

**FEDERICA MONTSENY AND MUJERES LIBRES: TWO  
APPROACHES TO  
WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION BASED IN SPANISH  
ANARCHISM**

by

Gretchen A. Bowder

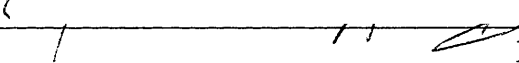
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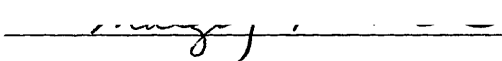
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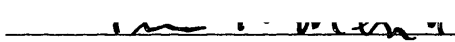
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Signature of Author  \_\_\_\_\_  
Department of Humanities  
June 1, 1987

Certified by  \_\_\_\_\_  
Professor Margery Resnick  
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by  \_\_\_\_\_  
Professor Travis R. Merritt  
Director, Humanities Major Programs

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Submitted to the Department of Humanities on June 1, 1987 in  
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**Abstract**

From 1936 to 1939 Spain experienced what was probably the bloodiest war in its history - the Spanish Civil War. The leftist political factions that had emerged during the previous decades joined together to combat the fascists. The anarchists were one such group. In theory their ideology demanded the equality of all individuals, but women in the movement found themselves in the same inferior position as always. Federica Montseny and the women of the group Mujeres Libres were important women in the anarchist movement, and they held strong beliefs about the the place of women. Although they collaborated on programs to educate women, their theories were quite different. Montseny's approach to women's problems is based on the responsibility of the individual for his or her state regardless of the social conditions that caused it, *i.e.* ignoring the legacy of history. Mujeres Libres, on the other hand, took a collective approach to solving women's problems, as they saw women in terms of the gender roles and violence to which history had subjected them.

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Margery Resnick  
Title: Associate Professor of Spanish

## **Dedication**

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Dr. William Watson.

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And here's to E.B., who first inspired in me an interest in anarchism. Cheers!

### **Note**

Many of the sources cited in this thesis were in Spanish. Should those readers who know the language prefer to read quotations in the original, I have left them thus. However, for those who do not read Spanish, translations have been provided in parenthesis after the quotation. Unless otherwise noted, these are the responsibility of the author.

## **PART I**

### **An Overview of the Times**

The years before and during the Spanish Civil War were years of great intellectual activity. Several leftist political groups emerged; their followers had become enthusiastic at the prospect of leading Spain to adopt a political system different from the two it had already experienced: monarchy and democracy. The Russian Revolution had taken place in 1917, and many were eager to implement a similar system of communism. Others wanted a socialist government, and still others, the anarchists, wanted no centralized government at all. Anarchist philosophy urged freedom of the individual, and for some, this idea had a very important implication: the liberation of women. Among the people concerned with this issue were Federica Montseny - a leading anarchist woman, and Mujeres Libres (Free Women) - a group of anarchist women devoted primarily to the empowerment of women. Before discussing their specific views on women's emancipation however, it will be helpful to discuss the Spanish Civil War and the problems that women in general confronted in that era.

In 1936, General Francisco Franco staged a military coup that marked the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. His aim was to overthrow the legally elected Republican government, which fought desperately to retain control of the country. But Franco's troops were receiving extensive military aid from the German and Italian fascists, and therefore were far too powerful for the Republicans alone to combat. Consequently, the various leftist political parties made use of an association they had formed in the years preceding the war to unite their forces: the Frente Popular (Popular Front). This union was not altogether an easy one; there

was a great deal of disagreement within the organization among the various groups. Their ideologies in many cases differed substantially, but they had to accept the necessity of putting these ideologies second to the task of defeating Franco. Compromise on the part of the anarchists was especially great; not only did they have to put their goal of complete social transformation on hold, but the war necessitated their participation in centralized government - something anarchism is fundamentally against.

The Spanish anarchists adopted most of their ideology from Mikhail Bakunin, a Russian aristocrat. His theory of anarchism is based on a single point: unrestricted freedom. Of course, from this freedom does not come chaos, as the word *anarchism* has wrongly come to mean today; rather, Bakunin believed strongly in the notion of self-regulation. He believed that people were inherently good, and that if free to govern themselves, would naturally work to benefit the community. In his terms then, this freedom shall be a

liberty consisting in the full development of all the material, intellectual, and moral powers latent in every man; a liberty which does not recognize any other restrictions but those which are traced by the laws of our nature, which, properly speaking, is tantamount to saying that there are no restrictions at all, since these laws are not imposed upon us by some outside legislator standing above us or alongside us. These laws are immanent, inherent in us; they constitute the very basis of our being, material as well as intellectual and moral; and instead of finding in them a limit to our liberty we should regard them as its effective reason.<sup>1</sup>

Bakunin emphasized then, that although he did not mean "rabid individualism", that certainly people must be free in order to fulfill themselves. In theory, then, the anarchists were against discrimination, for they worked toward a society in which the needs of every individual could be fulfilled, in which every person could have a

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<sup>1</sup>Murray Bookchin, The Spanish Anarchists: The Heroic Years 1868-1936. (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1977) 25.

voice. Unfortunately, society had never been thus structured in the past, and the anarchists found it difficult to change the patterns to which they were accustomed. As we shall see, the anarchists were not as a group, nor in many cases as individuals, able to achieve this ideal of non-discrimination. In particular, this complete liberty appeared not to apply to women.

Also fundamental to Bakunin's thought was the concept that

From the outset...the revolution must destroy the state apparatus: the police, the army, the bureaucracy. If violence is necessary, it must be exercised by the...revolutionary people...<sup>2</sup>

But perhaps this apparatus did not include patriarchy, for women had a hard time convincing their comrades that they indeed ought to be allowed a movement of their own to combat the patriarchally based society in which they lived. Anarchists insisted on a strategy of direct action and self-organization,<sup>3</sup> but apparently not when the group trying to implement these strategies for change was a women's group.

