spanish Civil War on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March 1939, the day that marked the beginning of an “uncivil, merciless peace” (Casanova, 2013: 130).

## ***2.2 The situation of women during the Second Republic and the Spanish Civil War***

From the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, woman was regarded as the ‘perfect married lady’ who was in charge of the correct functioning of the family, being submissive and taking care of the family with love (Nash, 1995: 10-11). Women suffered from “occupational segregation, political and educational inequality, and legal and labor discrimination” (Nash, 1995: 7). On the other side, men were the bread-winners and superior beings, therefore the “patriarchal culture had been strongly rooted in Spain” (Casanova, 2013: 107).

The Second Republic, 1931, brought the “principle of political equality between the sexes”. This was a great advancement since until that moment women’s subordination

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<sup>6</sup> In the appendix 1, pp.A, there is a map of the division of Spain in July 1938.

was ensured by law. Married women had to obey their husbands, the husband was the one who administrated the goods. Married women needed their husband's permission to attend public events; they did not have control over their wages and in relation to sexuality a double moral existed (Nash, 1995: 15-16). The 1931 law provided legal equality between spouses, abolishing the discriminatory treatment of married women at least by law.

Women experienced other positives changes during the Second Republic. Divorce became legal, many republican and leftist women's organizations were founded, and the female vote became a constitutional right (Mangini, 1995: 24). To achieve female suffrage was not an easy task, at the moment of the decision the Parliament included three socialist women and only one supported women's right to vote: Clara Campoamor. The reason why the other two, Margarita Nelken and Victoria Kent, did not vote for women's suffrage was that they saw women as strongly attached to the Catholic Church, and therefore conservative; moreover, they were afraid that women would not take their own decisions and instead follow their husbands' criteria (Mangini, 1995: 25). Women to them were not yet ready, they were not educated enough to vote; also because there was a high rate of illiteracy among women, around 90% (Ackelsberg, 1985: 65). Campoamor alleged that Nelken and Kent were against the women's right to vote for political reasons, Campoamor instead argued for the necessity of female suffrage as equal right to men (Mangini, 1995: 26).

With the start of the Spanish Civil War there was a change in the social role of women; women were asked to not remain at home but to help with different activities that the war had created, therefore a female mobilization started (Nash, 1995: 49). One of the symbols that changed the image of woman was the posters with heroic *milicianas* (militia women<sup>7</sup>); the posters encouraged the popular mobilization against fascism during the summer of the 1936 (Nash, 1995: 50). However, those posters were not primarily addressing women, but men, as a "recruitment device to persuade male audience to volunteer for military service" (Graham, 2005: 56). There was a very famous poster that showed a *miliciana* with a gun wearing blue-overalls, by the artist Arteché, stating: "The militia needs you"<sup>8</sup> (Nash, 1995: 51).

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<sup>7</sup> Women who fought in the front

<sup>8</sup> In the appendix 2, pp.B, there is an image of this poster published in the *Mujeres Libres's* magazine

However, the role of *miliciiana* was very shortly promoted since by September 1936 the Prime Minister of the Republic at that time, Largo Caballero, decided to make women return home (Casanova, 2013: 108). There had been an intensification of the war and the republicans did not want women in the battlefield. Now, instead of identifying women as heroines, they saw them as “disreputable figures who impeded the correct development of the war effort”, therefore they rushed to make the previous posters and propaganda disappear (Nash, 1995: 53). The reason why this happened it seems to be due to the republican willingness to bring back traditional ‘gender-appropriate’ roles were women would focus on the role of mothers and the child rear as Casanova states (2005: 110), but he does not argue why the Republican adopted such reasons. Another reason why *milicianas* had to abandon the battlefield mentioned in the Spanish film *Libertarias* by Vicente Aranda in 1996, is that *milicianas* were accused of transmitting sexual diseases such as syphilis to men and thus causing deaths.

Therefore, the opposite campaign started then with the slogan “men to the front, women on the home front” and was attached to the values of women as mothers who were responsible for children and their protectors (Casanova, 2013: 109). The majority of women’s organizations supported the last slogan; in any case none of them rejected the decision by which women had to abandon the armed struggle, not even *Mujeres Libres* (Casanova, 2005: 110). Many *milicianas* decided to move to the rear front and continue there their activities but a small group continued in the battle fronts (Ackelsberg, 2005: 95-97) until the beginning of 1937 when “heroines with their blue uniforms were already history” (Casanova, 2010: 110). Ackelsberg mentions that *Mujeres Libres* wrote articles in their magazine about how *milicianas* were fighting in the Spanish Civil War; the tone used in the articles was apologetic (Ackelsberg, 2005: 95-97) but on the cover of the *Mujeres Libres*’s magazine in March 1937 (no.7, March 1937: 1), quite after the Republican government asked women to return to home, *Mujeres Libres* stated: “With work and weapons, women will defend the freedom of the people”; this was published together with a drawing where we can see women with guns in what seems to be a trench,<sup>9</sup> so it does not seem that *Mujeres Libres* were apologetic but instead supported women in the battle and rear front.

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<sup>9</sup> In the appendix 3, pp. C, there is the cover of the *Mujeres Libres*’s magazine number 7, March 1937.

### **2.3 The anarchist movement in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the relation with women**

Anarchism reached Spain in 1868 by the Italian Giuseppe Fanelli, a follower of the Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin. Fanelli was sent by Bakunin in order to gain supporters for the International Workingmen's Association, the famous 'First International'. Bookchin argues that Fanelli ideas rooted deep and with them anarchism in Spain started (Bookchin, 1977: 12-16). The anarchism in Spain at the beginning of the twentieth century became different from other countries when it changed into anarcho-syndicalism (Casanova, 2010: 8), "anarcho-syndicalism was the particular creation of Spanish theorists and activists, a unique blend of anarchist vision with a revolutionary syndicalist strategy" (Ackelsberg, 2005: 237). Anarcho-syndicalism had formal and disciplined syndicates for a mature and consolidated CNT during the years 1917-1921 and 1931-1937 when it was a mass movement (Casanova, 2010:8).

One of the key elements of anarcho-syndicalism was education and culture because these were regarded by the anarcho-syndicalists as tools to eradicate part of the exploitation suffered by the workers. Therefore, anarcho-syndicalists put effort into being the 'teachers of the people/town.' They created schools and 'ateneos' (cultural forums), promoted literacy and produced theater. These initiatives were keys to the socialization and training of the anarchist members in order to have a united group, with a common identity and a feeling of belonging to the anarchist movement (Vicente, 2013: 149). The leaders of CNT were well informed on social and political affairs. They gathered with other members with the purpose to "read the press, attend union meetings and frequent the local study and debating centers known as 'ateneos' and libraries, in search of the information necessary for their activism" (Casanova, 2005: 37). The diverse ways of thinking within anarchism were represented by journals, magazines and publishing houses that ranged from a more generic anarchism to a less revolutionary syndicalism. Some of the publication's names were: *Estudios* (Studies), *El Libertario* (The Libertarian), *Vida y Trabajo* (Life and Work), *Tierra y Libertad* (Land and Freedom) and *La Revista Blanca* (The Blank Journal) (Casanova, 2005: 37).

In 1927 another anarchist organization was founded, the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (FAI) (Iberian Anarchist Federation) by anarchist revolutionaries from the CNT. In 1932 the youth organization FIJL (Federació Ibèrica de Joventuts Llibertàries) (Iberian

Federation of Young Libertarians) (also known as JJLL or JJAA) was established. The CNT, FAI and FIJL “constituted the conglomerate of the Spanish libertarian movement of the time” from which *Mujeres Libres* was rejected (Nash, 1995: 87; Ackelsberg, 2005: 182).

Before the Spanish Civil War started, the “anarchist activists had created a vast and complex network of programs and organizations uniquely structured to meet the particular needs of widely differing groups within the Spanish working class” and had many followers (Ackelsberg, 2005: 62).

## **2.4 Women in the anarchist movement**

Spanish anarchism at the beginning of the twenty century gathered two schools of thought related to women’s position that came from two different anarchist theorists considered the most influential ones from the mid nineteen century. One school was inspired by the writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, French anarchist theorist, who underlined the role of women as mother, while the other school was based on the writings of Mikhail Bakunin, anarchist figure from Russia, who defended gender equality and the emancipation of women through their incorporation in the labor force (Sanchez, 2007: 230). Although Bakunin’s ideas were more widely spread in the CNT (Casanova, 2010: 8), many anarchists did not recognize the subordination of women in the patriarchal society. This is called the ‘double paradox’ of anarchism: “the anarchists, so proud of their genuine commitment to anti-authoritarian politics, were yet so blind to the oppressive effects of patriarchy” (Gemie, 1996: 417). Other male anarchists did not want to challenge the dominant gender relations (Sanchez, 2007: 232-233) because they did not want to give up their male power (Ackelsberg, 1985: 65-66). For example the anarchist union was not bothered by the working conditions that women suffered from in factories as bad lighting and ventilation, and less income because of their gender (Kaplan, 1971: 103-104); instead some anarchist men called these working women a disloyal force. Their arguments were that because women were getting paid less for the same work, women were their rivals and would bring misery to society. Male anarchists as a result did not want women in the labor market but at home (Nash, 2010: 141). This example

shows clearly the existence of an ‘anarcho-sexism’ within the Spanish anarchist movement (Gemie, 1996: 417).

The situation for women was not better when they spoke at political events in the anarchist movement, since men did not take them seriously; they either did not pay attention to or laughed at them. In other cases, anarchist men who claimed to be “committed to a sexually egalitarian movement” when at home wanted to keep their privileges and therefore forgot about equality (Ackelsberg, 1985: 76). This is the context in which the founders of *Mujeres Libres* were living and in which they understood that the only way they would be taken serious was by founding an autonomous organization out of CNT, an organization “that could challenge those attitudes and behaviors, from a position of strength” (Ackelsberg, 1985: 77), and that was the beginning of *Mujeres Libres*.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have explored the complex situation of Spain during the Second Republic; the Spanish Civil War happened from 1936 to 1939 and divided Spain into the Republican side and the Franquists. It is interesting how the reality of women is not integrated within history, in the case of this chapter due to this situation there are specific sections in which I have commented on the situation of women.

During the Spanish Civil War initially there were not only men fighting on the Republican side, as I have mentioned, there were as well the *milicianas*. The concept of *milicianas* was a great progress towards equal rights for women, where women could take guns and be at the battle front as men. The heroic image of *miliciiana* in the Republican though did not last long, however, and the government of the Republic urged the *milicianas* to go back to the image of woman taking care of their children and preparing food for the family. In fact the image of *miliciiana* reproduced in posters was set to attract men to the military service, but at the same time did attract women. Consequently this shows the existence of sexism on the Republican side that used women to attract men to the military service but did not want women there because women’s place was considered to be at home. Moreover, the Republic had passed a Constitution in 1931 which gave women equal rights but the theory of the laws was not put in practice.



Women's situation was not better in the Spanish anarchist movement either; a movement that challenged hierarchies but could not recognize gender oppression, patriarchy was deeply rooted in the society and in the anarchist movement as well. Therefore women were not taken seriously; some of the founders of *Mujeres Libres* not only experienced this sexism but also decided to work against the subordination of women through an autonomous organization.

### CHAPTER 3. MUJERES LIBRES

In this chapter I focus on describing the organization *Mujeres Libres* in order to offer a better understanding of the organization, which is intended to be helpful for the next chapters as well. To do so I have divided this chapter into six sections, each part exploring a different side of the structure of *Mujeres Libres*. The first section is about the three founders of *Mujeres Libres* with a brief summary of their lives in connection with the anarchist movement in which they all took part.

The second and third sections respectively describe how *Mujeres Libres* was formed and how they developed. It is interesting to notice that the founders initially started with the magazine and not with the organization since their goal was to reach out to women while promoting their ideas. The third section discusses the steps taken before the founding of *Mujeres Libres*, and how the founders gathered ideas, contacted other organizations and established the first branch in Barcelona with *Grupo Cultural Femenino* (Female Cultural Group). In this section there is as well an analysis of the first conference of *Agrupación Mujeres Libres* (*Mujeres Libres* Group) in August 1937 that shows how the group, by then, had clarified its goals and openly discussed every decision.

The fourth section is about the aims and goals of *Mujeres Libres*'s activities. Basically *Mujeres Libres* recognized that women experienced a triple subordination. To overcome that and for women to be emancipated, education was needed. Therefore, they offered courses and workshops.

The fifth section describes the relation between *Mujeres Libres* and the anarchist movement. Anarchists ignored and were indifferent to *Mujeres Libres*'s propositions and excluded them from the movement. On the other side, *Mujeres Libres* wanted to preserve its autonomy and did not want to be part of women's groups on the left in Spain in order to struggle against Franquism together with them. To understand the great impact that *Mujeres Libres* had in their short period of life, in the last section I focus on its membership.

### 3.1 The founders of *Mujeres Libres*

The founders of the magazine *Mujeres Libres* were: Lucía Sánchez Saornil, Mercedes Comaposada and Amparo Poch. In this section I will describe shortly their lives besides the organization of *Mujeres Libres* in order to understand their ideas better. It is important to acknowledge that while I refer to them as the founders, as other writers (Ackelsberg, 1985: 75), Mercedes Comaposada in an interview with the historian Martha Ackelsberg in 1982, emphasized that “we never called ourselves ‘founders’, only initiators” (Comaposada in Ackelsberg, 2005: 29).

Lucía Sánchez Saornil (1895-1970) studied at the Academy of Beaux Arts, she started to work when she was very young as a telephone operator and she also wrote poetry. She engaged with anarchism by the end of the 1920's and participated as CNT militant in demonstrations. During the years 1933 and 1934, she worked as a journalist for the CNT and as a secretary in the *Federación Nacional de Industria* (National Federation of Industry). Sanchez contributed as well to different press journals of the anarchist movement, even during the Spanish Civil War. In 1938 she became the Secretary of the *Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista* (SIA) (International Antifascist Solidarity) for which she had to travel to France, the same country where she became an exile later on until she came back to Madrid in 1940 and she stayed there in secrecy (CMHD, 2008: 86-87).

Another founder was Mercedes Comaposada (1890- 1997) who studied and worked in the film industry and joined the labor union of spectacle in CNT. Like Sanchez, Comaposada wrote articles for the anarchist press. She moved to France, by the end of the Spanish Civil War, with her partner and had the support of Pablo Picasso, the renowned Spanish painter. Comaposada became Picasso's secretary and continued to write while in France (CMHD, 2008: 88-89).

The third initiator of *Mujeres Libres* was Amparo Poch i Gascón (1904-1966) who studied medicine and was also an expert in sociology and economics. She participated actively from the 1930's in the anarchist media. Poch helped in the Red Cross as well and had an important role in one of the educative centers of *Mujeres Libres*, *Casal de la Dona Treballadora* (House of the working woman) in Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War. When Federica Montseny was part of the government (November 1936- May 1937), Poch

assumed the position of General Director of Health. By the end of the Spanish Civil War she moved into exile to France where she continued to work in the libertarian movement<sup>10</sup> and helped the refugees (CMHD, 2008: 89).

### **3.2 The magazine, the starting point of *Mujeres Libres***

In 1933, Lucía Sánchez Saornil and Mercedes Comaposada experienced sexism within the anarchist movement through their ‘compañeros’<sup>11</sup> (Ackelsberg, 1999: 155). The way male anarchists related to them made them understand that women experienced a ‘double subordination’ (class and gender) (Nash, 1975b: 96-98). Sanchez and Comaposada agreed that women’s subordination had to be tackled specifically (Rodrigo, 2002: 88), and they started to gather together in order to discuss possible solutions for the emancipation of women. In 1935, Sanchez and Comaposada began to send letters to women’s groups, in which they asked the members of those groups’ questions about women’s situation, what their worries were and what they would like to learn (Ackelsberg, 1999: 155). Sanchez and Comaposada acknowledged the urgency of propaganda to promote their ideas as far as possible, and with this end in mind in May of 1936, with the help of Amparo Poch, the first issue of the magazine, named *Mujeres Libres*, came out (Ackelsberg, 1999: 156). The name *Mujeres Libres* was chosen in order to emphasize the word ‘mujeres’ (women) while connecting it with the adjective ‘libres’ (free) (Sanchez in Liaño, 1999: 42).

The three first issues of the magazine were published before the start the Spanish Civil War and were very well received, but with the outbreak of the war the fourth number which was being prepared for July 19, 1936, did not come out until a bit later. This was because the priority of *Mujeres Libres* at that moment was to help the republican side by taking up weapons, helping in hospitals and being a part of the organized groups that provided assistance to the people (Sanchez in Liaño, 1999: 43).

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<sup>10</sup> When I mention the ‘libertarian movement’ I refer to “the other anarchist organizations, such as the anarcho-syndicalist union CNT, the radical activist anarchist group FAI, and the youth organization FIJL, which constituted the conglomerate of the Spanish libertarian movement of the time” (Nash, 1995: 87)

<sup>11</sup> Compañeros/as is a term used to define their colleagues in the libertarian movement, also can be used the word comrades.

With the start of the Spanish Civil War, the propaganda of *Mujeres Libres* was even better received by women (Sanchez in Liaño, 1999: 43). Women were needed out of the home to help in various positions, and women did so but the founders of *Mujeres Libres* recognized that this response was not a politically conscious one. It was an instinctive response to what was happening and *Mujeres Libres* wanted to “convert that instinct into consciousness” (Ackelsberg, 2005:135).

Throughout the 14 issues published<sup>12</sup>, *Mujeres Libres* magazine showed the essential ideas of the organization and their actions. The environment was a difficult one; the Spanish Civil War was going on. The publication was aimed to be written and produced by only women and their target readers were women; they received many letters from men who supported women’s emancipation and wanted to collaborate with them, but although they appreciated that, it was not part of their plan (Ackelsberg, 2005: 131). The only man that they accepted was Baltasar Lobo, Mercedes Comaposada’s partner, as the designer of the magazine (Rodrigo, 2002: 91).

The magazine was successful and reached many women from different parts of Spain (Nash, 1975: 70). The key to their success was, as predicted by Sanchez, that women recognized their voice in the magazine (Rodrigo, 2002: 95). This statement was proved by the amount of positive letters that they received from women. Ackelsberg states that “...many of those letters revealed a lack of familiarity with written language. Many had multiple spelling errors and little sense of proper sentence construction”, so *Mujeres Libres* attracted the attention of many women who were not well educated and generated in them a need to express their feelings. *Mujeres Libres* awoke women and this was in fact their goal (Ackelsberg, 2005: 130)

### 3.2.1 Not declaring themselves in the magazine as anarchist

*Mujeres Libres* was initially cautious about declaring themselves openly as part of the anarchist movement. In one letter that the founders wrote to one of their contacts (Antonio Escorihuela) on May 30, 1936, they stated, “We will try to maintain a moderate tone in the magazine, in line with our cultural goal; moreover, our primary goal is to attract women. We will not identify as anarchist, since that might be enough to frighten women

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<sup>12</sup> There were fourteen issues edited but the last one disappear with the entrance of the Franchist troops in Barcelona and no copies survived (Ackelsberg, 2005: 129)

away” (Nash, 1995: 80). Sanchez added that in the magazine they would not use the word anarchist, although the anarchist ideology would be embedded in the articles (Ackelsberg, 2005: 129). As a matter of fact, *Mujeres Libres*’s magazine of July 1937 wrote: “In the publications of ‘MUJERES LIBRES’ you will find a social, humane and clear orientation without any political interest but with a wide sense of emancipation and authentically revolutionary”. The most important point in the quote is that they mention that they would not be related to politics, although they were in the anarchist movement.

### **3.3 The foundation of the organization *Mujeres Libres* in 1937**

In this subsection I will focus on the development of the organization, in this context it is important to understand that although initially the organization was named *Agrupación Mujeres Libres* (*Mujeres Libres* Group), and later on it was agreed to change to a *Federación Mujeres Libres* (Federation of *Mujeres Libres*), throughout this thesis I mention the organization with the title *Mujeres Libres* only.

The founders of *Mujeres Libres* saw that the only way to overcome the subordinate condition of women was to create a separate and women-only organization (Ackelsberg, 1985: 65-67). Therefore after the start of the magazine the founders gathered ideas to constitute the organization *Mujeres Libres* (CMHD, 2008: 73). Ackelsberg states that “the national federation of *Mujeres Libres* was not formed officially until 1937” although she does not mention the exact date, but probably it was some time after the first conference of *Mujeres Libres* in August 1937 that I will mention later. It seems then that by the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, *Mujeres Libres* started to make contacts with other women’s organizations that would become their branches around Spain after Civil War began, and that this was called *Agrupación Mujeres Libres* (*Mujeres Libres*’s Association) but there is no evidence that this ‘Agrupación’ was officially registered.

In September or October 1936, Comaposada went to a regional meeting of the *Grupo Cultural Femenino* (Female Cultural Group) that was part of the CNT in Barcelona. *Grupo Cultural Femenino* was founded towards the end of 1934 (Rodrigo, 2002: 95) by Concha Liaño and Soledad Estorach, together with eight more proletarian women. *Grupo Cultural Femenino* claimed the need for equal rights and duties between the sexes; they discussed the exploitation of women by men and the way to achieve women’s

emancipation in the CNT conference in May 1936 as in other meetings addressed only for women (Rodrigo, 2002: 96-97; Quiñonero, 2005: 24). Once in the meeting, Comaposada realized that *Agrupación Mujeres Libres* and *Grupo Cultural Femenino* shared similar objectives in relation to the emancipation of women (Rodríguez, 2002: 98).

After the meeting, Comaposada contacted the *Grupo Cultural Femenino* and explained to members that *Mujeres Libres* was planning to start a national federation of women and asked them if they wanted to join. The women's group in Barcelona had been following their 'compañeras' from the first issue of *Mujeres Libres's* magazine (Quiñonero, 2005: 231-232) and although *Grupo Cultural Femenino* had been active from 1934, they had not yet prepared an action plan (Estorach in Liaño, 1999: 51). The proposition by *Agrupación Mujeres Libres* was well received by all members of *Grupo Cultural Femenino* and they decided to join *Mujeres Libres* since they had clearly defined objectives (Quiñonero, 2005: 231-232). Within two meetings the action plan for the *Grupo Cultural Femenino* was structured and they became the first branch of *Mujeres Libres*, with Concha Liaño as secretary (Estorach in Liaño, 1999: 51). Liaño and Estorach were the youngest members of the group in Barcelona and the ones with more free time; both of them contacted other anarchist women and organizations in Catalonia and in Madrid (Quiñonero, 2005: 231-232). From there the *Agrupación Mujeres Libres* started to spread their ideas through different branches around Republican Spain.

In Valencia on August 20-22, 1937, the first national conference of the *Agrupación Mujeres Libres* was organized; with attendance of representative members from the fifteen branches of *Mujeres Libres*. All the members had an active role during the meetings but it is important to underline the contribution of the members from Barcelona and Valencia. The existent branches were situated where republicans were still in power; therefore, there were six in Catalonia, three in Comunitat Valenciana, four in Castilla-la Mancha, one in Madrid and one in Andalucía (Federación Nacional de Mujeres Libres, 1937: 1).

The conference addressed several points discussed over in different sections. One of the most relevant discussions was if *Mujeres Libres* had to be an association or a federation; they decided on the latter as some of the branches did not want to centralize the power with a committee. It was decided as well that they would be structured by provincial committees to reduce costs, and in some cases there would also be regional

committees. Another important decision was to nominate the delegations of Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia to prepare the statutes of the federation and to nominate Sanchez as the General Secretary by unanimity.

In relation to education, during the conference the members from the Barcelona branch mentioned that during the war *Mujeres Libres* could not limit itself to good intentions only, if it wanted to make an impact; the branch in Barcelona for example had created cultural and professional secondary schools, and argued that the factories and studios/garages it was important to have a nursery and a room for breastfeeding, an example of how important motherhood was for *Mujeres Libres* (Federación Nacional de Mujeres Libres, 1937: 5- 7).

Other topics that they discussed was the need of a *Mujeres Libres* membership card to accredit them when attending conferences in the name of the organization, a membership card with a national quota that members would have to pay for (twenty cents of peseta); the colors to be printed on the membership card were decided to be red, black and grey (red and black as the colors of CNT-FAI); they decided to not include the CNT-FAI letters since they were an independent organization; they discussed the creation of a stamp and the colors of the flag of *Mujeres Libres* for which they decided to have the blue for optimist with white letters and the red and black stripe (Federación Nacional de *Mujeres Libres*, 1937: 8-10). On this meeting we can observe that *Mujeres Libres* was well organized with members and branches where everyone participated in the decision making.

### **3.4 Aims and goals, challenging three different sources of subordination**

The initial aims of *Mujeres Libres* was women's emancipation and their recruitment towards the anarchist movement. The goal of the organization, as Nash states (1975: 15), was to liberate women, with special focus on the female working class, of the 'triple slavery' (Nash, 1975: 15) also called triple subordination or triple servitude (Ackelsberg, 2005:134). The three different forms of subordination that women experienced were: ignorance (illiteracy), economic exploitation, and subordination by men within the family. *Mujeres Libres* focused on the first one since with education women would be able to overcome the other two forms of oppression. Literacy became a tool in order to



“develop their self-confidence as well as to facilitate their full participation in society and social change” (Ackelsberg, 1985: 70).

To reach their objective, to educate women and empower them in order to be equal with men, they first needed to attract women through the magazine and then give them trainings to empower them, so they could become free and autonomous (Montero, 2013: 16). They called this: *captación* (to attract) y *capacitación* (to train). *Captación* without *capacitación* would not make sense since women “were not yet prepared to enter the movement as equals” (Ackelsberg, 2005:148).

At the beginning of the war *Mujeres Libres* established in Barcelona social dining rooms, a place to clean and iron clothes for the republican’s militias in the rear front, and gave courses to nurses and about childcare.<sup>13</sup> But later on they retook their programs that “included courses to overcome ignorance and illiteracy, industrial and commercial apprenticeships, as well as consciousness-raising groups”. Through the programs *Mujeres Libres* wanted to empower women, giving knowledge and confidence to women to make them part of society as full citizens (Ackelsberg, 2005:137).

By the beginning of March 1937, *Mujeres Libres* had founded the Institute of *Mujeres Libres* in Barcelona that gave courses to women who increased rapidly in numbers reaching 15,000 after some months (Comaposada in Liaño, 1999: 72). Another relevant action taken by *Mujeres Libres* around the same time was the creation of structured working sections to tackle the republican needs from the war in the rear front. The working sections were divided into different areas, dealing with health, transportation, clothing and public services and a movable working section that could help where it was necessary (Comaposada in Liaño, 1999: 71). Teaching professions to women was very important since with the Spanish Civil War there was a lack of male workforce since men were at the battle front, and that male workforce had to be replaced by women (Nash, 1975: 16). *Mujeres Libres* supported and promoted the women’s workforce, with their slogan from September 1936 “Men to the front, women to work” (Nash, 1975: 16-17)

*Mujeres Libres* with the support of Federica Montseny, created ‘liberatorios de prostitución’, places where *Mujeres Libres* taught prostitutes other professions so that

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<sup>13</sup> In the appendix 4, pp. D, there is an article about the collaboration of women during the first days of the revolution together with pictures

they could leave the streets (Comaposada in Liaño, 1999: 71). The educational programs in Barcelona were successful and by December 1938 had reached “many thousands of women; between 600 and 800 women were attending classes each day at the *Casal de la Dona* in Barcelona. That helped *Mujeres Libres*’s struggles and aims to be more widespread” (Ackelsberg, 2005:153). It is important to underline that in the case of *Mujeres Libres* Barcelona branch, they had access to a building transferred from the CNT named *Casal de la Dona* where they gave their courses. Therefore, the branch in Barcelona was more independent; while other delegations were more restricted in their trainings since they had to do them in the trade unions in the libertarian movement (Domingo, 2006:71).

### **3.5 Relationship with other organizations**

#### **3.5.1 The relation with the anarchist movement**

CNT was in disagreement with the founding of an organization only for/by women. They would offer *Mujeres Libres* all money they wanted if they worked on other issues rather than only focusing on women’s issues, but *Mujeres Libres* refused to do so (Ackelsberg, 1985: 68). *Mujeres Libres* was criticized for their feminist ideology in the libertarian movement and this produced a tension relationship with CNT, FAI and FIJL (Nash, 1975: 20). Although the anarchist movement was in disagreement with *Mujeres Libres*, Liaño explains that the libertarian movement gave them financial aid. They lent *Mujeres Libres* some buildings or apartments that they possessed, and gave them some money to pay teachers and members who worked full time in *Mujeres Libres*, but this help was provided in a paternalistic way (Liaño, 1999: 59).

In Barcelona, on October 16-30, 1938 the congress of the anarchist movement took place. *Mujeres Libres* prepared a delegation in order to attend as the fourth branch of the libertarian movement (together with CNT, FAI and FIJL). Ackelsberg explains that *Mujeres Libres* members used to attend as members of other movement organizations, but this time they wanted to attend as delegates of *Mujeres Libres*. However, they did not have invitations. When the delegation of fifteen women from *Mujeres Libres* arrived at the congress, after what for some of them was a long journey, they were not welcome. After discussions they were only accepted at two sessions (Ackelsberg, 2005: 191-192).

In these sessions *Mujeres Libres* members were able to present a report in which they protested against the lack of support and against the indifference towards their propositions in the libertarian movement. The answer to their report came on February 11, 1939 (when Catalonia was in the hands of Franco) in an extraordinary meeting with the anarchist movement where two branches of *Mujeres Libres* were present (from Madrid and Valencia). The answer from the libertarian movement was negative; they stated that “an independent women’s organization would undermine the overall strength of the libertarian movement and inject an element of disunity that would have negative consequences for the development of working-class interests and the libertarian movement on the whole” (Nash, 1995: 88). They also mentioned that women were not qualified for ruling an organization and that the members needed more practice (Quiñonero, 2005: 255-257). The delegation of *Mujeres Libres* argued that their ‘compañeros’ should leave aside their archaic concepts about women and realize that women were needed in the social and political life; and that in *Mujeres Libres* they would find quality and quantity in women (Minutes of the extraordinary meeting, in Nash, 1975: 106)

*Mujeres Libres* was rejected by the libertarian movement twice; first when the anarchist movement did not want to acknowledge *Mujeres Libres* as part of the movement, and second in February 1939 when once again they negated them. *Mujeres Libres* clearly was not happy about the first rejection and in a report of the *Federation of Mujeres Libres* in September 1938, there are statements as ‘nobody wants to recognize the important role of *Mujeres Libres*, that had a clear vision and whose aim was to be useful to the libertarian movement’. *Mujeres Libres* critiqued the way they had been treated, the limited support from their ‘compañeros’ while *Mujeres Libres* had attracted many women to the anarchist movement (Nash, 1975: 103-104).

To conclude, it is important to acknowledge that *Mujeres Libres* identified with the goals of the libertarian movement and considered themselves as part of the movement. *Mujeres Libres* though did not consider itself as an annex to the CNT; instead they claimed autonomy and wanted to be the fourth branch of the anarchist movement (Nash, 1975: 19). Although *Mujeres Libres* suffered from the hostility and indifference of the libertarian movement, they “never proposed disassociating itself from the anarchists” (Nash, 1995: 89).

### 3.5.2 The relation with women's organizations

We have seen in chapter 2 that during the Spanish Civil War there was rivalry among organizations on the left which prevented them from working together. In the case of women's organizations on the left, this political tension was also present which made a union between republican women impossible (Domingo, 2006: 59). Moreover, *Mujeres Libres* did not want to be part of a cluster of female leftist organization because the other female organizations<sup>14</sup> did not struggle enough for women's rights, while *Mujeres Libres* advocated for education and social changes (CMHD, 2008:78) and recognized the specific oppression of women by gender.

### 3.6 The extent of *Mujeres Libres's* work around Spain

*Mujeres Libres* expanded very fast during the Spanish Civil War. This enlargement was promoted by *Mujeres Libres's* branches and the magazine whose goal was to attract women to their ideals. For example the branch in Barcelona visited factories and villages in order to expand their group and to reach all women (Estorach in Liaño, 1999: 51). In the magazine there was a guide of 'How to create an association of *Mujeres Libres* in your village' (Nash, 1975: 75-85). This guide explained how to attract women's attention, first by telling them the importance of helping the combatants in the Spanish Civil War and second by empowering themselves through education. The guide also showed how to create a Committee with a minimum of ten women and detailed the different roles that needed to be covered. It described as well how to approach other women and the way to collect money (Nash, 1975: 75-85).

By the end of the Spanish Civil War, *Mujeres Libres* had created more than 168 local groups in towns and villages in republican Spain and reached around 20.000 women, although in some reports the numbers are higher, up to 28.000 (*Mujeres Libres's* magazine, number 11, January 1938: 27) or even 60.000 members (Nash, 1995: 78). The CNT claimed around three million members and FAI 150.000 during the Spanish Civil

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<sup>14</sup> Women antifascist organizations as: Agrupación de Mujeres Antifascistas (AMA) (Antifascist Women's Organization), Unión de Muchachas (UM) (Union of Young Girls), Unió de Dones de Catalunya (UDC) (Women Union of Catalonia), etc. (Nash, 1995: 65)

War (Commire and Klezmer, 1999: 356), but those organizations had been founded in 1910 and 1928 respectively.

*Mujeres Libres* contributed to the empowerment of many of its members; their community and shared knowledge had a deep effect on some women (Ackelsberg, 2005: 201). *Mujeres Libres* felt very proud of its work as they expressed in an article called 'Federación' (Federation) referring to *Federación Mujeres Libres*, published in the *Mujeres Libres*'s magazine number 13, where *Mujeres Libres* affirmed to be the major model to educate women and stated that its achievements and development had been done with women's effort (*Mujeres Libres*'s magazine in Nash, 1975: 98-100).

## **Conclusion**

*Mujeres Libres*'s founders realized the existent sexism in the anarchist movement and wanted to address it with an autonomous organization, *Mujeres Libres*. The founders advocated for women's rights and emancipation in the *Mujeres Libres*'s magazine but at the same time they continued to be part of the libertarian movement; in the case of Sanchez and Comaposada they worked as journalists for other magazines of the movement. I find it interesting that CNT negated the work of *Mujeres Libres* but at the same time collaborated with the founders and gave them materials and places where they could hold their courses. Even if this was done in a paternalist way, in some way they recognized them since they helped them.