Of paramount importance to the anarchists was the struggle for workers' rights. They felt that until the working class, that is, the majority of the Spanish people, were allowed to govern the conditions of their own work place and work structure, society would be grossly unfair in that the wealth would be reaped by only a privileged few. Anarchist workers were fighting against domination. What these same workers failed to see is that they dominated yet another majority of the population in their own households: women. At home, they themselves were the boss of a woman, their wife, who was relegated an inferior status to that of men. Some people, albeit very few, saw this contradiction.

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<sup>2</sup>Bookchin 27.

<sup>3</sup>Martha Ackelsberg, "Revolution and Community: Mobilization, De-politicization and Perceptions of Change in Civil War Spain," Women Living Change, ed. Susan C. Bourque and Donna Robinson Divine (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, n.d.) 95.

Not surprisingly, many of the anarchists who did recognize the contradiction were women. Anarchist women recognized that women were "la esclava del esclavo": the (female domestic) slave of the (male economic) slave. Soledad Gustavo, the mother of Federica Montseny, observed that women were "esclavas cuando solteras, cuando casadas y cuando viudas, del padre, del marido o del burgués" (slaves when single, married and widowed; of the father, husband, or of the bourgeoisie).<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, to most men women's emancipation meant nothing more than the incorporation of women into the work force and into the syndical and social fight.<sup>5</sup> Some men were all for this development. However, many women who did enter the work force experienced hostility from their male co-workers. Women, devalued from having always performed unpaid labor in the house, could be hired at wages lower than those that would have to be paid to men. Women were also seen as strike breakers, as they could often be recruited to fill those vacant places. Although the anarchists recognized the fact that, in the society in which they lived, women found themselves in a position inferior to that of men<sup>6</sup> most anarchists saw the origins of this problem as being purely economic, not social. "Some argued that women's subordination stemmed from the division of labor by sex"; women were economically dependent on men; as soon as women joined the work force, they would no longer occupy an inferior social position. (Few considered the inclusion of men into domestic life, however. Many anarchist men considered it beneath their dignity to work in the home.<sup>7</sup> Even *Mujeres Libres* thought that a woman who is

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<sup>4</sup>Mary Nash, *Mujer y Movimiento Obrero en España, 1931-1939*. (Barcelona: Editorial Fontamara, 1st Ed. Oct. 1981) 24.

<sup>5</sup>Nash, *Mujer* 28.

<sup>6</sup>Mary Nash, "Dos Intelectuales Anarquistas Frente al Problema de la Mujer: Federica Montseny y Lucía Sánchez Saornil," *Convivium* (Barcelona: Universidad de Barcelona, Facultad de filosofía y letras, 1975) 73.

<sup>7</sup>Nash, *Mujer* 75.



only a housewife is no better than a prostitute - she gets "paid" by her husband. The anarchists believed that the only legitimate work is that which benefits the collectives, not the individual.<sup>8</sup> Without economic independence then, women would forever be victimized. Others argued that due to their link with the devalued institutions of the church and family, women too were becoming devalued. With the destruction of these institutions, women would no longer be devalued.<sup>9</sup> (One may well wonder if women, rather than simply cease to be devalued, would not also be destroyed. The importance of women's relation to the church will be discussed later.) Some thus thought that with the advent of the social revolution, women as well as men would suddenly be liberated from exploitation. The revolution would bring about new freedoms: freedom from sexual restraint - the constraining doctrines and pervasive morals of the church, and freedom from political and economic systems that worked to benefit only the elite classes.

Others believed that a mere social revolution was not going to induce men to give up the privileged status they had so long enjoyed; it was ingrained in them, just as being inferior had been ingrained in women. Proponents of this view urged that a separate group dealing with women's issues go hand in hand with the anarchist movement. Some scholars today call this concept "anarco-feminism", because its founding members believed that anarchism was the only context for true women's emancipation.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, the three founding members of *Mujeres Libres* - Lucía Sánchez Saornil, Mercedes Comaposada, and Amparo Poch y Gascón -

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<sup>8</sup>Mary Nash, "*Mujeres Libres*": *España 1936-1939*. (Barcelona: Tusquets Editor, 2nd Ed. Serie los Libertarios 1, Vol. 4., 1976) 182.

<sup>9</sup>Martha Ackelsberg, "Mujeres Libres and the Role of Women in Anarchist Revolution," *Women in Search of Utopia: Mavericks and Mythmakers*, ed. Ruby Rohrlich and Elaine Hoffman Baruch (New York: Schocken Books, 1984) 118.

<sup>10</sup>for further discussion see: Peggy Kornegger, "Anarchism: the Feminist Connection," *The Second Wave* (Spring 1975): 26-37.

espoused this ideology. They believed that women could only bring about change in their lives if they took matters into their own hands. Montseny also seems not to have believed that the revolution would solve all of women's problems. Shirley Fredricks says

She (did not) think the anarchist revolution would take care of the discrepancy between anarchist theory and practice in (the area of women's emancipation); the economic discrimination, yes; but not the social or moral aspect of the question.

"The moral part of prejudices in sex...will persist into the post-revolutionary period", says Montseny.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the members of Mujeres Libres are the only women who truly took change into their own hands. They introduced proletarian feminism to Spain for the first time.<sup>12</sup> Some anarchists were deeply worried by feminism, and thought that such a movement would ultimately antagonize relations between men and women when in fact each sex needed the other. Although Federica Montseny shared this view, she felt that women's emancipation was important, and contributed to the cause of women in the anarchist movement.

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<sup>11</sup> Shirley Fay Fredricks, "The Social and Political Thought of Federica Montseny, Spanish Anarchist, 1923-1937" Ph.D. diss., University of New Mexico, 1972, 130.

<sup>12</sup> Nash, Mujeres 8.