However, *Mujeres Libres* was never recognized as the fourth branch of the libertarian movement by CNT. After the first rejection, *Mujeres Libres*, although angry, continued to work for the anarchist cause without criticizing it since the founders trusted in anarchism and they had the hope that at some point the anarchist movement would realize the important work they did in terms of attracting women to the movement. This moment did not arrive because even when the Franquist troops were controlling almost all Spain, in February 1939 CNT negated *Mujeres Libres*. This shows that both organizations were not flexible about their objectives and goals since they could not arrive into an agreement.

The founders of *Mujeres Libres* to me were like 'ants' (an expression used in Spain) because from nothing, from what we could call a 'lost cause', they worked little by little and they were not defeated by their opponents or by those who did not believe in them.

They continued to work towards the emancipation of women through education because they believed in it and to me the work that the founders did together with some other members who later joined *Mujeres Libres* is more than admirable. They started from zero and they ended up with around 20.000 members, so they did magnificent work for a great cause that ended sadly with the victory of Franco.

## **CHAPTER 4. MUJERES LIBRES'S PREDECESSORS AND COLLABORATORS**

In this chapter I introduce three relevant women who have been connected in different ways and moments to the work of *Mujeres Libres*. I examine their life, ideals and struggles; I explore their opinion about the emancipation of women and feminism, lastly I will study the relevance of these women for *Mujeres Libres*. The chapter is divided in three sections. In the first one I discuss Teresa Claramunt and Teresa Mañe, who have been considered as the vanguards of anarcho-feminism because of their writings, speeches and actions although their role in the Spanish history is very rarely acknowledged. Claramunt and Mañe are relevant since their ideas towards the liberation of women opened a path for *Mujeres Libres*. The second section is dedicated to Federica Montseny, a powerful female anarchist who had influence in the anarchist movement when *Mujeres Libres* emerged, so I will explore the relationship between her and the founders of the organization, and also Montseny's ideas in relation to feminism.

The order of the presented figures in this chapter is as well important since I have taken into account time and nationality. The three characters are Spanish and are discussed in chronological order. I could also argue that they are in order from less known to more known in the libertarian movement, considering that both Claramunt and Mañe have not been visible in the anarchist movement.

### **4.1 The vanguards of the anarcho-feminist ideology in Spain by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century: Teresa Claramunt and Teresa Mañe**

In this section I will focus on two women: Teresa Claramunt and Teresa Mañe, who fought for the interests of women and their freedom at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Nash, 2010: 144-148). Molyneux, sociologist, describes them as follows: "By the 1880's there had emerged within the European anarchist movement a distinctive feminist current, represented by writer-activists such as Teresa Mañe ('Soledad Gustavo') and Teresa Claramunt", Molyneux also compares their ideas

to the ones developed by Voltairine de Cleyre, Emma Goldman and other well-known anarchists in North America. Molyneux states that the “main impulse for anarchist feminism came from Spanish activists” (Molyneux, 2001: 17).

Molyneux’s affirmations claim the importance of these two women, giving them credit for their work and recognizing its importance. Although Molyneux clearly underlines the role of Claramunt and Mañe, this is not common; moreover, not much has been written about these two women in English at all. In the Spanish language, we can find some books and articles but again not much. In the case of Claramunt, only two writers, Laura Vicente and Maria Amalia Pradas, have dedicated a whole book to her life, both published in 2006, and there are several published articles about Claramunt. There are no academic articles about Mañe and there is only one book about her, published in 2001 by Joaquim Micó, *Teresa Mañe i Miravet: 1865- 1939*, to which I did not have access. Therefore I have focused my analysis on a short article by the same author, Micó; Vicente’s book (2013) and two other researches that talk briefly about Mañe.

Vicente describes Teresa Claramunt and Teresa Mañe as the pioneers of anarcho-feminism, the same ideology by which *Mujeres Libres* is defined by some writers, and mentions that the organization *Mujeres Libres* was born out of a range of ideas and movements that existed before them and framed their existence. In Vicente’s view, the two Teresas set the ideological ground between feminism and anarchism that was developed by the next generation of women in the Second Republic and the Spanish Civil War (Vicente in Antologia, 2012: 5).

#### **4.1.1 Teresa Claramunt (1862- 1931)**

Teresa Claramunt was born in 1862 in Sabadell but she lived part of her childhood in the province of Huesca (Vicente, 2006: 16). Her family was humble and it seems that she started to work from an early age, earlier than 10 years old, in a factory, cleaning the floors and helping the adults for some cents of pessetas per week (Vicente, 2013: 74). When she was 13 years old she returned to Sabadell where she worked in the textile industry and when she was there the strike known as the ‘seven weeks’ happened in 1883 (Vicente, 2006: 16). The aim of the strike was a reduction of the working hours to 8 hours per week. After the strike Claramunt together with her partner got involved in an entity



called *Ateneo Obrero* (Laborer Ateneo) and a weekly publication *Los Desheredados* (The Disinherited) (Vicente, 2006: 78-80) that were part of the anarchist movement. In 1884 Claramunt got married in a civil ceremony with Antonio Gurri, an anarchist who guided Claramunt through her learning in the first years (Vicente, 2006: 79)

When Claramunt was 22 years old, in 1884, she started to participate as an anarchist activist in the *Federación Regional Española de la Asociación Internacional de Trabajadores (FRE)* (Regional Spanish Federation of the International Worker's Association). At the beginning of her activism, she was characterized as having "simple and comprehensive ideas for other working women", she was also described as beautiful, pleasant, with a voice that attracted people and that denoted strength (Vicente, 2006: 85-86), probably these are some of the reasons why working people started to follow her ideas.

Claramunt had several miscarriages and in 1888 she had a baby that died 5 months later. The married couple then decided to move out of Sabadell in 1889 and there is no track of them until 1891, when they were in Barcelona. From the 1890's Claramunt's fame increased and she left her husband in her shadow; she felt she did not need a guide/mentor anymore. Claramunt at that period was more mature, more self-conscious and continued to spread anarchist ideas, together with pleas for the emancipation of women (Vicente, 2006: 99-102).

In the following years Claramunt became very involved in the anarcho-syndicalist movement. She got arrested, was put in jail and even condemned to death for being part of labor strikes and anarchist terrorist attacks. In the two cases she was absolved for lack of evidence but in 1897 she was sent in exile to London by the government, where Teresa Mañé was sent as well for the same reason (Micó, 2001: 6). From London Claramunt moved to Paris and then to Barcelona again in 1898. In 1902 she cofounded with Leopoldo Bonafulla a magazine called *El Productor* (The Producer) (Prado, 2011: 41). She started her career as writer while continuing with her public speeches. She published different letters and articles in the weekly magazines *El Productor*, *La Anarquía* (The Anarchy) and *La Tramontana* (The North Wind). In relation to her writings it is important to mention an earlier dramatic theater piece that she wrote and was first released in 1886, called 'El mundo que muere y el mundo que nace' (The world that dies and the world that is born) (Vicente, 2006: 120). In 1905, she published 'La mujer. Consideraciones sobre

su estado ante las prerrogativas del hombre' (The woman. Considerations about her position in front of the privileges of men), Nash defined it as one of the first treaties about the social condition of Spanish women written by a female worker. This treaty was embedded in feminist thought that rejected the female oppression as a consequence of male superiority (Nash, 2010: 146)

Claramunt continued her activist campaign writings, her engagement with public political meetings and events until shortly before her death caused by illness, due to the time she spent in prison. She died the day before the Second Republic was announced (Prado, 2011: 41-42).

#### 4.1.1.1 Her ideals and claims

Claramunt's speeches and articles are embedded in her fight for women's emancipation. She believed that "one of the major obstacles to women's advancement was men's sense of superiority" (Nash, 1995: 31). So if men were superior and had privileges, women were the slaves; a concept that Claramunt used since she saw that women were ignorant about their position. She denounced, in words of Nash, that "women were the slaves of the slave workers and were dependent on men who took their individuality" (Nash, 2010: 146) and in a public meeting in 1888 Claramunt stated:

"No, 'compañeras', we have been slaves and docile long enough, we need to show that we have a heart and we need to tell our 'compañeros': ¡'Compañeros', that being that you called weak now is equaling you, and she is understanding that she belongs to half of humanity, she is part as well as you do" (Prado, 2011: 43).

Women in Claramunt's view were 'double slaves' because of their condition as woman and worker (Nash, 2010: 149), so she connected the concepts of class and gender (Prado, 2011: 43).

Claramunt argued that women themselves had to fight for their own emancipation (Nash, 2010: 149). At a meeting in 1888 for example she stated: "This way you need to act, daughter of the earth, forward, forward female worker. Awake, misfortunate sister" (Prado, 2011: 43). Claramunt have used the verbs to 'act' and 'awake' in relation to women, where she is making women own their situation and take action about it. Nash

states that Claramunt became “one of the first social activists to advocate the self-emancipation of women workers” (Nash, 1995: 31).

Claramunt also focused her activism on the importance of maternity, family, marriage, love and sexual reform (Vicente, 2006: 81); she promoted education for women, the founding of an organization of women and gave support to ‘compañeros’ on the way to revolution. She also denounced prostitution (Vicente, 2006: 90-94), a fight that was continued by Federica Montseny and *Mujeres Libres*. Claramunt developed antipatriarchal and feminist ideas while defending the interests of women (Nash, 2010: 144), although she never used the term feminist to describe herself (Nash, 2010:146).

Claramunt questioned why women were not attending the *Ateneo Obrero*, as a result she asked anarchist men to take women, their wives and sisters, with them to the ‘ateneo’<sup>15</sup> (Vicente, 2006: 87). Claramunt also expressed herself against the pastors and the Jesuits (Vicente, 2006: 87), believing that religions did not let people think freely; for her religious beliefs were like having a blindfold on (Vicente, 2006: 107).

#### 4.1.1.2 The women’s organizations in which she participated

For Teresa Claramunt the emancipation of women was central to her goals and women were the ones who had to fight for themselves, therefore she participated in the foundation of several women’s organizations (Vicente, 2006: 108). Claramunt in Nash’s words “wanted to found one organization in order to create a space for education, training and meeting point for women” that would help push women to leave their social passivity behind (Nash, 2010:145).

In 1884 Claramunt together with other women constituted the *Seccion Varia de Trabajadoras anarco-colectivistas de Sabadell* (Section of the anarcho-collectivist workers from Sabadell). It was a section that aimed to help the emancipation of both sexes in the *Ateneo Obrero* through education. It seems, though, that it was operative for a very short period since the last reference to the section in the press was in July 1885 as Vicente

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Ateneo’ is cultural forums where anarchist met to learn

argues (2006: 82-86), but there is no explicit documentation that clarifies when *Seccion Varia de Trabajadoras anarco-colectivistas de Sabadell* stopped working.

In 1891, *Agrupación de Trabajadoras* (Group of female workers) started as a project in Barcelona that Claramunt supported because of its feminist, anarchist and proletarian characteristics. The committee of *Agrupación de Trabajadoras* organized public meetings, in which Claramunt participated and where she spoke about the necessity of a women's organization. The *Agrupación de Trabajadoras* declared that women were suffering from a double burden, because in addition to taking care of the home and children, they also worked outside the home, in jobs that were not paid well (not paid equally as men) (Vicente, 2006: 108-112). Its goal was that women associated themselves with working unions, but knowing that this would be difficult they created a more general organization to encourage women to take part in it. Unfortunately that organization never saw the light (Vicente, 2006: 108-112). This situation shows how difficult it was to organize women. Women, Vicente mentions, did not feel the need to belong to a labor organization as men did because working outside the home was not their first responsibility, in contrast with men. Women saw working outside of the home as something temporary, and for that reason they accepted badly paid jobs (Vicente, 2006: 112-113).

Around 1891, Claramunt also got in contact with the *Sociedad Autónoma de Mujeres de Barcelona* (Autonomous Society of Women from Barcelona) and participated in some of their meetings. It was an organization open to different ideologies related to freethinking that brought together women of diverse social status (Vicente, 2006: 113) with the aim to create the foundations of a secular feminism that defended the emancipation of women within a secular society. The organization started to function in 1889 but in 1892 stopped to work (Vicente, 2006: 113). Claramunt later supported Belén Ságarra's attempt to establish *Asociación Librepensadora de Mujeres* (Free-thinkers Women's Association) but Ságarra was arrested in 1896 because the organization was against Christian morality and promoted free-thinking. Some of the followers of the organization organized a public meeting for the liberation of Sagarra in which Claramunt participated (Vicente, 2006: 114).

We have seen that Claramunt put much effort into trying to mobilize women into women's organizations, but what she aimed for had still to wait four decades until the

appearance of *Mujeres Libres*. Claramunt had ideas ‘too’ advanced for her time, but definitely her ideology and actions became a legacy for *Mujeres Libres*.

#### 4.1.1.3 Part of the legacy for *Mujeres Libres*

In *Mujeres Libres* magazine there are often articles recognizing the labor of other re-known anarchist women such as Emma Goldman, Voltairine de Cleyre and Federica Montseny. In the magazine issue 12, published in 1938, there is an article about Teresa Claramunt. It asserts that the younger generations barely knew her name but Teresa Claramunt represented nevertheless “nearly fifty years of revolutionary action and anarchist propaganda, with harsh persecutions at a time when, we can say, she was the only revolutionary woman” (*Mujeres Libres*’s magazine, no.12, June 1938 num.12: 25). The article continues to describe Claramunt’s fight, her public speeches together with her numerous detentions, her exile and her strength to continue with the fight. Interestingly though, the writers did not make a connection between Claramunt’s work and their own at *Mujeres Libres*, and by calling Teresa Claramunt “the only revolutionary woman”, they left out Teresa Mañé.

#### 4.1.2 Teresa Mañé (1865 - 1939)

Teresa Mañé was born in 1865 (Mico, 2001:4), in Cubelles, but her family moved to a textile area close by, called Vilanova i la Geltru. Her family had a business that provided enough income so Mañé was able to study in a teacher school in Barcelona. She started to teach when she was 22 years old and in 1887 she founded the first secular school for girls in Vilanova i la Geltru (Vicente, 2013:73). According to Micó, Mañé was most likely the first secular teacher in Spain (Mico, 2001:4).

In 1891, Teresa Mañé and Juan Montseny, an anarchist as well, got married in a civil ceremony (Vicente, 2013:74). Mañé became more known after her marriage according to an study published by the *Centre per la Memòria Històrica y Democràtica* (Center for the recovery of the historic memoire and democracy) (CMHD, 2008: 85), but it is important to remember that Mañé was writing and publishing from the age of 22 (Micó, 2001:10) and that in 1889 she won a writing contest in Barcelona for her work ‘El amor libre’ (The free love) (it is not specified if it is an article or a book) (CMHD, 2008: 85).

In 'El amor libre', she was in favor of equality and freedom in gender relations (Nash, 2010:147). After getting married, the couple moved to Reus (Micó, 2001: 6), and they became engaged in a pioneer rationalist school there that functioned over 6 years (Vicente, 2013:73-74).

The 1890's was an active period for the anarchist movement; they called a general strike for the 1<sup>st</sup> of May of in 1981 (International Workers' Day), in 1983 they set explosions against a general and a year later they put two bombs in the opera house of Barcelona (Liceu) killing twenty two people. During that period Juan Montseny as other activists and intellectual people who were considered as the enemy of the government got arrested several times (Micó, 2001:6). In 1986 in Barcelona, someone threw a bomb in the street at the time of a religious procession that killed eleven people and injured forty. This supposedly terrorist attack (there are speculations that the bomb was thrown by the police), was followed by a repression of the Catalan anarchist labor movement by the government. This was translated into the 'Procés de Montjuïc', with more than 400 people under arrest. Due to this, both Juan Montseny and Teresa Mañé got arrested and in 1897 after their trial, they were sent into exile to London. Teresa Claramunt then was sent there as well (Micó, 2001: 6). In 1898 Juan Montseny and Teresa Mañé returned to Madrid, Spain, but it is not clear if they came back with a pardon from the government (Vicente, 2013:91-92) or if they entered the country illegally (Micó, 2001: 7). Once in Madrid they started a campaign to review the irregularities of the sentences and tortures in prison during the 'Procés de Monjuïc'.

In 1898, Teresa Mañé and Juan Montseny founded the magazine *La Revista Blanca* (The Blank Journal<sup>16</sup>) with modest objectives but with the collaboration of Spanish anarchist leaders (Vicente, 2013: 93). The magazine "became amongst the most progressive spaces for political discussion on topics ranging from politics to environmental issues and where special emphasis was put onto gender and sexuality" (Iniguez, 2007:6). At that time for security reasons the couple used pseudonyms when publishing articles: Mañé as Soledad Gustavo and Juan Montseny as Federico Urales

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<sup>16</sup> *La Revista Blanca* translated as *The Blank Journal* by Commire and Klezmer (1999: 355) because they argue that "...the government censors of rejecting anarchist articles, whose absence was made apparent by the lines or columns of empty space left in the publication" and therefore in accordance to this meaning they decided to translated as 'blank' and not 'white'.

(Vicente, 2013: 93). Micó affirms that during the first period of the magazine (1898-1905) Mañe was the director, not Juan. The fact that Mañe directed the magazine is one of the reasons why Micó has underlined Mañe's higher intelligence (Micó, 2001: 3) whereas other writers argued that she only had a nominal role, with which Micó is not in agreement (Micó, 2001: 13). Juan Montseny founded a supplement to the magazine called *Suplemento a la Revista Blanca* (1899- 1902) that in 1903-1904 became the famous magazine *Tierra y Libertad*, where Mañe also published articles (Micó, 2001: 7).

Unfortunately *La Revista Blanca* saw its end in 1905. Vicente argued that was because Federica Montseny was born, and Mañe did not have time to be in charge of the magazine since she decided to raise and to educate Federica at home; moreover, Mañe had a postpartum depression (Vicente, 2013: 93). However in Micó's interpretation the couple transferred *Tierra y Libertad* in 1904 and closed *La Revista Blanca* in 1905 due to legal and monetary problems (Micó, 2001:8), therefore there are two interpretations of the same action.

Micó mentioned that there is a lack of documents about how Teresa Mañe lived the years after closing the magazine, in what seemed that she gave up her public role for Juan and Federica Montseny. The publication of CMHD, however, mentions that after 16 years in Madrid, in 1914 the family moved to Barcelona where Mañe wanted to start a school. But the school project did not work and then they moved to Cerdanyola, where Mañe translated and copied texts for a theatre company (CMHD, 2008: 85).

In 1923 Mañe's husband and daughter retook *La Revista Blanca* until 1936. Mañe in this second period contributed to the magazine by publishing articles (Vicente, 2013: 156; Micó, 2001: 8). We can see that Mañe occupied a relevant position as intellectual in the anarchist movement; one example is that *La Revista Blanca* was often a source of discussions among the best known anarchist theorists (Micó, 2001: 8), and Mañe was part of the magazine. Mañe died on the "torturous journey" towards exile with Federica Montseny after the Franquists broke the Catalan Front in early 1939 (Fredericks, 1976: 9); she was 74 years old.

#### 4.1.2.1 Mañe's ideas: feminism and secularism

Writers such as Molyneux, Vicente and Nash have at least mentioned Teresa Mañe as part of the fight for women's rights and as a pioneer of anarcho-feminism together with Claramunt. Mañe and Claramunt prepared the ideological ground between feminism and anarchism that was developed later by *Mujeres Libres* (Vicente in Antologia, 2012: 5). Micó explains the ideological proximity of Mañe and Claramunt and shows in his article with references from Mañe's writing how Mañe aimed to overcome the oppression of proletarian women by class and gender, claiming the need for women's education (Micó, 2001: 7).

Out of Mañe's published books it is important to underline: *A las proletarias. Propaganda emancipadora entre las mujeres* (1886) (To the proletarian women. Emancipatory propaganda towards women), in which Mañe in Nash words, "assumed the defense of women's rights and their equality... at the same time [as] she denounced the sexist behavior of men" (Nash, 2010: 148). In this book Mañe, like Claramunt, also described women as slaves and recognized the subordination of women by:

"Men are so used to look at us as slaves that they cannot get used to the idea that one day we will be considered as their equals and that we will be at their same level in all the different relationships in life" (Mañe, 1886 in Nash, 2010: 148).

Other important books by Mañe are: *La sociedad futura* (1899) (The future society); *Amor Libre* (1904) (Free Love), *Las diosas de la vida* (no date) (The female gods of life) and *El sindicalismo y la anarquía. Política y sociología* (1932) (Syndicalism and anarchy. Politics and sociology) (CMHD, 2008: 85).

As mentioned earlier, Mañe was involved in secular education and she blamed the Catholic Church whose she considered did not let people think freely (Micó, 2001:11). Claramunt and other left thinkers also saw the values the church promoted as a negative influence, arguing that it reinforced female submission (Nash, 2010: 145). They stood up against the Church when the majority of women in late nineteenth century and beginning of twentieth century were very religious.



## **4.2 An important woman in the Spanish anarchist movement in the 1930's: Federica Montseny (1905 - 1994)**

Federica Montseny was an anarchist leader who became the first Spanish female minister in 1936 (Nash, 1998: 354) and who had a great impact in the anarchist movement in the 1930's. Commire and Klezmer (1999: 355) affirm that Montseny was “one of the most important anarchists and one of the most important women during the Spanish Civil War”. She was one of the best known women in the CNT because of her passionate activism; she was either loved or hated (CMHD, 2008: 90-91). Her work has been recognized and is publically known. The literature about Federica Montseny is very large, and she herself published around fifty novels and novellas and hundreds of articles (Mangini, 1995: 46; Commire and Klezmer, 1999: 355)

Federica Montseny was born in Madrid in 1905, as daughter of Teresa Mañé and Joan Montseny. She was educated by both of her parents, her mother was her teacher at home and her father used to take her to CNT rallies and to libraries. Afterwards she specialized in secretarial studies at school. Montseny saw Teresa Claramunt as her ‘spiritual mother’ (Vicente, 2013: 156).

Montseny started her career very young; already in 1920 she wrote her first texts, in 1922 her first novel, and in 1923 her first articles were published in *Solidad Obrera* and *La Revista Blanca*. *La Revista Blanca*, as mentioned before, was retaken by the Montseny family in 1923 (Vicente, 2013: 156). In 1930 Federica Montseny became a couple with another anarchist, Germinal Esgleas, with whom she had three children (Mangini, 1995: 46).

When the Second Republic was established in Spain (1931), Montseny became part of the editorial board of *Solidad Obrera* and started her career as a leader after an anarchist propaganda tour around Spain. From there she gained a visibility in the anarchist movement that she did not have before. Federica Montseny became part of CNT and FAI but there is disagreement in the sources about which organization she militated in first. Commire and Klezmer (1999: 356) say that she became involved with FAI in 1928 and became active in CNT, joining the organization from 1931; while Vicente (2013: 156-157) states that Federica initially was part of the CNT, but with the start of the war she enrolled in FAI as well.

In November 1936, the CNT decided to be part of the government due to the inability of anarchists to advance towards Aragon and northern Spain and because they were afraid that Madrid would fall in the hands of the fascists. The CNT team was formed by four anarchists and Federica Montseny was one of them (Commire and Klezmer, 1999: 356). Federica became the first (Nash, 1975:74) as well as the last female minister in Spain for many decades (Commire and Klezmer, 1999: 356). Initially Montseny did not want to be part of the government since she understood it as a betrayal of her ideals. She believed that “through the State nothing at all could be achieved, that the words ‘government’ and ‘authority’ signified the negation of every possibility of freedom for men and for nations” but she decided to accept the position, with pain in her heart, because it was necessary to stop Franco and his allies (Commire and Klezmer, 1999: 356). She took charge of the Ministry of Health and Social Services, a ministry that could have been considered as more ‘feminine’ (Vicente, 2013: 157).

Montseny, while in the government, wanted to create a preventive health system to give more choices to women. Although she perceived maternity as essential to women, Montseny worked to pass a law that would allow women to voluntarily end a pregnancy (Kaplan, 1971: 108). In Spain the law on the legalization of abortion was published on March 5, 1937; this made Spain the second country (after the Soviet Union) to legalize abortion (Commire and Klezmer, 1999: 358). Previously, on December 25, 1936, the abortion had been legal in the autonomous region of Catalonia through the ‘decree of artificial voluntary end of pregnancy’ that defended women’s choice and self-determination (Univ. Zaragoza, 2007: 21) and allowed “abortions in hospital, clinics, and sanatoria established for this specific purpose” (Kaplan, 1971: 108)

Montseny was in the government until May 16, 1937. She left the government together with the other three anarchist members and the Prime Minister of the Republic, Largo Caballero. The reason was that after the fight of May 4, 1937 in Barcelona with different parties of the republican side, the anarchists saw the complicity that existed in between the Soviet Union, which supplied arms to the republicans, and the communists and anarchists did not like (Commire and Klezmer, 1999: 359). In fact because of that fight, on May 6, 1937 Montseny together with other anarchists arrived in Barcelona as peacemakers and communists tried to injure her and even attacked her car, although she was not hurt (Commire and Klezmer, 1999: 358). Fredericks also argues that Federica resigned from the government since she was worried about feeding her family and that

Franco forces could bomb her house (Fredericks, 1972: 9). However, Montseny continued her relation with CNT, attending meetings and social events (CMHD, 2008: 90).

By the end of the Spanish Civil War, in early 1939, Montseny had to go into exile to France (Fredericks, 1976: 9). In 1941, Franco asked for the extradition of Montseny but due to her pregnancy and international pressure, France rejected to send back Montseny (Commire and Klezmer, 1999: 360). While in France, she continued in the libertarian movement, she took an important role in reviving CNT abroad, and she also made "unsuccessful attempts to create a secret anarchist organization inside Franco's Spain". She returned to Spain on April 27, 1977 and "presided a great anarcho-syndicalism meeting in Barcelona" (Commire and Klezmer, 1999: 360). Federica Montseny died in Spain in 1994 (CMHD, 2008: 91).

#### **4.2.1 Federica Montseny's ideas about the 'woman question' and her relation with *Mujeres Libres***

To explain Montseny's thought in relation to the 'woman question' is complex since it involves contradictory ideas. Mangini states that Montseny's "antifeminist rationale" made her contradict herself (Mangini, 1995: 46). However, it was because of those ideas that she could be considered a feminist, although she did not identify as such (Mangini, 1995: 47). In the analysis of her ideas I think it is important to recognize three stages: her youth until 1929; the start of the Second Republic, and the period after the Spanish Civil War.

In an article which Montseny's published in 1923, she considered that feminism was lacking ideals. She claimed that it was wrong to ask for equality with men within a system of privileges; as an anarchist she was also against the suffragist movement and feminism (Nash, 2010: 151). In other articles about women and gender published from 1923 to 1929 in *La Revista Blanca*, she described women as ignorant and not reflecting on their own lives, and this was why they could not emancipate themselves. She also defined women as slaves who reproduced their female oppression in the family (Nash, 2010:150). Characteristic of Montseny thought is that although she acknowledged that women were oppressed and needed to be emancipated, she did not mention by what or whom they were oppressed. As Nash mentions (2010: 152), Montseny did not recognize that women were oppressed by gender. Since she could not see the gender oppression, she did not understand

the necessity of a female organization to overcome that subordination and the need for the emancipation of women from men. As Nash asserts, Federica Montseny had a normative anarchist discourse in which she refused the specificity of a ‘woman question’ and instead argued that this problem was ‘general’, with men and women having to struggle for individual liberation. She claimed: “¿Feminism? ¡Never! ¡Humanism always!” (*La Revista Blanca*, October 1924 in Nash, 2010: 152).

Federica Montseny did not agree with the idea of creating a feminist initiative inside the anarchist movement because, like many others in the anarchist movement, she thought that an independent women’s organization could harm the unity of the anarchist movement (Nash, 1995: 88). Curiously enough, as Vicente mentioned, this unity was not seen as being treated by the founding of FAI (Federación Anarquista Ibérica) in 1932 (Iberian Anarchist Federation) or Juventudes Libertarias (FIJL) (Libertarian’s Youth) (Vicente, 2013: 157-158). So Montseny was against the foundation of *Mujeres Libres* (Kaplan, 1971: 108); nevertheless, she collaborated with them. Shirley Fredericks, a historian who interviewed Montseny around 1972, adds that while Montseny was in the government she “actively aided the efforts of the anarchist women’s organization, *Mujeres Libres*”, and “Montseny encouraged the organization’s efforts to train women for useful, skilled, and honorable employment” (Fredericks, 1972: 8). So it is difficult to understand why- as we can see in the next paragraphs- Montseny helped *Mujeres Libres* directly if she did not support them within the libertarian movement as the fourth organization.

Montseny and *Mujeres Libres* struggled together in order to change the regulations related to prostitution (Kaplan, 1971: 108). Montseny stated about prostitution in 1937:

“Prostitution presents a problem of moral, economic, and social character which cannot be resolved juridically. Prostitution will be abolished when sexual relations are liberalized; when Christian and bourgeois morality are transformed; when women have professions and social opportunities to secure their livelihood and that of their children; when society is established in such a way that no one remains at the margin; when society can be organized to secure life and rights for all human beings” (Montseny 1937 in Kaplan, 1971: 108).

So the core of Montseny’s argument against prostitution is that women were not equal and did not have equal access to jobs, salaries and rights, and they were not free to choose their professions. *Mujeres Libres* in agreement with these reasons started an educational program that provided prostitutes with training so they could learn a new profession that

would allow them to leave the streets, as *Mujeres Libres* explained in the article ‘Liberatorios de prostitución’ (there is not an exact word for this, but it means a place to get out of prostitution) (*Mujeres Libres* magazine, no.4, December 1936: 11)

Montseny also participated in public meetings together with *Mujeres Libres* and *Mujeres Libres*’s magazine included articles about Montseny. There is a description about Montseny that says: “Federica Montseny is more [than a symbol]: [she] is a reality that exists in the actual moments that are decisive in Spain. She is an intelligent and dynamic reality that gives action to concepts that are adequate today and constructive for tomorrow” (*Mujeres Libres* magazine, no. 10, July 1937: 23). In the next issue of the magazine, issue no. 11, there is an article that explains how Montseny has changed her opinion about *Mujeres Libres*. The article stated that Montseny was moving towards the need for a separate female organization, quoting from Montseny:

“The anarchist organizations until now have had the tendency of not separating the female movement from the rest of the proletarians; but there is a need to rectify that tendency because, due to the backward situation of the working women in Spain, we need a specific organization to train them and to bring them next to the other fighters of the working class. The Federation of *Mujeres Libres* has to achieve a big revolutionary task”<sup>17</sup> (Montseny in *Mujeres Libres* magazine, no. 11, January 1938: 23).

This quote affirms the work that *Mujeres Libres* was doing, claiming that it was important and that it was the way to overcome women’s submissive role, while at the same time accepting that there was a ‘woman problem’. Moreover, it is interesting that no scholar or historian has commented on this article, although it indicates a crucial shift in Montseny’s perspective in January of 1938.

One of the possible reasons for Montseny’s contradiction on the “woman question” is that with the start of the Second Republic Montseny preferred to focus on the struggles within the anarchist movement in order to become a recognized leader rather than focusing on her interest in the “woman question” (Nash, 2010: 150). Therefore her statement with an ‘antifeminist’ perspective could have come in a time in which she was very much involved in the anarchist movement; that led her to accept the anarchist normative discourse towards the fact that there was not a specific ‘woman problem’. It is important as well to add that after the Spanish Civil War, when she was in France,

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<sup>17</sup> In the appendix 5, pp. E, there is the article digitalized

Montseny fought for a better status for women and for improving women's situation (Mangini, 1995: 48). Mangini reviewed interviews with Montseny during the Franco regime, and published in 1983. In those interviews Montseny argues that "the optimism during the war[,] years later turned into bitter indictments of the machismo of Spanish politics". Montseny was as well disappointed that she was the only women visible while she mentioned others who contributed massively to the anarchist movement such as Teresa Claramunt, and her mother, Teresa Mañe, among others (Mangini, 1995: 48). She recognized this invisibility as unjust and therefore her positive opinion about the anarchist movement was ruined. Nash claims that with the democratic transition Montseny "caught up rapidly with her interest in feminism and women's rights in her first public meeting in Barcelona" (Nash, 2010:150). Montseny ended up wanting to recognize the role of *Mujeres Libres* and other relevant female anarchists as Teresa Claramunt and Teresa Mañe. This at the same time reinforces the reason for the writing of this thesis whose goal is to give visibility to those women who contributed to the anarchist and feminist movements in Spain and who have been unjustly erased from Spanish history.

To conclude I want to quote different opinions from historians about Montseny's antifeminism/feminism. On the one side we have Nash, who states that Montseny was reluctant to accept anarcho-feminism. In her review, Montseny accepted the normative discourse of anarchism in which there was no specific women's problem but a humanist problem that had to be solved by all, women and men. Nash concluded that Montseny's impact "made difficult the development of an anarcho-feminist thought and practice" (Nash, 2010: 152). Ackelsberg asserts that "Federica Montseny was perhaps the most outspoken Spanish anarchist critic of feminism" (Ackelsberg, 2005: 199). Fredericks, however, claims that Montseny was a "remarkable woman, who is a role model both as a feminist and an anarchist" (Fredericks, 1976: 3). Mangini added to this "her [Montseny] concern and work for the advancement of women is in essence feminist, though...she found the word 'feminism' to be offensive" (Mangini, 1995: 47). Nash claims that it is ironical that 'libertarias' (anarchist women) considered Montseny as feminist and that she was an icon for them, while Montseny did not consider herself a feminist and was reluctant towards anarcho-feminism (Nash, 2010: 153). However, we need to remember here that Montseny wanted to legalize abortion and fight against prostitution, hence she had 'feminist' ideas; at the same time Montseny was not well received by feminists since "her squeamishness vis-à-vis feminism- which she considered 'fascist'-and her idealistic

optimism in thinking that the male-dominated CNT would respond to the needs of women have provoked accusations against her by feminists” in Mangini words (1995: 49).

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have examined three important women in the anarchist movement. I believe that in order to understand an organization better we need to know who is involved in it, who gives support and where their ideas come from. Therefore, in this chapter I have tackled some of those areas to help us better understand of *Mujeres Libres*.