## PART II

### Federica Montseny

Federica Montseny was born in Madrid on February 12, 1905 to Teresa Mañé and Joan Montseny (who later took the pseudonyms of Soledad Gustavo and Federico Urales) two well known anarchist intellectuals. They were the founders of the anarchist magazine La Revista Blanca. Federica never went to primary school; rather, her mother was her teacher in those early years. Later, when the Montseny family moved to Catalunya, Federica often witnessed the assassination of trade-unionists whose only crime was having had membership in the CNT (the National Confederation of Work). This played a great part in helping her to form her militant consciousness. From the time she was 15 years old until she was 19, she attended the University of Barcelona in Philosophy. Later, she attended Cots Academy to study languages. Federica's parents played a crucial role in the development of her anarchist ideology; she was given a good education and spent a great deal of time reading from her parents' extensive library. She began writing early in her life, and often contributed articles to her parents' magazines and other anarchist publications. Her first novel, published in 1925, is entitled La Victoria and is a "novela en la que se narran los problemas de orden moral que se le presentan a una mujer de ideas modernas" (a novella in which are recounted those problems of a moral order encountered by a woman with modern ideas). Early in her life, then, she developed a political philosophy concerning women and the problems of society. In 1930 she married Germinal Esgleas in a civil ceremony, and at the age of 31 in 1936 she became the first woman to hold a ministerial position; she was the Minister of Health and Public Assistance in Largo Caballero's Republican government.

Federica's parents were instrumental in the development of her anarchist beliefs. About them she says

La influencia de mis padres era decisiva en mi vida.<sup>13</sup> Quizás mi virtud destacada ha sido la fidelidad que he conservado frente a (sus) ideas...<sup>14</sup>  
(The influence of my parents was decisive in my life. Perhaps my outstanding virtue has been the fidelity with which I have preserved their ideas...)

Montserrat says that "en realidad, mi maestra fue mi madre. De niña nunca fui a la escuela primaria ni a la secundaria." (In reality, my teacher was my mother. As a girl I never went to primary or secondary school.)<sup>15</sup> Of her father she says "su manera de ver las cosas poco a poco me inclinó definitivamente hacia el anarquismo." (his way of seeing things little by little inclined me definitively toward anarchism.)<sup>16</sup> Among the ideas that she seems to have adopted from them is a widely criticized opinion of her father's on the role of women. Joan Montseny (pseudonym Federico Urales) believed that

Sólo el motivo amoroso que tiene por objeto la concepción de un ser...puede representar la evolución y la eternidad de la vida en el amor y puede ser en el hombre la potencialidad de la Naturaleza camino de su superación. (Only the amorous desire that has as its objective the conception of a living being can represent the evolution and eternity of life in love, can be in men the potential of Nature, the road to fulfillment.)

It is true that this idea was quite modern in a society where marriages were often arranged by the parents of the couple for reasons of economics or social standing. However, it is ultimately a step backward for women's emancipation. In the end, the burden of the conception would fall upon women and impede their development

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<sup>13</sup> Carmen Alcalde, Federica Montseny: Palabra en Rojo y Negro (Barcelona: Editorial Argos Vergara, S.A., 1977) 16.

<sup>14</sup> Alcalde, Federica 26.

<sup>15</sup> Alcalde, Federica 37

<sup>16</sup> Alcalde, Federica 16

as individuals; they would continue to be beasts of procreation.<sup>17</sup> About her mother Montseny remarks

(My) virile literature shocked the purity and scruples of my own mother: the manner I had of defending my right to speak with the frequency, the equality of men...<sup>18</sup>

It is interesting to consider this statement in light of the fact that Montseny clung strongly to the ideas of her parents. Although she asserts her right to speak, the fact that it shocked her mother indicates that her mother had traditional ideas about what was becoming to women. If her mother was so shocked at her "virile literature", then Montseny must have learned this behavior from her father. But what she learned in those years with her mother manifests itself in another way: the assignment of gender roles.

Montseny frequently glorifies men in her writings and speeches. She often speaks of them with the terms of Christ imagery; they are the heroes, who, saintly in nature, docile and innocent as lambs, suffer and sacrifice for the good of all. Shirley Fredricks observes

If Christian institutions and dogmas were roundly condemned by the anarchists, Christ and the Virgin Mary held a favored position in Montseny's religious judgements.<sup>19</sup>

Montseny herself says

They believed that Jesus was a social disturber, a propagator of socially disruptive ideas and of criminal practices, on whose expiation depended the future security of Roman society.<sup>20</sup>

Carmen Alcalde on the other hand, does not accept this common criticism of Montseny. She says that Montseny revered some women just as highly as she did

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<sup>17</sup> Nash, Mujer 49.

<sup>18</sup> Fredricks, "The Social" 71.

<sup>19</sup> Fredricks, "The Social" 91.

<sup>20</sup> Fredricks, "The Social" 91.

some men. Alcalde cites Montseny's admiration of Teresa Claramunt as an example. Montseny says

Teresa Claramunt era ante de todo una mujer obrera, la mujer que representaba la clase obrera por antonomasia...era una persona muy guapa, bien planteada. ...Se distinguió como la figura excepcional de la mujer obrera, sin gran cultura, sin una gran preparación, con faltas de ortografía incluso, pero con una gran inteligencia natural. (Teresa Claramunt was before all else a working woman, a woman who excellently represented the working class...she was a beautiful person, well grounded. ...She stood out as an exceptional figure of the working woman, without a lot of culture, without a lot of training, without a mastery of spelling as well, but with a great natural intelligence.)<sup>21</sup>

It is true that Montseny appears to admire Claramunt, but when we compare this description with one about Eliseo Reclus, we discover a distinctly different tone: he possessed a soul like

a little child, always serene, always pure, never searching for a bad thought.<sup>22</sup> ...Reclus gave anarchism generosity, tolerance, a great vision across the centuries...(he was) an entire Man.<sup>23</sup>

We notice distinctly religious overtones in Montseny's description of Reclus. It is almost as if she were describing Jesus, not Eliseo. Conversely, nowhere do we find descriptions of women with such religious overtones. It is true that in a Church maintained by women, the characteristics attributed to Christ are also those commonly associated with women. Montseny may have felt such characteristics to be admirable in both men and women. However, it appears despite this that for Montseny, women are not the principal agents, but rather the mothers of martyrs. They are relegated the role of mother Mary; their purpose is to raise revolutionary sons, and suffer bravely when those sons die for the cause. Montseny possessed equally romantic ideas about heroism - of the death of Ferrer (founder of the

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<sup>21</sup> Alcalde, Federica 36.

<sup>22</sup> Fredricks, "The Social" 84.

<sup>23</sup> Fredricks, "The Social" 37.

Escuela Moderna) she says he died with "serenity".<sup>24</sup> Montseny's admiration of the Jesus and Mary figures actually comes as no surprise. She was born and raised in Spain; her anarchism by no means assured that she escaped the influence of the church.

This same church taught that different characteristics were becoming to men and women, and Montseny had very specific notions of what these traits were.

De los hombres admiro la honestidad, la rectitud y el valor personal. De las mujeres, el espíritu de iniciativa, la rebeldía, y el afán de no ser sometidas, de no ser demasiado dóciles y admiro también las que saben encontrar un equilibrio entre lo que podemos llamar nuevas ideas y un cierto mantenimiento de la femineidad que, en cierta manera, es consustancial a la naturaleza de la mujer: el amor a los hijos, el gusto por la vida, por la casa, el saber hacer comidas, en una palabra, saber hacer la vida agradable a las personas que te rodean. (In men I admire honesty, rectitude and personal valour. In women, the spirit of initiative, rebelliousness, and the determination not to be subjugated, to not be too docile, and I also admire those that know how to find a balance between that which we might call new ideas and a certain conservation of femininity that, in a certain way, is inseparable from the nature of women: the love of children, the love of life, of the home, knowing how to make meals; in a word, knowing how to make life agreeable to the people around her.)<sup>25</sup>

But Montseny never comments on who makes life nice for *women*. The double standards ignored by Montseny may also be seen in her analysis of one case of adultery. She says that the mother of Louise Michel pardoned her husband's "whim" when he had an affair with the servant, and rather than throw out the servant and her child (Louise), she took the child in like one of her own. This reaction is "very cultured", of "modern ideas".<sup>26</sup> But it is doubtful that the same whim would be tolerated if a woman were the adulteress. So we may conclude that forgiveness and self-sacrifice are virtues of women only.

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<sup>24</sup> Alcalde, Federica 20.

<sup>25</sup> Alcalde, Federica 26.

<sup>26</sup> Alcalde, Federica 40.

This double standard did not lead Montseny to believe that only women had problems, however. As Nash says, she denied the existence of a specific woman's problem.<sup>27</sup> That is *not* to say that she denied that women had problems, but she felt that both sexes were victimized by their inequality: just as women were victims of discrimination, so were men victims of their machismo. She thought that unnatural restrictions on human sexuality caused men to behave violently; "rigid bourgeois morality forced men to commit sexual crimes."<sup>28</sup> Montseny believed that such incidents as rape would not occur once people lived in a true libertarian society. Her philosophy was one of healing the ills of the society in which she lived; "if you catch a starving man stealing food, feed him, don't punish him."<sup>29</sup> Feminism, as Montseny saw it, didn't give the correct focus to women's problems. It lacked idealism; many feminist movements didn't question the existing social structure, and instead asked systematically for equality with men - an equality of "domination and privileges"- not the across the board equality theorized by anarchism.<sup>30</sup> To Montseny's mind, men were in the wrong, and those who wanted equality with them were part of the problem. Rather than strive for a position of domination (undesirable because it created inequality), both sexes would have to find another niche - one in which no particular group was dominant, nor was submissive. As she analyzed the problem in this fashion, she could support the common anarchist opinion on the participation of women in politics:

At best, the anarchists feared that political involvement and extension of suffrage to women would lead them to the illusion of emancipation when indeed such political involvement would only continue their

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<sup>27</sup> Nash, Mujer 29.

<sup>28</sup> Fredricks, "The Social" 117.

<sup>29</sup> Fredricks, "The Social" 116.

<sup>30</sup> Nash, Mujer 29.



exploitation under the guise of participation, legality, and emancipation.<sup>31</sup>

As true feminism could not exist in anything less than an anarchist society, the recruitment of women to the anarchist cause became very important to Montseny, and she formulated a list of priorities for their involvement. These were:

- 1) Extender la propaganda ideológica dentro del movimiento femenino. (Spread ideological propaganda within the feminine movement.)
- 2) Conseguir una estrecha alianza entre las mujeres que a la vez que diera fuerza al movimiento, le diese también intensidad. (Create an intimate alliance between women that, concurrently with giving the movement strength, will give it intensity.)
- 3) Propagar una tolerancia que facilitase una unión entre los diversos grupos de mujeres a nivel internacional con indiferencia de lo que fueran las ideas preconizadas por estos grupos una vez que fueron ideas que "se dirigieran hacia el porvenir." (Propagate a tolerance that will facilitate a union between the diverse women's groups at the international level, regardless of what were their preconceived ideas once they are oriented toward the future.)
- 4) Lograr que la mujer se despierte y se haga consciente a la vez que se eleve moralmente. (Get women to wake up and achieve social consciousness while elevating themselves morally.)<sup>32</sup>

Although Montseny rejects suffrage as meaningful, she does claim to be a proponent of what she calls "humanist" feminism;

...absolute equality in all aspects for both sexes; independence for the two;...an expanded and universally free way for all the specie...To propagate feminism is to foment masculinism; is to create an immoral and absurd struggle between the two sexes which no natural law would tolerate...Feminism? Never! Humanism? Always!<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Fredricks, "The Social" 128.

<sup>32</sup>Nash, "Dos" 86.

<sup>33</sup>Fredricks, "The Social" 131.

The basis for what Montseny sees as a "problem of the sexes" is that each is the enigma of the other.<sup>34</sup> Although Montseny didn't believe that women needed an autonomous fight to secure their liberation, she did think that a solution was necessary. For Montseny that solution was what she termed *individualizamiento*: self-realization. This process would have to be undertaken by both men and women. It means "crearnos una nueva mentalidad, un nuevo punto de vista, una vida moral nueva, la autovivificación, la autocreación de la personalidad equilibrada y salvadora." (create for ourselves a new mentality, a new point of view, a new moral life, a self inspired vitalization; the self-creation of the equilibrated and reborn personality.)<sup>35</sup> Each person must find a solution within oneself for the inequalities one sees around oneself. Montseny writes about these new individuals:

El prototipo de mujer 'futura'...(se caracteriza) por su dignidad y orgullo de sexo y su plena confianza en sí misma y por la conciencia de que ella (depende) los destinos y el porvenir de la raza humana." (The prototype "future" woman is characterized by her dignity and pride in her sex and a full confidence in herself due to the realization that upon her depends the destiny and the future of the human race.)<sup>36</sup>

She admits that "the task is arduous and the labor slow. And we must begin in order to convince (women) of the necessity of it."<sup>37</sup> But Montseny did not develop a program to convince women of that necessity. This work was done by *Mujeres Libres*.