In the first section I discussed the life and work of Teresa Claramunt and Teresa Mañe. The more I learned about those women figures, the more I could understand *Mujeres Libres*’s struggle, and the more I wondered how many women, in this case in the anarchist movement, have been forgotten in history. At the same time it made me comprehend where some of the ideas of *Mujeres Libres* came from; that does not mean that I am diminishing the merit of *Mujeres Libres*’s struggle, but I try to give credit where credit is due. In the case of Teresa Claramunt I was surprised by her strength and her fights for her ideas, even though she was imprisoned several times. Claramunt is a very interesting character and the way she struggled was deeply impressive to me. In the case of Teresa Mañe what I would underline is her intelligence and the fact that she is in the shadow of her husband and daughter. Mañe suffers from an unjust silence about her contributions; even when historians do write about her there are different accounts about the same event.

The second section was dedicated to Federica Montseny, a known character in Spanish anarchist history. Montseny is interesting for her strong personality, a personality that a woman who in the 1930’s took charge of a ministry in Spain would have needed. Initially it was difficult to understand where Federica Montseny was standing in relation to feminism, but I concluded that she had different opinions in the course of her life. The two things that I most liked about her were, first, that when the Franco regime was still in place, she recognized how the anarchist movement was masculinized and second that she claimed it was unfair that women such as Teresa Claramunt and Teresa Mañe had not been visible or given the recognition that they deserved within the movement. In addition, towards the end of the Spanish Civil War Montseny gave credit to the autonomous women’s organization *Mujeres Libres*, stating the important nature of their work.

## CHAPTER 5. *MUJERES LIBRES*: A FEMINIST/ ANARCHO-FEMINIST ORGANIZATION?

This chapter explores the feminist ideology of *Mujeres Libres*, in four sections. In the first section I show how the historians Mary Nash and Martha Ackelsberg claimed that *Mujeres Libres* rejected feminism while they referred to Federica Montseny, who was not part of the organization, therefore I consider that it is not adequate to reference Montseny. In order to argue my point, I seek to analyze the articles written by the founders of *Mujeres Libres*. I will also analyze other articles in the magazine that make an explicit reference to the word feminism, in order to examine if those sources can shed light on the non-identification with feminism of the founders of *Mujeres Libres*. Since there are very few original documents where the word feminist is stated, in the second section I continue this study by examining the statements of some relevant members of *Mujeres Libres* about the use of feminism as an ideology in the organization and if they considered themselves feminist.

The third section is dedicated to exploring whether *Mujeres Libres* can be referred to as a feminist organization. Here I mention the different struggles that *Mujeres Libres* fought for with a feminist character and also with an anarchist influence.

The last section is about the term that unites the two traditions, anarchism and feminism: anarcho-feminism. I will discuss the nuances of this term, through the works of some pioneers of anarcho-feminism and conclude by mentioning that historian Nash uses the concept of anarcho-feminism to define *Mujeres Libres*, while Ackelsberg does not.

### 5.1 *Feminism*

Defining feminism is a complex task since there is not a single or unique definition of the concept as there are many feminisms. Chandra Mohanty, feminist theorist, for instance mentions that “it is difficult to speak of a singular entity called ‘Western feminism’” (Mohanty, 1991: 4), and “western feminist discourse and political practice is neither singular nor homogeneous in its goals, interests or analyses” (Mohanty, 1988: 61). In this sense there cannot be a homogenous or unique understanding of feminism. Despite



this absence of homogeneity, the trait common in all forms of feminisms is the need for a struggle based on gender (Mohanty, 1991: 12). Since there is recognition of women's oppression, historian Karen Offen adds that feminism advocates for the emancipation of women (Offen, 2000: 19). Context and history are very important to the development of feminism; therefore we will see that in some cases the struggles against gender oppression considered other elements of oppression such as race, class, nation or sexuality, based on what we now call an intersectional perspective (Mohanty, 1991: 12).

### 5.1.1 Did *Mujeres Libres* identify with the term feminism?

Mary Nash in *Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War* (1995: 84), and Martha Ackelsberg in *Free Women of Spain* (2005: 118-119) (the first edition of the book was in 1991) argue that *Mujeres Libres* did not identify with feminism but their claims are based on Federica Montseny's statements, instead of statements by *Mujeres Libres*'s founders. I think that it is incorrect to quote Montseny regarding *Mujeres Libres*'s feminism. I am aware of the important role that Montseny had in the anarchist movement, as I have discussed in chapter 4, but if we want to examine the affinity of *Mujeres Libres* to feminism we need to examine how its founders used the concept of feminism. We also need to review articles published by the founders in *Mujeres Libres*'s magazine or other anarchist journals, internal letters or reports of the organization and interviews. In support of my argument, I will show one example from previously mentioned books by Nash and Ackelsberg:

Mary Nash (1995: 84) claims that *Mujeres Libres* was unique for its 'working-class anarcho-feminism'; she affirms:

"*Mujeres Libres* did not identify with the term feminist. In line with other women anarchists, it associated feminism with bourgeois middle-class political feminism and thus rejected it for its social limitations."

It is clear from the above words of Nash that *Mujeres Libres* did not identify with feminism but in fact Nash is basing her argument on the statements of Federica Montseny, who is not introduced before this paragraph by Nash. Here are Nash's words:

"For example, Federica Montseny was most articulate in her rejection of feminism. See Nash. 'Dos intelectuales anarquistas frente al problema de la mujer: Federica Montseny y Lucía Sánchez Saornil.'" (Two anarchist thinkers facing the woman question: Federica Montseny and Lucía Sanchez Saornil) (Nash, 1995: 208)

The article that Nash is referring to, written by herself, shows the different positions towards the ‘woman question’ of the two anarchists, the *Mujeres Libres*’s founder, Lucía Sánchez Saornil and Federica Montseny. Nash instead of quoting Sánchez, mentions Montseny, who had a clear discourse rejecting feminism.

Ackelsberg follows a similar path, while talking about feminism in the organization of *Mujeres Libres*. Instead of quoting any of the founders or the members she refers to Montseny, but mentions her within the text. Montseny claims that feminism belongs to the middle-class bourgeoisie woman:

“Feminism is a word that is applicable only to wealthy women, because poor women have never been feminist, nor would they be permitted to be so!” (Montseny in Ackelsberg, 2005: 119)

Ackelsberg uses Federica Montseny’s statements to talk about feminism in relation to *Mujeres Libres* claiming that “*Mujeres Libres* rejected both feminism (by which they meant treating men as the enemy and striving for equality for women within an existing system of privileges)” (Ackelsberg, 2005: 148); and she references two articles, one from *Mujeres Libres*’s magazine that has nothing to do with feminism and the another that I have no access to, so I cannot use the quote of Ackelsberg about *Mujeres Libres* ‘rejecting’ feminism since in one of the primary sources, there is no mention it.

Therefore I decided to review the seven numbers of *Mujeres Libres*’s magazine plus some other articles that I have access from different books in order to examine more about this ‘rejection of feminism’. I found two articles in which the term feminism/feminist is mentioned, rarely used concept in the *Mujeres Libres*’s magazine. The first one is ‘Las mujeres en los primeros días de lucha’ (Women in the first days of struggle) (*Mujeres Libres* magazine, no.10, July 1937: 3) where *Mujeres Libres* mentions that feminists were taking care of babies and helping in the hospitals, the teachers were peeling potatoes and the dressmakers were taking guns. *Mujeres Libres* puts a label on feminists and associates them with caregivers, thus affirming that feminists can also take care of others. The fact that *Mujeres Libres* labels them does not mean that they rejected feminism; they also refer to teachers and they use to teach, so this article does not give us much information. In a second article, ‘La Federación’ (The Federation), *Mujeres Libres* states that feminists were those who wanted to establish a separation and a competition between the sexes, whereas *Mujeres Libres*’s goal was to claim the need to integrate women in the political and public sphere in Spain (*Mujeres Libres*’s magazine no.13 in Nash, 1975: 98-99). The second article then is a bit more useful since we can see *Mujeres Libres* distancing

themselves from feminists. But that it is not enough to argue that the organization did not identify with feminism.

Mercedes Comaposada in March, 1937, published in the anarchist journal *Tierra y Libertad* (Land and Freedom), the article ‘Origen y actividades de la agrupación Mujeres Libres’ (Beginning and activities from the association *Mujeres Libres*). The article is addressed to their anarchist comrades and claims that *Mujeres Libres* is not connected to a ‘feminist fight’ instead *Mujeres Libres* trains women to work with men more efficiently for the revolution and the war (Comaposada in Nash, 1975: 69-72).

In the case of Lúcia Sánchez Saornil, I could not find any article where she states the word feminist that can help in this analysis, but I do want to mention here that she wrote a series of five articles with the title ‘woman question’ published in the anarchist journal *Solidaridad Obrera* in 1935 (Nash, 1975b: 87) as an answer to two previous articles by Mariano Vazquez, secretary of the CNT, about the role of women in the anarcho-syndicalist movement in the same magazine (Ackelsberg, 2005: 126). The claims of Sánchez have a clear feminist content as I will show in the next section. Probably for that reason historian Mary Nash considers Sánchez as “the major feminist thinker among Spanish women anarchists” (Nash, 1995: 79).

Amparo Poch wrote an article that it is collected in Rodrigo’s book (2002b). There is no date neither reference of when it was published but I guess that would be in one of the three first magazines of *Mujeres Libres*, to which I have no access. The article title is ‘Terrible fracaso’ (Horrible disaster) and in it she uses a metaphor to refer to the feminists in the 1930’s. The article, as I understand it, is about doctors (as Poch) that go to a feminist public meeting where many crazy feminists are but for those feminists there is no cure to what Poch seems to mean that we need to believe in a better future and transform that feminism (feminism since the 1920’s was appropriated by Catholics and bourgeois women (Nash, 1998: 354)) into another feminism with anarchist ideas (Poch in Rodrigo, 2002b: 212-214). So I think Poch does not reject feminism, instead she is mentioning that the existent feminism needs to move from certain debates from the 1930’s towards anarchist but she does not mention the lines that the ‘new’ feminism has to follow.

There is not enough material to argue that the founders did not identify as feminist, probably the articles that shed more light into the discussion are the second article that I mentioned published in the *Mujeres Libres*’s magazine, ‘La Federación’, and the article from Comaposada. Therefore I would continue this analysis in the next section examining the opinion of some relevant members of *Mujeres Libres* about feminism.

### 5.1.2 Five relevant members of *Mujeres Libres* give their opinion in relation to feminism

In this section I want to further explore the opinion towards feminism by relevant members of *Mujeres Libres*, my aim is to understand clearly their position. To do so I have reviewed different interviews conducted with five relevant members of *Mujeres Libres* after the 1980's and mainly in the 2000's where they expressed their opinions towards feminism in the 1930's and after the Franco regime.

Laura Ruiz Eugenio in a recent article mentions how women's discourses of *Mujeres Libres* about feminism have changed over time. In her research, she interviewed Pepita Carpena and Sara Berenguer, relevant members of the *Mujeres Libres*'s branch in Barcelona. Ruiz interviewed them several times from 2000. The two women told her that in the 1930's they did not identify as feminists since feminists were bourgeois and therefore did not understand the problems of the female workers (Ruiz, 2004: 5). But nowadays, Carpena and Berenguer saw how feminism changed to include different women's voices; and Carpena now retrospectively defines *Mujeres Libres* as a feminist organization (Ruiz, 2004: 5). In an article by Carpena titled 'Vivencias' (Livings) published in 1999 in the collection of articles in *Mujeres Libres. Luchadoras Libertarias* (Free Women. Libertarian Fighters), she claims:

"In my deductions and analysis, I considered that together, men and women, we needed to fight for the social emancipation, I could not understand 'feminism', but being sincere I have to say that I had to review my concepts. One thing was the theory and another the practice and sadly, in Spain there were many [patriarchal] prejudices which some syndicalists followed" (Carpena in Liaño, 1999: 74)

This quote shows how stereotypes and prejudices were present in society, what made it difficult for members of *Mujeres Libres* to understand the feminist movement.

Quiñonero, historian, around the 2000's interviewed Concha Liaño, another relevant member in the branch of *Mujeres Libres* in Barcelona, exiled in Venezuela. Liaño said she enjoyed the fact that nowadays women do different types of works. Liaño saw herself as a pioneer of feminism and felt that the conquest of those women was hers as well and this was the biggest satisfaction in her life (Quiñonero, 2005: 289). Although Liaño now is proud to call herself a feminist, in another interview in 2007 in Barcelona, Liaño claimed that in the 1930's the members of *Mujeres Libres* did not identify with feminism:

“We [*Mujeres Libres*], absolutely, did not consider ourselves feminists” (Liaño in Vega, 2010: 195) and “we [*Mujeres Libres*] were not a feminist movement, we were a female liberation movement, nothing else, nothing of feminism” (Liaño in Vega, 2010: 195).

Soledad Estorach who, similar to Liaño, had an important role in the branch of *Mujeres Libres* in Barcelona, was interviewed in 1982 in Paris. Ackelsberg argues that feminism mystified the anarchist women but more than mystify it seem by Estorach’s words that they did not know about the existence of feminism in the 1930’s:

“Most of us had never heard of ‘feminism’ before. I didn’t know that there were groups of women out there in the world organizing for women’s rights. There were one or two women in our group who had heard of feminism- they had been to France. But I didn’t know that such things even existed in the world! We didn’t import this from elsewhere. We hadn’t even realized it existed” (Estorach in Ackelsberg, 2005: 124).

Suceso Portales, another relevant member of *Mujeres Libres*, in an interview with Ackelsberg in 1979, asserted:

"We are not-and we were not then feminists", "We were not fighting against men. We did not want to substitute a feminist hierarchy for a masculine one. It's necessary to work, to struggle, together because if we don't, we'll never have a social revolution. But we needed our own organization to struggle for ourselves" (Portales in Ackelsberg, 2005: 22-23).

Portales claims that they did not consider themselves as feminist and neither they do nowadays, but in the previous quotes I showed how other relevant members, such as Carpena and Liaño, did change their opinion about feminism and now are happy to call themselves feminists. One of the reasons why they do not seem to identify in the 1930’s with feminism is because they saw it attached to a narrow middle-class view of the emancipation of woman. Nash for example explains that socialists and anarchists considered that “Catholic and bourgeois women had appropriated the usages and meanings of feminism as a strategy to recruit women to a religious and class reading of female roles in society” (Nash, 1998: 354) so they did not want to be part of it but at the same time the recognized ‘feminists’ did not consider *Mujeres Libres* as feminist, as Ruiz states (2004: 5).

However, the most important point here is that those relevant members clearly stated that they did not identify with feminism in the 1930’s, and as I have argued in the previous section, founders did neither seem to identify with it. Nonetheless, from the 1970’s scholars defined the organization *Mujeres Libres* as feminist. This situation, though, it is

not unique for *Mujeres Libres*, many other women and organizations in the left movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have been defined as feminist when they did not identify with the term previously. For example, Erik McDuffie in his book *Sojourning for Freedom* (2011), describes the communist black women as ‘black left feminist’ although the subjects did not identify with feminism. McDuffie defines them as feminist since it has analytical sense to do so because the communist black women identified their oppression from three different sources that were intersecting: gender, race and class (McDuffie, 2011: 5), and one of the common characteristic of feminism, as mentioned previously, is that women recognize that they are oppressed by gender.

### **5.1.3 The feminist ideology of *Mujeres Libres* by the statements of the founders and the articles in the *Mujeres Libres*’s magazine in the 1930’s**

Although *Mujeres Libres* did not acknowledge their feminist character, they defended feminist positions, as I will briefly demonstrate here. To do so, I have reviewed articles authored by the founders and articles published in the *Mujeres Libres*’s magazine without signature (understanding that are produced by the editorial board of the magazine). I have selected the most relevant topics to which the founders and the magazine made reference and that at the same time had a clear feminist stand.

One of the key elements of *Mujeres Libres* is the double struggle, presented in the magazine *Mujeres Libres* in an article called ‘La doble lucha de la mujer’ (The double struggle for woman) where they explained the two sides of their fight: the ‘outside freedom’, where men and women aimed for the same goal; and the ‘interior freedom’ only relevant to women since men had been enjoying it from centuries as stated in the article (*Mujeres Libres* magazine, no.7, March, 1937). Nash adds that the double struggle of *Mujeres Libres* had a social and political content close to the interests of the working class in one side; and in the other it had a feminist consciousness that made them claim the emancipation of women due to her oppression (Nash, 1975: 23).

Another important claim of *Mujeres Libres* related to contemporary feminism, is the equal pay. *Mujeres Libres* in the article ‘¿Hasta Cuando?’ (Until when?), recognizes that women did not have the same access to the labor market as men, and when they did their salaries were lower; so they claimed equal pay (*Mujeres Libres*’s magazine, no. 10, July 1937, 23). In Ackelsberg’s words, “*Mujeres Libres* believed that decently paid work,

under reasonable working conditions, was as much a woman's right as a man's, whether in war-time or in peace” (Ackelsberg, 2005:155). The third article of Sánchez with the title the ‘woman question’ is about how the entry of women at the workplace had generated negative reactions by men because they saw women as disloyal competitors; they got paid less money for the same work. To this situation Sánchez argued that if male workers had done something to stop treating women as inferiors the situation would have been very different (Sanchez, 1935: 52-53). Sánchez and *Mujeres Libres* were then pro equal pay, to what Sánchez added the lack of support from men for this struggle, where she underlined the existent sexism in the anarchist movement.