Paradoxically, Montseny believed that each sex ought to limit itself to providing solutions to the problems of its own gender. That is to say, men ought to concern themselves with solutions appropriate to their gender, and women ought to

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<sup>34</sup>Nash, "Dos" 77.

<sup>35</sup>Nash, "Dos" 78.

<sup>36</sup>Nash, "Dos" 78.

<sup>37</sup>Fredricks, "The Social" 132.

do the same, neither meddling in the emancipatory processes of the other. This contradicts self-realization because it implies a collective solution of problems concerning gender. Of women finding ways to emancipate themselves she says

Quiere decir esto exclusión del hombre en nuestra vida y separación de los problemas de ambos sexos? De ninguna manera. Pero el hombre ha de mantenerse al margen de nuestras discusiones, cuando éstas sólo atañen al problema *exclusivamente* femenino. Es decir, cuando se trata de determinar las inquietudes, las nuevas modalidades, las nuevas formas de existencia moral y social femeninas. (Does this mean the exclusion of men from our lives and the separation of problems pertaining to both sexes? By no means. But men must keep themselves at the margin of our discussions when these only involve exclusively feminine problems. That is to say, when they involve determining the fears, the new varieties, the new forms of moral and social feminine existence.)<sup>38</sup>

Would this not be feminism? We may say so today, but we shall see that in Montseny's experience, feminism did not have this meaning. Nevertheless, it is curious that Montseny opposed a separate women's movement if she saw the abovementioned as the appropriate method for finding solutions.

In addition to not taking action to convince women of the necessity of self-realization, Montseny did not challenge the patriarchy directly; thus she betrays a certain timidity concerning action. If revolution necessarily meant upset, then perhaps she only half-heartedly believed in it. Neither a challenge of patriarchy, nor the creation of a separate women's group would have gained Montseny popularity. The institution of patriarchy was heavily embedded in Spanish culture, and particularly inseparable from the political world in which Montseny was successful. If she felt anarchism to be a cause more pressing than women's emancipation, she may well have carefully protected her ability to influence her male peers. Those peers would ultimately undergo self-realization too, however, even if this took place after the revolution. Montseny is aware that

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<sup>38</sup>Nash, "Dos" 79.

Los hombres también tenían que superar 'treinta siglos de dominio, de omnipotencia, de despotismo sexual, de culto...de la autoridad, de sentido propietario, de exclusivismo amoroso, de ilusoria superioridad masculina.' (Men also have to transcend thirty centuries of domination, of omnipotence, of sexual despotism, of the cult of authority, of the sense of ownership, of requiring amorous exclusivity, of the illusion of masculine superiority.)<sup>39</sup>

But she seems not to have considered the struggle involved in convincing *men* of the necessity of self-realization. Although Montseny sees self-realization as a process that both women and men must undergo, it is unlikely that men, in their position of privilege, would bother to find a solution for something that they do not experience as a problem.

Self-realization is also highly unrealistic when one takes into consideration the degree of self esteem, education and social awareness required to transcend the former state of being. Montseny herself was a strong woman. She was a member of the upper middle class, an intellectual. She had a good education, and due to her upbringing in an anarchist household, one can assume that she, to some degree more than her peers, was allowed to realize her potential as a human being. She had the intellectual means and confidence in herself as a strong individual to actually carry out such idealistic reforms. Nash says "El enfoque del problema de la mujer de Federica Montseny corresponde a su condición de mujer de fuerte personalidad, anarquista individualista e intelectual." (The approach that Federica Montseny has to the woman problem corresponds to her own condition of being a woman of strong personality, an anarchist individualist, and an intellectual.)<sup>40</sup> But for the majority of Spanish women, this transcendence would have been impossible.

Montseny describes women in the following terms:

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<sup>39</sup>Nash, Mujer 31.

<sup>40</sup>Nash, Mujer 30.

These domestic animals are perfectly regulated by the benevolent watch of the judge, the priest and world opinion,...they live in a semi-consciousness which permits them to be disengaged from life; that is to say, to be born, to exist, to procreate and to die, mechanically.<sup>41</sup>

She correctly ascertains that women have always had bourgeois morality imposed on them to keep them in their place, but in light of this it is difficult to see how Montseny expects the average working class woman to successfully undergo the process of self-realization. If women suffered in two burdens - "la inquietud y duda que este mundo 'sin norte' presentaba a todo ser humano y, en segundo lugar, como mujer, salía de un período de esclavitud moral y religioso para entrar en una etapa de libertad e igualdad de derechos" (the anxiety and doubt that this world "without a north" presented to all human beings, and secondly, as women, they were coming out of a period of moral and religious slavery to enter a stage of liberty and equal rights)<sup>42</sup> - then it would be doubly hard for them to escape their condition. But, continues Nash, she had a very unfavorable view of most women; "la mayoría eran estúpidas" and "bestias de placer o máquina incubadora de hijos", "criadas para el hogar, siervas del cura, sacerdotistas del dios 'que dirán' y de la diosa 'costumbre'." (the majority were stupid, beasts of pleasure or incubators of children, raised for the home, slaves of the priest, priestesses of the god 'what will people think' and the goddess 'custom'.)<sup>43</sup> In fact

observation told her that in the current state of female ignorance women simply were not capable of independent judgment about anything, let alone political issues.<sup>44</sup> There could be no hope for social progress as long as society entrusted the education of each generation to such

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<sup>41</sup>Fredricks, "The Social" 126.

<sup>42</sup>Nash, "Dos" 75.