Other feminist claims by *Mujeres Libres* that I have mentioned earlier in the thesis are women’s right to education with the goal to empower women as I have referred to *Mujeres Libres*’s projects of *capacitación* (educative courses) in Chapter 3. *Mujeres Libres* challenged sexism in the anarchist movement since there was only a small group of women in the CNT and their comrades in the movement did not take seriously women, they did not listen to them, as mentioned in Chapter 2. The *Mujeres Libres*’ ideas in regards to the female emancipation are very similar to the ones of present-day feminist, as Nash argues; since *Mujeres Libres*’ project towards freedom consisted in “psychological liberty, the development of female identity, personal autonomy, and self-esteem” (Nash, 1995: 85); that was related to make women conscious.

Moreover, since *Mujeres Libres* was part of the Spanish libertarian movement, although not recognized as the fourth branch, some of their claims were aside of feminist related to the anarchist movement. For example, as scholar Gemie argues, that anarchists were against prostitution (Gemie, 1996: 431-432), and the anarchist Federica Montseny and *Mujeres Libres* stood together against prostitution since they regarded it as a way to exploit sexually women, *Mujeres Libres* created the ‘liberatorios de prostitución’ (places to get out of prostitution) with the aim that prostitutes could learn other professions (as I mentioned in chapter 4). Anarchists wanted to “reclaim jurisdiction over the body from the State”, and aimed a sexual liberation considering the “unfortunate effects of religious sexual repression on girls” (Gemie, 1996: 432). Spanish anarchism then believed in ‘free love’, because “they believed in the freedom to mate without political or religious sanction, but they shunned free sexuality and promiscuity” (Bookchin, 1977: 311). Therefore, Spanish anarchists opposed the marriage ceremony because they considered it as something bourgeois and instead aimed for free union of partners (Bookchin, 1977: 4).

Gemie argues that following this pattern *Mujeres Libres* in the 1930's critiqued the notion of marriage (Gemie, 1996: 432) and understood the need for sexual liberation, acceptance of women's sexual pleasure, and the importance of conscious maternity. In the next paragraphs, I will focus on those ideas from the founders and as expressed in the *Mujeres Libres's* magazines.

- Sexuality

Amparo Poch was a medical doctor and wrote different articles about the sexual life of women. She published in 1932, 'La vida sexual de la mujer' (The sexual life of women) where she claimed:

"the sexual life that Spain offers to women is discouraging", "the female sexuality has not been given any importance, until recently", "married women, with several children, consider sex as something disgusting that they have to accept as a duty", "Not only the right to satisfy the sexual taste- the sexual pleasure is physiological (...) -that has been negated to women" (Poch, 1932: 105, 125-126).

It is clear then from those statements Poch aimed for women to have sexual pleasure. Poch mentioned as well the lack of sexual education at schools:

"In the schools- neither at home- nothing is taught to the girls about their organism, not about their functions, not even the most obvious" and "From our schools we cannot expect sexual education and sexual hygiene" (Poch, 1932: 110-111).

Sánchez, in her fifth article about the 'woman question' addressed sexual freedom but from a different point of view than Poch. Sánchez claimed that the majority of anarchist men misunderstood the concept of sexual freedom as treating women as objects to have sex with (Sánchez, 1935: 58-60), while the goal of sexual freedom was the opportunity to choose a partner without the need of marriage (marriage as institution) as a way to liberate women.

In *Mujeres Libres's* magazine, no.3 (July 1936, in Rodrigo, 2002b: 100), there is an article 'El elogio del amor libre' (Compliment to the free love) (it seems to be written by Poch due to the tone of the article and is collected in the book about her, but there is no author) where free love is claimed and as well there is a section about adultery defined as wonderful and promising.



It is interesting that Ackelsberg has mentioned that “Little of this explicitly ‘pro-sex’ writing was to be found in *Mujeres Libres*” and “While some articles advocated the abolition of the sexual double standard, none dealt explicitly with women's sexuality or sexual liberation. The majority of articles related to sexuality concerned prostitution, analyzing its causes and efforts to eliminate it” (Ackelsberg, 2005: 167-168). Nash suggested that the silence in regards to sexuality could have been due to the fact that the use of contraceptives and voluntary abortion were stigmatized in society (Univ. Zaragoza, 2007: 23). If we look again the date of the three articles mentioned above we will see that are from before the start of the Spanish Civil War; moreover Nash and Ackelsberg are referring to the *Mujeres Libres*'s magazine so from that source it is only the last article that I have commented on that was published in the number 3, a number that is partly available. I have reviewed the other articles after the start of the war in the seven numbers of *Mujeres Libres*'s magazine that I have access to, and I only found one article that based on its title supposedly addressed sexuality, ‘The sexual program and the Revolution’ (*Mujeres Libres*'s magazine, no.9, June 1937: 5). However, the article does not debate women's sexual pleasure, neither monogamy, instead it mentions the struggle against prostitution by *Mujeres Libres*, as stated by Nash, and that their final objective is the social revolution. So I can conclude that the discourses from before and after the start of the Spanish Civil War (and in different journals) in relation to sexuality were completely different.

- Marriage

Marriage in the discourse of the founders is much related to sexuality and also connected to prostitution. Sánchez stated that she did not support marriage (Sánchez, 1935: 58-60), and in the second article of the ‘woman question’, she critiqued society saying that women were raised in order to arouse the macho senses and the purpose of a woman's life was either marriage or prostitution (Sanchez, 1935: 49-50). Poch was against monogamy, claiming that it needed to end, arguing that women by marriage became ‘private property’ of men, and therefore slaves (Preface of Poch in *El matrimonio libre* (Free marriage) by Ribelles (1937) in Rodrigo, 2002b: 92-93)

About marriage there is an article probably written by Poch (since it is collected in the book about Poch by Rodrigo, 2002b: 218- 220) in which the author uses irony to mock marriage; the title it is already pretty creative: “Proyección para la creación de una fábrica

de bodas en serie (Churros auténticos)” (Project of a factory of weddings on series (Authentic mess)). The article argues that people are continuing getting married in the reality in which they live, where men continue to oppress women. Therefore in the article there is mention of a ‘fake’ project to create a place far away where weddings can take place since “it is not convenient that tragedies are being hold in public”, that it will be a library with the book “The common sense commandments” (*Mujeres Libres*’s magazine, no.7, March 1937: 9) and it goes on around those lines. I can conclude then, that the founders and the editorial board of the magazine rejected marriage first due to the inequality in which woman and men were entering in marriage and second, and more related to the anarchist ideology, against the institution of marriage.

- Motherhood

In relation to maternity, Amparo Poch “did not seem to break completely from the identification of women with maternity” (Univ. Zaragoza, 2007: 24). In her article, ‘Más ideas acerca de las mujeres’ (More ideas in relation to women) published in 1928, Poch stated that women will be always housewives and will take care of the children, but she mentioned as well that women could be other things and that men should love them as equals (Poch in *La Voz Aragón*, 1928; in Rodrigo, 2002b: 83). Mercedes Comaposada, affirmed that: “woman is an individual, and she has value and worth even apart from being a mother”, at the same time she mentioned that if women wanted to be mothers they had to be self-conscious which meant being able to choose: “when and how to have children and to know how to raise them” (Comaposada in Ackelsberg, 2005: 162). Sánchez, in her fourth article critiqued how the concept of motherhood took over the meaning of woman (Sanchez, 1935: 54-56). In Nash words, Sánchez meant that “motherhood and maternity could never annul a woman as an individual” (Nash, 1995: 15).

Nash and Ackelsberg evaluate negatively that *Mujeres Libres* did not question the role of the mother as the only caregiver of children. Ackelsberg mentions that “women had been given the primary responsibility for raising children. That responsibility, *Mujeres Libres* argued, required that women educate themselves in order to raise their children properly” (Ackelsberg, 2005: 165). Ackelsberg argues that *Mujeres Libres* did not challenge the identity of woman as a mother, instead *Mujeres Libres* argued for a

better education for mothers. Nash considers this as a failure of *Mujeres Libres* (Nash, 1995: 91), but she adds that not all the founders saw maternity in the same way and that Sánchez did speak out against maternity as the only identity for women (Nash, 1995: 91), as I have showed with the previous quotes.

#### 5.1.4 Anarcho-feminism

The anarchist movement was deeply rooted in the patriarchal culture, as I mentioned. Nash argues that anarcho-feminism emerged as reaction to this. The pioneers of anarcho-feminism are Teresa Claramunt and Teresa Mañe, who since the end of the nineteenth started to speak out about the inequality that existed in the anarchist movement in Spain (Nash, 2010: 142-144). The founders of *Mujeres Libres* continued with Claramunt's and Mañe's discourses but took them to a next level by founding an anarcho-feminist organization “*Mujeres Libres*, the first working-class women's movement [in Spain] to espouse both the revolutionary and the feminist causes on an equal basis” (Nash, 1995: 80).

When mentioning the pioneers of anarcho-feminism I have to name at the international level Emma Goldman<sup>18</sup>, the well-known American-Russian anarchist leader, who is defined as one of the founders of anarcho-feminism (Nash, 1995: 80). In addition it is important to underline that Emma Goldman and the founders of *Mujeres Libres* built a close relationship by exchanging letters and founders/members met at some of Goldman's visits to Spain in the middle of the Spanish Civil War (Wright, n.d: 2; Ackelsberg, 2005: 99, 226). Goldman gave support to *Mujeres Libres* and affirmed that

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<sup>18</sup> In Shulman book *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, she introduces Emma Goldman with this words: “Red Emma Goldman. By the time she was deported to Russia along with 248 others in the shameful Red Scare of 1919, Emma Goldman's name was a household word. In the first decades of this century, the notorious revolutionary was known as the Queen of the Anarchists and the Most Dangerous Woman in the World. During her thirty years as an anarchist agitator, labor champion, free speech activist, and birth control advocate, the notorious Red Emma was feared as a promoter of violence, free love and anarchy. This outspoken enemy of capitalism, the state, and the family was arrested so often that she never spoke in public without taking along a book to read in jail. The radical journal she founded in 1906 and edited until 1918, *Mother Earth*, was once suppressed by the government because of an article she wrote on prostitution. A brilliant and fearless speaker, during her career she was arrested uncounted times and three times imprisoned: once for allegedly inciting to riot at a workers' rally, once for instructing a large audience in the use of contraceptives, and once for conspiring, on the eve of World War I, to obstruct the draft. And even after she was deported, she managed to make a comeback to public consciousness in the thirties through her sensational autobiography, *Living My Life*.” (Shulman, 1998: 3-4)

she would gladly collaborate with them (Goldman 1936 in Liaño, C et. al 1999). Goldman for example sent a letter on October 7, 1938 to Mariano Vazquez, secretary of the CNT, stating that there was a need for the collaboration of CNT with *Mujeres Libres*, arguing that she was very surprised that their organizations (CNT, FAI and FIJJL) had done so little to help *Mujeres Libres* and that this should be changed (Goldman, 1938 in Ackelsberg, 2005: 187).

Nash has recognized *Mujeres Libres* as anarcho-feminist organization (2010: 149), as well as the researcher Iniguez (Iniguez, 2007: 5), but not all scholars who have studied *Mujeres Libres* have come to this conclusion. Ackelsberg for example in her book *Free Women of Spain*“, a ground-breaking study published in 1991 (first edition), does not mention anarcho-feminism, not even in its attempt to analyze the legacy of *Mujeres Libres* in contemporary anarchism” (Iniguez, 2007: 2-3), neither is there a reference to this in the second edition of the book. A possible reason why Ackelsberg did not use this term is the existent tension between anarchism and feminism during the Spanish Civil War, where the ‘anarcho-sexism’ (Gemie, 1996: 417) would be incompatible with the specific female emancipation that *Mujeres Libres* argued for. As Gemie argues, “there was clearly a structural problem in the integration of feminist ideals and concepts into anarchist discourse” (Gemie, 1996: 432)

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained the different views regarding *Mujeres Libres*’s feminism. I argued that the historians Nash and Acklesberg quote Federica Montseny to affirm the non-identification of *Mujeres Libres* with feminism in the 1930’s, what I consider an inadequate analysis. Therefore I suggested reviewing first articles written by the founders in other anarchist journals and the articles published in the *Mujeres Libres*’s magazine where the term feminism/feminist was mentioned. The original documents did not bring much information, therefore in the second section I examined interviews made with five relevant members. The interviews showed clear statements where the members of *Mujeres Libres* did not identify with feminism as Nash and Ackelsberg had argued through the analysis of Federica Montseny; however the non-identification with feminism by *Mujeres Libres* did not influence the fact that scholars since the 1970’s considered *Mujeres Libres* a feminist organization, because of their claims.

I discussed those feminist claims in the third section as a way to argue that *Mujeres Libres* needs to be considered feminist. In this third section, I also mentioned some anarchist arguments that *Mujeres Libres* followed as the claim for sexual liberation that is part of contemporary feminism. The relation between these two traditions leads to the last section, anarcho-feminist. Anarcho-feminist is a concept used by some scholars as Nash, but *Mujeres Libres* is not broadly recognized by this term; for example Ackelsberg did not define them as such. However, although there are tensions between anarchism and feminism, in the Spanish context mostly due to the existant anarcho-sexism in the libertarian movement, the organization *Mujeres Libres* brought together ideas from the two movements, therefore I believe that anarcho-feminist is an adequate term to define *Mujeres Libres*.

## **SECTION 2. Historiography**

## CHAPTER 6. THE IMPORTANCE OF RECOVERING WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

Chapter six contains the historiographical part of the thesis and is divided into three sections. The first section is dedicated to the complex situation in which Spain finds itself in recovering the history of the Spanish Civil War and after the Franquist dictatorship, a history that Franco attempted to erase and transform. I explain how, thanks to Spanish civil society, Spain set institutions to work recovering this history but there was and is a long way to go.

The second section examines the role of women in contemporary history from a broader to a more limited perspective. The research on women's history has advanced very much since the 1970's and I want to examine how women are represented 40 years later in textbooks. I move a step further down to examine if high school history in Catalonia, an autonomous region of Spain, made any references to the most relevant figures that I mentioned in this study. To continue with the analysis I will as well review books that I have previously analyzed about Spanish anarchism and others related to *Mujeres Libres* in search for references of the relevant figures, mentioned in chapter 3 and chapter 4.

The third section discusses two great projects of oral history that aim to recover the historic memory of what happened during the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime. The first project that I discuss is *Dones del 36* (Women of [19]36) whose participants at schools talked about their own experiences during the Spanish Civil War; this project concluded eight years ago due to the age of the members. The second project I debate is *Consell de savis* (Sage board), a group of twelve men and women who also go to schools and to museums to talk about their experiences; this group is still working and I had the honor to meet two of its members.

## **6.1 Towards the recovery of the historical memory after the imposed amnesia during the Franco regime**

The loss of the Spanish Civil War by the Republican side has had a huge influence on written history. The Franco regime aimed for a general “collective historical amnesia concerning the Second Republic and the Civil War” (Nash, 1995: 2-3). The Spanish history until the end of the Franquist dictatorship (1975) was an ‘unexplored desert’ (Vicente, 2013: 14-15).

The historian Graham explains that the Franquist regime tried to manipulate what occurred during the war and instead of calling it by what it was, a Civil War, they used to refer to it as ‘crusade’ or ‘war of national liberation’. In 1963, Spain started to attract tourists, and while they were celebrating the ‘Twenty-five Years of Peace’ they were still executing people for ‘war crimes’, so in fact Graham claims that what they were celebrating was victory and not peace (Graham, 2005: 138). After the death of Franco (1975) the transition towards democracy was built on forgetting the past. In October 1977 the Amnesty Law, pushed by the deputies in the Spanish Parliament, was passed and “provided amnesty for acts committed by functionaries and agents of public order against the rights of others... for human rights violations committed prior to 15 December 1976” (ARMH, 2012). This Amnesty law has as well been referred to as ‘pact of silence’. In the 1970’s and early 1980’s, there was still a self-censoring in Spain that restricted what could be said publicly about the war (Graham, 2005: 139-140). From the late 1980’s many historical works about the Civil War have been published. They reconstructed the Franquist repression province by province; by the beginning of 2000 sixty percent of Spain’s provinces, as Graham argues, had been examined in order to recover material but much of the material that proved evidence of the repression by the Franco regime had been destroyed by the Franquists in the early 1970’s (Graham, 2005: 140-141). Some decades later, in the 2000’s emerged pressure from the civil society to recover the Republican memory, by the *Asociación por la recuperación de la memoria histórica* (Association for the Recuperation of Historical Memory) (ARMH). This organization asked for the exhumation from common graves to recover the remains of many people assassinated by Franco’s forces. Graham in 2005 claimed that the estimated number of people that have not yet been found is around 30,000 people (Graham, 2005: 141).



The *Asociación por la recuperación de la memoria histórica* was the one who pushed to pass the ‘Ley de Memoria Histórica’ (Law of Historical Memory) approved on October 31, 2007. The law established measures to support people who suffered from persecution or violence during the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime. It is not the first law on this subject; there have been others since the beginning of democracy (1975), but this one is more complete (Law 57/2007).