<sup>43</sup>Nash, "Dos" 75.

<sup>44</sup>Fredricks, "The Social" 127.

incompetency and inferiority.<sup>45</sup>

Yet Montseny says that women are "hungry for justice..." and that "although 'semi-literate', women possess a 'mute and profound comprehension' of true human dignity and social justice."<sup>46</sup> Montseny vacillated between admiration of her supposed working woman without culture, but who possesses great talent, and contempt of the more lamentable reality. She was unable to come to terms with this reality, and thus was insensitive to women's real needs. It is highly unlikely that most women following her advice could have emancipated themselves.

Montseny in fact did recognize the impossibility of self-realization for most women, yet she offered them no solutions.

(Ella) misma reconoce que su planteamiento del problema se sitúa en el futuro y que para el presente 'sólo mentalidades superiores a la mentalidad corriente' podrían llevar a la práctica la emancipación de la mujer tal como la concibe ella. (She herself recognized that her conception of the problem was situated in the future and that for the present "only mentalities superior to the common mentality" could bring into practice women's emancipation as she conceived it.)<sup>47</sup>

Montseny happened to be one woman who could implement her own plan successfully. She says of her own free nature

...fui así, soy así porque no he podido ser de otra manera, como la nieve es blanca y el carbón es negro, como corre el agua hacia el mar y el océano mece el sueño milenarío de la tierra. (I was this way, I am this way, because I can not be any other way, like the snow is white and coal is black, like water runs toward the sea, and the ocean rocks the ancient dream of the earth.)<sup>48</sup>

Besides showing her typically anarchist connection with nature, this quotation

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<sup>45</sup> Fredricks, "The Social" 125.

<sup>46</sup> Fredricks, "The Social" 132.

<sup>47</sup> Nash, Mujer 32.

<sup>48</sup> Alcalde, Federica 23.

compliments Montseny by illustrating her strength as an individual and her own invincible spiritual freedom.

If Montseny believed in the inherent good of all people, she also recognized that women are certainly no better than men. This concept was also important to her assessment of feminism.

Nosotros jamás hemos sido feministas, porque consideramos que la mujer debe tener los mismos derechos que el hombre y que, como el hombre, posee las mismas parecidas cualidades y los mismos defectos. (We have never been feminists, because we believe that women ought to have the same rights as men, and that, like men, they possess the same qualities and defects.)

She speaks of all people possessing a human ferocity that has no sex<sup>49</sup> and for this reason women, were they given an equality of domination, would not rule any more justly than men. But, she does say

Consideramos que la emancipación de la mujer está íntimamente ligada a la verdadera emancipación del hombre. Por eso nos basta con llamarnos anarquistas. Pero nos ha parecido que, sobre todo en España, nuestro movimiento padecía de un exceso de masculinismo: el hombre, en general, no gusta que la mujer le represente. (We consider the emancipation of women to be intimately linked to the true emancipation of men. Therefore it is enough to call ourselves anarchists. But it does seem, especially in Spain, that our movement suffers an excess of masculinism; men, in general, don't like women to represent them.)<sup>50</sup>

Montseny recognized the existence of inequality, but she did not challenge gender roles: "...en (toda situación las mujeres) han hecho posible que la CNT existiera porque ellas han sido guardianas del hogar..." (in all situations women have made the CNT's existence possible because they have taken care of the home...)<sup>51</sup> Although Montseny did not ask that roles be changed, she did hope that they be valued. She romantically pictures the ideal working women; they are

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<sup>49</sup> Alcalde, Federica 29.

<sup>50</sup> Alcalde, Federica 31.

<sup>51</sup> Alcalde, Federica 32.

mujeres simples, sin mucha cultura, sin grandes dotes oratorias, pero que, en momentos dados, arrastraron centenares de miles de hombres y mujeres, los galvanizaron, conduciéndolos al combate y a la victoria. (simple women, without much culture, without great oratory talents, but who, in times of need, pulled along hundreds of thousands of men and women and gave them strength, driving them to the fight and to victory.)<sup>52</sup>

It seems that Montseny reached the solution of self-realization through her views on love.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps she felt that in this area people had gone wrong. Montseny believed that the only healthy relationships were those that were formed with the utmost respect for one's partner. The partners in this ideal relationship would have to be complete human beings who had come together of their own free wills, with no consideration for economics or any other reason other than a mutual respect. Real love could only exist between equals. It is in this realm that self-realization must take place. Both partners must go beyond the constraints of society to form a relationship in which they are true equals. Thus, if love relationships were properly formed, and Montseny believed most were not, there would be no social or moral inequality between the sexes. Before one can form such a relationship, however, one must love oneself. In this way, one can love another and still not lose sight of his/her own uniqueness. Women must also be aware of their rights. They have

the right to love and the right to maternity. The right of the free expression of her existence. The right to live her life and to be that which she wished and not that which the man wanted...The right and the duty of looking in the face existence, liberty, health and happiness, of conquering and suppressing all prejudices, all morality and all unjust and inhuman laws.<sup>54</sup>

But how are women to become aware that they have even these rights?

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<sup>52</sup>Alcalde, Federica 35.

<sup>53</sup>Nash, "Dos" 79.

<sup>54</sup>Fredricks, "The Social" 140.



...El amor concibido por Montseny implica al mismo tiempo la mas absoluta libertad e independenciam tanto por parte del hombre como por parte de la mujer. El amor significa la superación de la persona humana. (The love conceived by Montseny implies both the most absolute liberty and independence as much for the man as for the woman. This love means the transcendence of the human person.)<sup>55</sup>

This ideal formation of relationships would also have been beyond the grasp of the majority, for it has as a prerequisite that each partner be already emancipated, fully realized as an intellectual being, and economically independent.

Despite the contradictions present between Montseny's ideology and actions she did make some very important contributions to the improvement of conditions for women in Spain. Most of these contributions were realized in collaboration with Mujeres Libres. This group was more sensitive to the inability of the average Spanish woman to emancipate herself, and took the initiative to form a women's group that maintained its autonomy separately from even the CNT.