In November 2007 the Generalitat de Catalunya (Autonomous government in Catalonia) officially published the law 13/2007 that approved the ‘Memorial Democràtic’ (Democratic Memorial), a public institution of the Generalitat of Catalonia that aims to recover, commemorate and increase the democratic memory of the period between 1931 and 1980 (Law 13/2007). The ‘Memorial Democràtic’ has since been doing very necessary work; it has produced many expositions, books and educative material for schools that promote the recovery of the history. The ‘Memorial Democràtic’ has also been promoting the recovery of the role of women through the Spanish Civil War history with specific publications dedicated to this topic.

By the end of 2013 the *UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances* published a report which critiqued the Amnesty law or ‘pact of silence’ for the crimes during the Franco regime. The *UN Working Group* claimed that the Spanish government should search without restrictions for all the people who have disappeared and also mentioned that there is a need for a commission that would determinate the truth about the human rights violations in the past (CAN, 2013). At the end of July 2014, the *UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances* had to ask for the attention of the Spanish government one more time, but on this occasion the *UN Working Group* gave the government 90 days to explain how they would help the victims of the Franco regime. The *UN Working Group* urged “the state to assume its responsibility and draft a comprehensive policy to bring truth and justice to the victims”. The *UN Working Group*’s goal is that the government of Spain helps to locate all the people who disappeared during the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime, and can find out what happened to them (Junquera, 2014).

## **6.2 The lack of recognition of women in Spanish history: examining textbooks, books and articles**

Karen Offen, historian, in *European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History* (2000), argues that “The growth of women’s history in national contexts and the emergence of feminist scholarship since the 1970’s have done much...to enrich our knowledge of women’s history and the history of feminism at the national level.” She refers to the knowledge that previously did not exist and mentions that in the early 1970’s feminists in Europe started from ‘Year Zero’, ‘overcoming amnesia’ (Offen, 2000: 3-4). It is clear from Offen’s statements that since the 1970’s in Europe a movement started in order to recover women’s history, which has produced a lot of published literature in a few decades. The case of Spain is exceptional due to the situation of the Franco regime as I explained previously, but in this section I want to examine if women’s history nowadays, 2014, is integrated with a gender perspective in every subject field<sup>19</sup> in Spain.

To examine if women’s role is part of the narrative in different subject fields, I will review an article based on research by López-Navajas from the University of Valencia, ‘Análisis de la ausencia de las mujeres en los manuales de la ESO: una genealogía de conocimiento ocultada’ (Analysis of the absence of women in the ESO textbooks: a hidden genealogy of knowledge) that analyzes the absence of women in Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO) textbooks in Spain. This is not the first study of this type in Spain, there have been other scholars from the 1980’s who have researched sexism in the school textbooks (López-Navajas, 2014: 1-5). The aim of the project is to measure the presence and the importance that women have in compulsory education; to do so they analyzed 115 manuals from three different publishing houses that cover all the subjects of the four years of Compulsory Secondary Education. They built a database in which they distinguished the people mentioned in the textbooks by gender as well as the number of times that a person is cited. They established that women have a very poor presence, they only appear with a 12,8% in the textbooks, which reveals “the lack of social consideration of women and their nearly complete exclusion from the worldview transmitted by compulsory education” (López-Navajas, 2014: 3-12).

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<sup>19</sup> “The history of feminism in Europe encompasses virtually every ‘field’ of historical inquiry- political, intellectual, social, economic, cultural, religious, and so forth” (Offen, 2000: 2)

Following this project, I have done a small research about the representation of women in the history of the Second Republic and the Spanish Civil War. I collected the three most frequently used textbooks in history in Catalonia at the High School level; concretely, I have examined the chapters about the Second Republic and the Spanish Civil War, and I also interviewed two history teachers at High School in May 2014. Although I would need much space to discuss the material here, I just want to give the most relevant tendencies. In the three textbooks,<sup>20</sup> in the chapter about the Spanish Civil War there are only two women cited: Federica Montseny and Dolores Ibarruri, leader of the communist party. The reference is made in a separate box or besides a picture of each of them, and there is no mention of *Mujeres Libres*. If the achievement of women's right to vote (1933) and the work done in the rear front during the Spanish Civil War (mostly by women) are mentioned, these things are placed in a separate page at the end of the chapter, so they are not integrated and often teachers and students do not pay attention to them as Laura Vicente, a historian high school teacher, affirmed in an interview I conducted with her in May 2014. Therefore it is important that we integrate the role of women and men equally in the textbooks to build an equal society since "Knowledge- as everyone knows- can often be empowering; partial knowledge, or lack of knowledge, can disempower" (Offen, 2000: 3).

I also examined whether *Mujeres Libres* is mentioned in some of the books about Spanish anarchism that were discussed in Chapter 2. In the book by the American anarchist and theorist Murray Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists: The heroic years 1868-1936*, there is no mention of *Mujeres Libres*. The book was published in 1977 when there was literature about *Mujeres Libres* already available.<sup>21</sup> I have as well reviewed the 2005 book *Anarchism, the republic and civil war in Spain: 1931-1939* by the historian Julian Casanova, Spanish historian. The author mentions *Mujeres Libres* and the non-recognition by the CNT in only one page (2005: 137) out of the 242. In the book *Tierra y Libertad*, edited by Casanova in 2010, there is a chapter: '20 key figures in the history

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<sup>20</sup> I examined three textbooks, the first: García,M, Gatell,C, Palafox,G and Risques,M (2012) *Història* (History). Vicens Vives Batxillerat. The second: Casassas,J ,Ghanime,A and Santacana,C (2012) *Història 2 Batxillerat* (History 2 High School). Grup Promotor Santillana. And the third: *Història 2nd Batxillerat* (History 2nd High School) (2009) Editorial Edebé.

<sup>21</sup> Kaplan, T (1971) 'Spanish Anarchism and Women's Liberation'. *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol.6, pp.101-110; and Nash, M (1975) *Mujeres Libres: España 1936-1939* (*Mujeres Libres: Spain 1936-1939*). Barcelona, Tusquets.

of the Spanish anarchism', where there is a section on only two women: Teresa Claramunt (227-230) and Federica Montseny (281-283). Juan Montseny (230-233) has also a section where Mañe is mentioned. Another book that I examined is the *Historia del anarquismo en España* (Anarchist history in Spain) by the Spanish historian Laura Vicente, published in 2013. This book sets a precedent of how to integrate women in the literature of Spanish Anarchism, since Vicente mentions *Mujeres Libres*, Teresa Claramunt and Teresa Mañe, across the book. So, little by little from the 2000's we can see that the historiography about the anarchism in Spain is trying to integrate the gender dimension into the libertarian movement, it is a good beginning but there is still a long way to go.

Federica Montseny, the first Spanish female minister in 1936, is the most recognized female anarchist in the Spanish anarchist movement (Nash, 1998: 354). However, Teresa Claramunt, Teresa Mañe, and the founders/relevant members of *Mujeres Libres* are rarely referred to. The case of Teresa Mañe is more pronounced than Teresa Claramunt, with only one published book and few non-academic articles dedicated to her, in the Spanish language. Moreover in the books published by the historians, Mary Nash (1995) and Martha Ackelsberg (2005), Mañe is nearly absent (referenced only twice); while Claramunt does not get much more attention either. In an article published by Nash in 2010<sup>22</sup>, Claramunt and Mañe have gained recognition in comparison to previous published literature but this representation is not enough if we consider their intellectual contribution to the anarchist movement.

There is even little published about the founders of *Mujeres Libres*, Lucía Sanchez Saornil, Mercedes Comaposada and Amparo Poch. While Poch has two books dedicated to her work, there is one published article about Sánchez and there is nothing specifically published (a book or an article) about Comaposada. The lack of the *Mujeres Libres*'s founders' voices, makes them more invisible.

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<sup>22</sup> Nash, M (2010) 'Libertarias y anarcofeminismo' (Libertarians and anarcho-feminism) in Casanova, J (ed.) *Tierra y Libertad*. Barcelona, Crítica.

### **6.3 Contemporary oral projects in Catalonia that aim to recover the role of women during the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime**

#### **6.3.1 *Dones del 36* (The Women of [19]36): An oral history and educational project**

In 1997, a group of women called *Dones del 36*<sup>23</sup> presented their candidature for the *Maria Aurèlia Capmany* awards from the Barcelona City Hall, specific to women. They were awarded with the prize and then they constituted the organization *Dones del 36* (Ventura in Associació ‘Dones del 36’, 2006: 15). *Dones del 36* was founded by eight women, a few months later seven more women joined them, and they all shared different political backgrounds (anarchist, communist and republicans).<sup>24</sup> The youngest, Josefina Piquet, called ‘la nena del 36’ (the girl from [19]36) since she had been born in 1936, became the secretary of the organization. *Dones del 36* came together to create a project of oral history to explain their own lived experiences during the Spanish Civil War, the exile and/or the Franco regime (*Dones del 36*, 2006), a testimony that had been silenced for 40 years in the textbooks (Salvo in Associació ‘Dones del 36’, 2006: 21).

*Dones del 36* spoke in all the four provinces of Catalonia, travelled to other cities in Spain and France; they woke up as early as 6am to go to a school and spent nights out of home when required, they all were around 80 years old but they did this because they believed in the importance of the project. They visited 179 centers of Compulsory Secondary Education and High Schools, reaching 11.050 students; they gave speeches in 35 universities with 2.700 attendees; they also carried out public events in cultural centers, associations, city halls, etc. and engaged in 142 roundtable discussions and lectures with

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<sup>23</sup> In the appendix 6, pp. F, there are two pictures taken with some members of *Dones del 36*.

<sup>24</sup> The eight founders of ‘Dones del 36’ were: Victoria Carrasco Peñalver (born in Madrid in 1917-2003, Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas of Madrid<sup>24</sup>), Carme Casas Godessart (born in Huesca in 1921-2013, Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas of Lleida), Rosa Cremón Parra (born in Madrid in 1914-2005, Partido Comunista Francés, activist in Partido Comunista de Catalunya), Trinidad Gallego Prieto (born in Madrid in 1913, Partido Comunista), Enriqueta Gallinat i Román (born in Barcelona, 1909-2006, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya), concha Pérez Collado (born in Barcelona in 1915, CNT), Manola Rodríguez Lázaro (born in Bilbao in 1917, Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas of Madrid), Maria Salvo Iborra (born in Sabadell in 1920, Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas of Barcelona).

Some months later other women joined the association doing the same tasks, they were: Emèrita Arbonès Sarrias (born in Barcelona in 1929, Federació Obrera d’Unitat Sindical, FOUS, and POUM), Laia Berenguer Puget (born in Sant Feliu de Codines 1920, Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas of Sant Feliu de Codines), Josefina Piquet Ibáñez (born in Barcelona in 1934-2013), Victòria Santamaria Palacios (born in Barcelona 1921) and Isabel Vicente García (born in Albacete in 1927-2010, Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas of Barcelona) (*Dones del 36*, 2006: 28-55)

8.650 participants. They participated in sixteen TV shows and sixteen TV documentaries as well (Associació ‘Dones del 36’, 2006: 81-125). Moreover, all the members of *Dones del 36* declared themselves feminists (Cuadrada in Dones del 36, 2006: 105) and got involved in demonstrations and campaigns in favor of women, justice and peace (Associació ‘Dones del 36’, 2006: 121).

In 2006, due to the age of the members, they concluded their project, but since then they received many tributes for the work done by *Dones del 36*. They have been honored with medals, and their contribution continues to be alive through books, interviews, documentaries and expositions (Associació ‘Dones del 36’, 2006: 182-184).

To conclude this section I want to quote a statement from *Dones del 36* that describes their project very well:

*“Més enllà del passat manipulat i silenciats, (Farther than the manipulated and silenced past,)*

*més enllà de les vides ignorades, (farther from lives which have been ignored,)*

*més enllà del dolor, (farther from the pain,)*

*les dones trenquen el silenci... i parlem.” (women break the silence...to speak.)*

(Associació ‘Dones del 36’, 2006: 24)

### **6.3.2 Consell dels savis del Museu d’Història de Catalunya (The board of sages from the Museum of Catalan History): A project of oral history**

*Consell dels savis* (The board of sages) is similar to the oral history project of *Dones del 36*, but this one is organized by the Museum of History of Catalonia. The information about the *Consell dels savis* is limited, even on the website of the museum; therefore in May, 2014 I interviewed, by email, Francesc Cardona, the coordinator of this project since 2002. I also interviewed two female members of *Consell dels savis*: Roser Rosers and Roser Font; but we talked more about their hard life experiences during the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime than about the project and therefore I have not included their interviews here.

The group of *Consell dels savis* was formed in 1999 with seven members by Lluís Campins i Punter, initiator of the project. In 2002, Francesc Cardona became the coordinator of the project, and through the years seven more people became part of the team, among them Josefina Piquet, member of *Dones del 36* (she joined after the

dissolution of *Dones del 36*). Nowadays the group includes twelve men and women born between 1922 and 1943 (Cardona, 2014).

*Consell dels savis*<sup>25</sup> is open to invitations from schools, institutes and other institutions, the members explain their living experiences and relate to the historical context of the Spanish Civil War or/and Franco regime, through their own experience. Another activity that the *Consell dels savis* does is ‘Jo hi era!’ (I was there!); this activity takes place in the Museum of History of Catalonia every first and third Saturday of month, when there are two members of the group available to answer questions by the visitors about their lived experiences. The participation of *Consell dels savis* in schools and institutes has increased through the years, for example during the first years of the project, *Consell dels savis* visited two schools in average per year, while during the last academic years, 2011-2012 and 2012- 2013, they have been in around twelve to sixteen centers every year. Their impact therefore it is not as big as that of *Dones del 36*, but it is important to recognize their work as well.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have touched open three topics; first the necessity of recovering the history of the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime; the fact that a working group from the UN had to call for the attention of the Spanish government in order to still find people who are missing since the 1930’s is a clear example of how far Spain is from recognizing the real history of the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime, and even more from recognizing the role of women within them.

Second, I discussed the necessity of creating published literature that integrates the women in the Spanish history. I gave the example of textbooks in which the absence of female role models perpetuates the inequality of women, and moreover the society loses part of the history, therefore it is very important to work towards the integration of women figures in different disciplines.

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<sup>25</sup> In the appendix 7, pp. G, there is one picture of some of the members of *Consell dels Savis* in May 2010 in one of the schools they attended.

Third, I discussed good practices to recover the historical memoir in Catalonia, mentioning two oral history projects. I consider the project of *Dones del 36* to be very important because it gives knowledge of a reality that is absent in history books and focuses on women as active agents giving them voice to explain their life experiences. Another reason why I like *Dones del 36* and *Consell dels savis* is that they started an intergenerational debate with the younger generations. To me any project that writes, describes, talks about women's history in the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime is essential since it helps to recover women's past and make visible those women who were there as well.



## CONCLUSION

This thesis explores the organization *Mujeres Libres* founded during the Spanish Civil War, and aims to underline and recognize the work done by the founders and the relevant members. To do so, I asked a number of questions: whether *Mujeres Libres* was unique in their ideas or there had been other women preceding them; if we can consider *Mujeres Libres* a feminist organization; and if they are (sufficiently) visible in the Spanish historiography, particularly that about the Spanish Civil War, and if not, why not. I have claimed that this thesis goes further than only reviewing what other scholars have said and the primary sources of *Mujeres Libres*. I have used my critical thinking to examine original documentation and published literature and to draw my own conclusion. Here, I will briefly mention the most relevant findings and conclusions that I have reached through the thesis.

Chapter 2 describes the context in which *Mujeres Libres* emerged, the Second Republic (1931- 1939) and the anarchist movement; it is important to mention that with the start of the Second Republic there were several laws passed regarding women's rights towards equality, but the society was rooted in a patriarchy structure which made those laws irrelevant in practice. This situation influenced the anarchist movement that has been considered as 'anarcho-sexist' and this fact favored the birth of *Mujeres Libres*.

In chapter 3 I have provided information about *Mujeres Libres* and commented on how other scholars and the same founders/ relevant members described the role and contribution of *Mujeres Libres*. First I have described briefly the lives of the founders a part of their work at the organization *Mujeres Libres* something that is rarely done by scholars. I summarized the original document of the first conference of *Mujeres Libres* in Valence, August, 1937, only available in the women's library in Madrid, which has not received much attention from other scholars. The minutes shows how the founders and the relevant members had clear ideas, were very organized and thought about every detail of their work. This fact is as well expressed by the way *Mujeres Libres* decided to found an autonomous organization separate from CNT, and when CNT did not recognize them as the fourth branch of the libertarian movement, *Mujeres Libres* continued with their struggle, without changing their aims.

In chapter 3 I also underlined the shift of Federica Montseny when she recognized the autonomous organization *Mujeres Libres* (*Mujeres Libres*'s magazine, no. 11, January 1938: 23). Scholars have not commented on that before but it is difficult to understand why they did not, probably because they did not read the article since it is a small piece. However the important point is that Montseny reconsidered the work done by *Mujeres Libres* while the anarchist movement did not want to recognize *Mujeres Libres* as the fourth branch of the libertarian movement as is stated in the report of February 1939. This recognition by Montseny is key since she argues for the need of this organization. Furthermore the fact that Montseny accepted it at the beginning of 1938 reaffirms her changing of opinion towards feminism, which I examined at the end of chapter 4.

In chapter 4, I have explored the position of Teresa Claramunt and Teresa Mañé in Spanish historiography, with the simplest evidence which is the lack of published literature about those figures in the Spanish language, and the nonexistent literature in English. I examined as well how little they are mentioned by scholars and even when mentioned how often there is a lack of recognition in the words of scholars towards the two figures. I have as well established relations in between the two Teresas and *Mujeres Libres*, which enable me to claim the Teresas as the predecessors of the founders of *Mujeres Libres*. I underlined how Teresa Claramunt tried to encourage the founding of a women's organization in the anarchist movement in the 1900's but without success. I have also dedicated a section to Federica Montseny who has been the most recognized female figure in the anarchist movement, including a subsection about Montseny's antifeminism/feminism.

Chapter 5 explores the feminism of *Mujeres Libres* in the 1930's, sometimes called anarcho-feminism. In this chapter I readdress the analysis of *Mujeres Libres*'s feminism often based on arguments of Federica Montseny, instead of those of the founders and relevant members of *Mujeres Libres* and the *Mujeres Libres* magazine. I have shown the examples of Nash mentioning that "Mujeres Libres did not identify with feminism", and Ackelsberg stating that the reason *Mujeres Libres* were not feminists was because "poor women have never been feminist", but in fact the two historians based themselves on Montseny's arguments. Therefore I have moved from that and I presented arguments by the founders in the 1930's in published articles and from relevant members that had been interviewed since the 1980's about the feminism of *Mujeres Libres*, to conclude that they did not identify with feminism. However since the 1970's *Mujeres*

*Libres* has been considered as a feminist organization, and I have presented their claims as a way to confirm that they have to be contextualized within the feminist movement and that some of their claims were feminist as well as anarchist. To conclude chapter 5, I have stated that *Mujeres Libres* has been defined by some scholars, not all, as anarcho-feminist since it united the traditions of feminism and anarchism.

In chapter 6, I showed how the historical context in Spain with the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime has influenced the recovery of Spanish history; since many documents were destroyed from the Franquist and there are still many publications missing. With the start of the democracy, the Amnesty Law was passed in 1977, which made judging the Franquists for their crimes impossible, and this law is still current. This context has a clear impact on the invisibility of *Mujeres Libres* since it was on the side of those who lost the war, the Republicans. I have brought evidence of this invisibility by the lack of representation of women in textbooks; specifically I have done research about history textbooks of High School in Catalonia from three different publishing houses. The result was the expected very little recognition towards the role of women during the Second Republic, where only Federica Montseny is mentioned and the lives of women are set apart at the end of the chapter, as a section not compulsory to read. I have also reviewed published literature on the anarchist movement that, by the 2000's, has started to integrate the role of women in their discourses but still far away from a proper representation.

In chapter 6, I have presented two oral history projects, *Dones del 36* and *Consell dels savis del Museu d'Història de Catalunya* that started by the end of the 1990's in the autonomous region of Catalonia, as good practices to recover the voice of women mainly but also some men who lived through the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime. The published literature on *Dones del 36* is in Catalan language while for the *Consell dels savis* there is no publication dedicated to them, so with these two sections I want to recognize their important work, so that other people can know about it.

Another of my contributions to the area of study, has been to demonstrate that there are relevant contradictions important in the literature published in two different ways. The first are the different interpretations of the same event by different scholars. For example in the case of Teresa Mañé one scholar says that in 1898 Mañé returned to Madrid from her exile in London illegally (Micó, 2001: 7), while the other historian states

that Mañe came back with the pardon of the government (Vicente, 2013:91-92). The second is that scholars are sometimes arguing something different from what we can observe in the primary sources. For example, in the case of the *milicianas* (militia women) Ackelsberg mentions that the articles published in the *Mujeres Libres* magazine have an apologetic tone (Ackelsberg, 2005: 95-97), while in the cover of the *Mujeres Libres*'s magazine (no.7, March 1937: 1) there is an image of women with guns and the slogan saying: "With work and weapons, women will defend the freedom of the people." Those contradictions can confuse a reader who has read more than one book on the topic and/or who has access to the original sources. In this sense, I have mentioned the relevant contradictions in this thesis, in order to provide the reader with an exhaustive research where I integrate the perspective by the scholars and my own perspective based on the different analyses of those and including my examination of the original documentations.

To conclude I want to recognize one more time the work done by founders and members of *Mujeres Libres*. I found out about the organization when I was preparing an essay for one of my courses and from that point I got somehow attached to them. Their articles and internal reports allowed me to read their voices and every time I became more engaged with their struggles, their claims and their stories. I was very sad to not be able to interview any of them, since at the time I started my research either they had already passed away or they were ill. However, this made me realize how important it is to continue to 'listen' to and read their voices; because if we do so we will be acknowledging their fights. Moreover, we will make them more visible, recognizing the position that they deserve to have in the Spanish historiography; a position that the founders and members of *Mujeres Libres* do not occupy since they are on the side that lost the Spanish Civil War. I close this thesis, hoping that with the points that I have addressed through the thesis I have managed to attract the attention of the reader to the organization *Mujeres Libres*, and its women, and also to Teresa Claramunt, Teresa Mañe and Federica Montseny; because I have learned so much from them and my biggest aim with this thesis is that other people get to know them as well.

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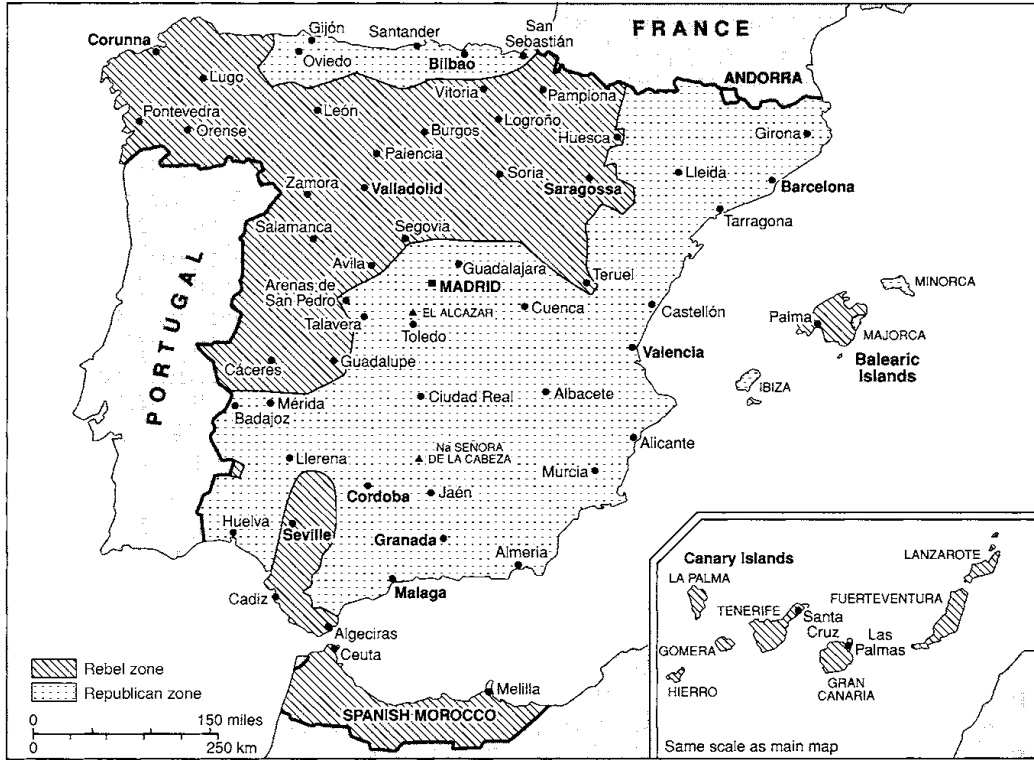
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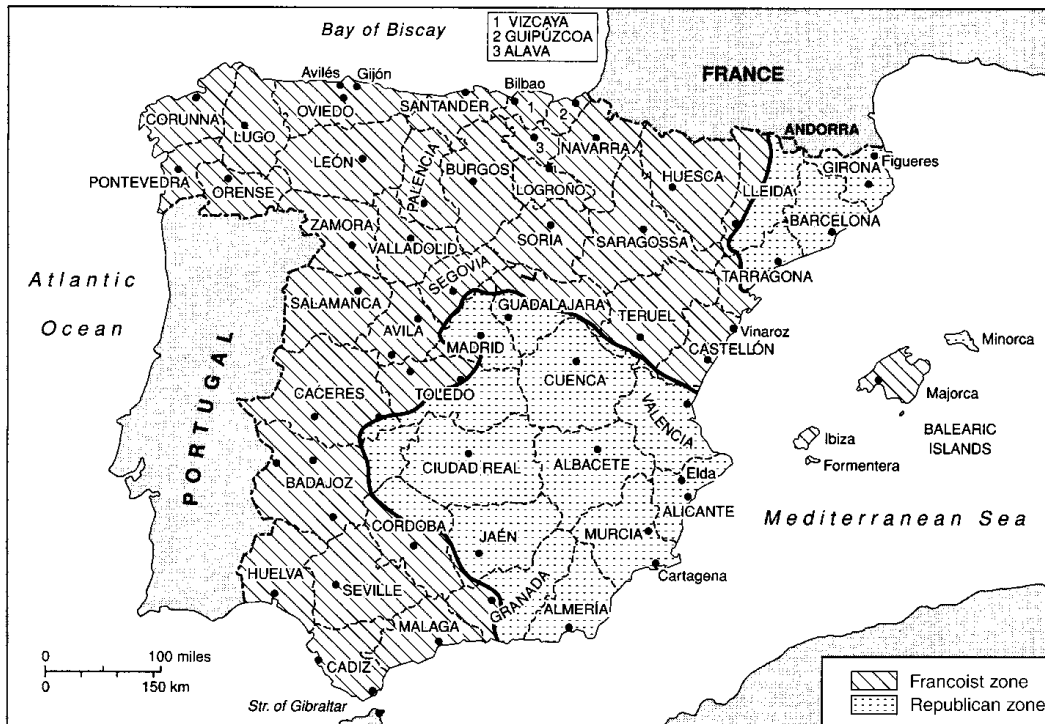
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## APPENDICES

- Two maps that show the advancement of the fascist troops in the Republic.



The division of Spain, 22 July 1936 (Graham, 2005: 20)



The division of Spanish territory, July 1938 (Graham, 2005: 97)

2. “Poster by the artist Arteché shows a militia woman dressed in a blue mono (overalls), a gun in her uplifted hand with a revolutionary militians marching with their flags in the background. The *miliciana* in the poster persuasively asserts: ”The militia need you” (Nash, 1995: 51).



Poster found in a blog on internet

3. The cover of the *Mujeres Libres*'s magazine (no.7, March 1937: 1). The message on the cover says "Con el trabajo y las armas, defenderemos las mujeres la libertad del pueblo" (With work and weapons, women will defend the freedom of the people) and we can see women with guns in what seems a trench.



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4. Article published together with pictures of women working that shows the tasks done by women in the first days of the Spanish Revolution (no. 10, July 1937: 3).

## LAS MUJERES EN LOS PRIMEROS DIAS DE LUCHA

Las maestras pelaban patatas, las enfermeras fregaban los suelos, las chicas del servicio doméstico acudían en avalancha a las clases preparatorias que se iban improvisando, las feministas cien por cien cuidaban niños y atendían hospitales, las modistas cogían el fusil; muchas corrían a ofrecerse, con máquina y todo, para coser monos; otras hacían acopio de bocadillos y refrescos y establecían *el puesto* en las barriadas para obsequiar a los pelotones de milicianos que salían en camiones a reconquistar pueblos.

Total: un revoltijo de generosidades simpático y magnífico.

Esta fiebre de actividades tenía su honda explicación. Había sonado una palabra: ¡Revolución! ¡Revolución! ¡Revolución! Y la chica del servicio doméstico corría a liberarse de su ignorancia, y la modista dejaba la tiranía de la aguja para realizar sus sueños de aventuras... Pero todas fueron útiles. Todas aportaron trabajo y entusiasmo. Y este brimir desbordamiento se fué canalizando luego en una fructífera aplicación de actitudes y de vocaciones que há de transformarse integralmente, en un sentido de superación, la vida de las mujeres españolas.

No solamente el hombre sintió latir en lo más profundo de su personalidad de obrero, las ansias de vengar, con las armas, los largos años de esclavitud moral y material en que el capital y el clero, las dos grandes plagas de la Humanidad, lo tenían sumido. También la mujer, dejando a un lado la ancestral apatía que las luchas de clase y fenómenos sociales, le habían causado siempre, sintió el aletear de la ilusión revolucionaria, en su alma eterna de «relegada», de ser cubierto por el eterno polvo del olvido.

No vaciló, y decidida se lanzó a la calle, a luchar al lado del obrero, compañero o no. Y ofreció su vida joven, plétórica de ilusiones juveniles, en las primeras jornadas de la lucha heroica, en que cada hombre era un héroe y cada mujer equivalía a un hombre.

Pero no todo consiste en el valor, en esta lucha larga y continua de dos clases

que se odian a muerte. La mujer, comprendiéndolo así, recapacité y comprendió que las escaramuzas callejeras distan mucho de parecerse a la lucha metódica, regular y desesperante de la guerra de trincheras. Comprendiéndolo así y reconociendo su propio valor, como mujer, prefirió cambiar el fusil por la máquina industrial y la energía guerrera por la dulzura de su alma de MUJER. No deshonró el frente, la verdadera mujer. Por el contrario, ella ha sabido imprimir al grosero ambiente de guerra, la delicada suavidad

de su psicología femenina. Tiene cuidados materiales con los que fatigados de las jornadas de lucha regresan al sitio donde se hallan alojados, y procura mantener vivo el optimismo en los trances difíciles en que el ánimo, excesivamente impresionado, empieza a decaer. No es un látigo para la sociedad, la mujer de hoy, no. En el frente luchan unas, y velan otras por los que combaten. En la retaguardia, trabajan incesantemente e incrementan la cultura de que hasta ahora carecía el movimiento femenino. La mujer se está rescatando ella misma.



5. Message of Federica Montseny recognizing the task of *Mujeres Libres* in a public meeting as stated in the following article, published in the *Mujeres Libres*'s magazine (no.11, January 1938: 23)

## Un mitin de "Mujeres Libres" en Valencia

**Federica Montseny**

Ha dicho:

«La misión de la mujer es crear los hijos y el Mundo para los hijos. Cuando las mujeres traemos al Mundo nuevas criaturas, adquirimos el deber de reorganizar el ambiente social en que ellos han de vivir, para que no lleguen nunca a maldecir la hora de su nacimiento.


«La tendencia de las organizaciones anarquistas ha sido, hasta ahora, la de no separar el movimiento femenino del resto del proletariado; pero hay que rectificar esta tendencia, porque, dado el atraso de la mujer proletaria en España, hace falta una organización específica para capacitarla y llevarla al lado de los demás luchadores del proletariado. A la Federación "Mujeres Libres" le toca cumplir una gran labor revolucionaria.»

**Lucía Sánchez Saornil**

«Nuestra guerra no es una guerra producida entre Potencias capitalistas con miras a especulaciones económicas en las que el hombre no es más que un juguete de esos intereses. La guerra es expresión de la muerte, pero nuestra guerra es una guerra entre la vida y la muerte, y, por ser única en su contenido, ha de tener consecuencias que no tuvo ninguna otra. El 19 de julio, la mujer vió el ejemplo magnífico de los milicianos que, con cara de júbilo, marchaban a desafiar la muerte, y se preguntó: ¿Qué pasa para que los hombres vayan contentos a la guerra?... La mujer quiso ser útil. ¿Cómo? ¿Sola, aislada? No: era preciso buscarse a sí misma, encontrarse y agruparse. Así nació y así creció nuestra organización "Mujeres Libres".»

**María Giménez**

«Hay que ayudar resueltamente a la mujer en su deseo y en su necesidad de preparación y de liberación total. La mujer no carece de capacidad inicial, no tiene la inferioridad psíquica que se le ha atribuido. Lo demuestra una brillante serie de mujeres que han sobresalido con categoría histórica en los diversos aspectos de la actividad espiritual; mujeres de todas las razas, entre las cuales es interesantísimo el movimiento femenino de China.»



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6. Pictures of *Dones del 36* (The Women of [19]36)



Credits to the Servei d'informació i atenció a les dones de Gavà (SIAD) (Information and assistance service for women from Gavà (small city close to Barcelona) )



Credits to the Catalan feminist organization, Ca La Dona (Woman's House), who took this picture in the meeting of Xarxa Feminista de Catalunya in 2006 where the organization *Dones del 36* was commemorated.

7. Picture of some of the members of *Consell dels savis del Museu d'Història de Catalunya*, May 2010. From left to right: José Maria Hervás (director of the school), Maria Rosa Arnalot, Elena Egea, Pere Basté, Josefina Piquet, Roser Font and Francesc Cardona (coordinator of the project).



Credits to the picture: IES Miquel Martí i Pol (school) from Cornellà de Llobregat.