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<sup>55</sup>Nash, Mujer 31.

### PART III

## Mujeres Libres

Emma Goldman asserts that women, in order to be free, must learn to disregard "public opinion and public condemnation."<sup>56</sup> This is particularly insightful and applicable to the case of Mujeres Libres. Publicly ridiculed, unrecognized by their own political affiliate, they insisted upon doing that which they saw as essential to their cause, and the cause of anarchism as a whole.

Mujeres Libres was formed in April of 1936 by Lucía Sánchez Saornil, Mercedes Comaposada and Amparo Poch y Gascón to educate women, make them conscientious,<sup>57</sup> and to liberate women, especially the worker, from "la triple esclavitud de ignorancia, esclavitud de hembra y esclavitud de productor" (the triple slavery of her ignorance, her sex, and her status as a worker.)<sup>58</sup> They, like Montseny, recognized women's ignorance of social injustices, but Lucía Sánchez Saornil blamed this on the roles women had historically been assigned, rather than blame their lack of will to learn, as did Montseny.<sup>59</sup> In Saornil's analysis the position of women is a result of the violence to which they are frequently subjected. She thought that women's lack of perspective was normal, considering what they had been through.<sup>60</sup> Mujeres Libres founded a feminist magazine bearing the same name. They accepted contributions only from women in order to show that women

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<sup>56</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, Women, Resistance and Revolution (New York: Vintage Books, 1972) 97.

<sup>57</sup> Nash, Mujer 85.

<sup>58</sup> Nash, Mujer 86.

<sup>59</sup> Nash, "Dos" 87.

<sup>60</sup> Nash, "Dos" 88.

were perfectly capable of such a task, and citing also the rationale that men, no matter how good their intentions, lacked perspective on the woman question.<sup>61</sup> Mercedes Comaposada estimates that Mujeres Libres had as many as 30,000 members,<sup>62</sup> although Mary Nash estimates that 20,000 is a more reliable figure.<sup>63</sup> In either case, the sheer numbers indicate a tremendous interest, and therefore we may assume need, on the part of Spanish women for such a group. Mujeres Libres was the first women's group created specifically for working class women, and therefore they made their arguments and language simple and accessible.

Mujeres Libres had two consciences: one socio-political, the other feminist. They knew that conscientious women were needed for the revolution, and they therefore saw a definite need for measures to be taken insuring woman's full incorporation in it. Mujeres Libres identified with anarchism in that they aspired to a society in which equality existed, but they thought that social and economic changes could take place only by subverting the patriarchal society based on male authority as well. Mary Nash notes that not only did Mujeres Libres think that women's liberation could take place only as a parallel movement with the revolution, but they believed the revolution could not develop correctly unless the means were consistent with the ends and women were equal to men during the process.<sup>64</sup> They embraced the thought of Teresa Claramunt: woman, in order to be free, had to take the initiative herself. Change could not take place within existing organizations; an entirely new order would have to be formed - one that would

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<sup>61</sup>Nash, Mujer 86.

<sup>62</sup>Temma Kaplan, "Spanish Anarchism and Women's Emancipation" Journal of Contemporary History (Vol.6, No.2 1971): 105.

<sup>63</sup>Nash, Mujer 87.

<sup>64</sup>Nash, Mujer 92.

defend women's rights.<sup>65</sup> The women of *Mujeres Libres* correctly saw that woman could not easily realize herself within the existing anarchist organizations, because she had to wage a double fight: one against capitalism and another against patriarchy.<sup>66</sup> One member characterizes the discrepancies between male anarchist theory and action in the following anecdote:

In Catalonia, at least, the dominant position was that men and women should both be involved. But the problem was that men *didn't know how* to get women involved as activists. They continued (both men and most women) to think of women as assistants, accepted in a secondary status. For them, I think, the ideal situation would be to have a *compañera* who did not oppose their ideas, but in whose private life would be more or less like other women.<sup>67</sup>

Women desperately needed organizations that would empower them; they needed to take direct action.

"Direct action means that revolutionary activity and organization...(do not) begin through 'intermediaries' such as political parties."<sup>68</sup> Women's emancipation was a huge task, and Saornil felt that no single woman could tackle it by herself; therefore, *Mujeres Libres* was formed. Women needed a "mentalidad libre capaz de discernir por sí misma lo falso de lo verdadero, lo político de lo social." (free mentality, capable of distinguishing by itself the false from the true, the political from the social.)<sup>69</sup> Soledad Estorach, another member of *Mujeres Libres*, underlines the importance of group support: "women made lifelong friends whose mutual

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<sup>65</sup> Nash, "Mujeres Libres" 24.

<sup>66</sup> Nash, "Mujeres Libres" 93.

<sup>67</sup> Martha Ackelsberg, "Mujeres Libres: Individuality and Community: Organizing Women during the Spanish Civil War" Radical America (Vol.18, No.4 1984): 2.

<sup>68</sup> Ackelsberg, "Mujeres Libres: Individuality" 3.

<sup>69</sup> Nash, "Dos" 92.

support was essential during those times when 'it seemed we lived on air alone.'<sup>70</sup> If these women felt the need to form groups, then it was their right to do so; it is the form that their direct action took. Ackelsberg brings yet another dimension to the necessity of direct action when she writes

Those (women) who became involved, who participated in activities whose goals and means they defined for themselves, experienced a transformation of self-concept which was deep and long-lasting.<sup>71</sup>

This means that women who became involved had already won half the battle that Montseny had proposed be fought with self-realization; they had empowered themselves with the knowledge that they were worthwhile, intelligent human beings! This may be the most important thing that *Mujeres Libres* actually accomplished; if they could not achieve actual equality in the context of society at large with men, at least they made a drastic difference in the self-esteem of those women involved. "Engagement in struggle requires a changed sense of self...";<sup>72</sup> only with this new self-esteem were women able to devote their energies to the proper development of anarchism. Ackelsberg also notes that

Those (women) who did not participate actively may well have experienced even revolutionary activities as simply one further manifestation of their relative marginality.<sup>73</sup>

The anarchists risked alienating women with their very beliefs. They attacked the institutions of the church and the family, two structures that were supported primarily by women, and in which women found their community. Temma Kaplan explains that "however exploitative the family and the church may have been, these institutions provided women with a sense of stability, status, and

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<sup>70</sup> Ackelsberg, "Mujeres Libres: Individuality" 6.

<sup>71</sup> Ackelsberg, "Revolution" 107.

<sup>72</sup> Ackelsberg, Mujeres Libres and the Role 119.

<sup>73</sup> Ackelsberg, "Mujeres Libres and the Role" 102.

dignity."<sup>74</sup> For women, the revolution had a meaning vastly different from the meaning it held for men; it was to bring about changes that affected the structure and practices of family life. The traditional women's arena, the church, was to diminish greatly in importance; in some areas of Catalunya, religious marriage became extremely infrequent. Birth control was practiced more widely than ever before. The restrictions on free interaction between young people were loosened, and in many regions, young women were able to choose their own fiancés for the first time.<sup>75</sup>

Scientific education, (male anarchists) said, could tutor volition by liberating men from fear of the supernatural. But (they) never alluded to the possibility of tutoring female will, strengthening it to withstand exhortations by the clergy and to overcome internal fear based on superstition, let alone to confront their fathers and husbands over psychological or political issues.<sup>76</sup>

Mujeres Libres were wise in not stressing their association with the anarchists, then. Instead, they hoped to give women the self-confidence to realize their own inherent worth, to give them status and dignity, independent of any social structure. In this way they provided an alternate support group to the church.<sup>77</sup>

Although Mujeres Libres dedicated themselves to "tutoring female will", they did not ignore the necessity of re-educating men too. For this Saornil formulated a four point list of goals. These were:

- 1) Eliminación del concepto de superioridad masculina. (An elimination of the concept of male superiority.)

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<sup>74</sup>Temma Kaplan, "Other Scenarios: Women and Spanish Anarchism" Becoming Visible: Women in European History ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977) 402.

<sup>75</sup>Ackelsberg, "Revolution" 93.

<sup>76</sup>Kaplan. "Other" 412.

<sup>77</sup>Kaplan, "Other" 419.

- 2) Conciencia por parte de los hombres de que todos los seres humanos eran iguales y que, por tanto, la mujer era igual al hombre. (A male consciousness that all human beings are equal, and therefore, women are equal to men.)
- 3) Aceptación del hecho de que las mujeres tenían una inteligencia igual que la del hombre y una sensibilidad similar y que como personas humanas tenían una necesidad de superación parecida a la del hombre. (An acceptance of the fact that women have an intelligence equal to that of men and a similar sensibility and that as human beings they too have a need to excel.)
- 4) Necesidad de implantar la igualdad y la justicia en el hogar antes de intentar implantarla en el contexto general de la sociedad. (A realization that it is necessary to plant equality and justice in the home before trying to plant it in the general context of society.)<sup>78</sup>

To facilitate the implementation of these theories, Mujeres Libres provided techno-professional instruction to women so that they could occupy a range of positions at work, thus proving their competence. They created numerous day care facilities in factories and agricultural collectives (although no men were ever employed in these facilities<sup>79</sup>), and cafeterias for both sexes so that housework would be alleviated, allowing women to spend, like their husbands, far less time in the house. They also advised equal pay for equal work.<sup>80</sup>

In addition to this agenda, Mujeres Libres put forth a list of their goals concerning women. These were the following:

- 1) Emancipar a la mujer de la triple esclavitud a que, generalmente, ha estado y sigue estando sometida: la esclavitud de ignorancia, esclavitud de mujer y esclavitud de productora. (Emancipate women from the triple slavery to which, generally, she has been and continues to be submitted: the slavery of being ignorant, a woman, and a worker.)

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<sup>78</sup>Nash, "Dos" 91.

<sup>79</sup>Kaplan, "Spanish" 107.

<sup>80</sup>Nash, "Mujeres Libres" 30.

- 2) Hacer de Nuestra Organización una fuerza femenina consciente y responsable que actúe como vanguardia en el movimiento revolucionario. (Make of Our Organization a conscientious and responsible feminine force that will act as a vanguard in the revolutionary movement.)
- 3) Combatir la ignorancia capacitando a las compañeras cultural y socialmente por medio de clases elementales, conferencias, charlas, lecturas comentadas, proyecciones cinematográficas, etcétera. (Combat ignorance, capacitating the women culturally and socially by means of basic classes, conferences, chats, commentated lectures, films, etc.)
- 4) Establecer un intercambio con Sindicatos, Ateneos y Juventudes Libertarias, a fin de llegar a un engranaje que vigorice nuestro movimiento revolucionario. (...) (Establish a dialogue with Syndicates, Ateneos and Libertarian Youth, with the goal of creating a network that will strengthen our revolutionary movement.)
- 5) Llegar a una auténtica coincidencia entre compañeros y compañeras: convivir, colaborar, y no excluirse; sumar energía en la obra común. (Arrive at an authentic equality between *compañeros* and *compañeras*: to live together, to collaborate, and not to exclude one another; join energies for the common cause.)
- 6) Preparar una poderosa aportación femenina a la tarea revolucionaria constructiva, ofreciendo a la misma, enfermeras, profesoras, médicos, artistas, puericultoras, químicas, obreras inteligentes: algo más efectivo que la sola buena voluntad llena de ignorancia. (Prepare a powerful feminine contribution constructive to revolutionary work, offering to it nurses, teachers, doctors, artists, pediatricians, chemists, intelligent workers: something more effective than just good will filled with ignorance.)<sup>81</sup>

Male anarchists in general were hostile to Mujeres Libres; this further indicates a need for the group's existence. Sara Guillén recounts that she

became involved with Mujeres Libres - despite feeling, initially, that it was wrong, to have a separate organization for women - when she found herself defending the women's right to meet against the taunts and jeers

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<sup>81</sup>Nash, "Dos" 93.



of her male peers.<sup>82</sup>

#### Mercedes Comaposada reports

They wanted me to teach...But it was impossible, because of the attitudes of some *compañeros*. They didn't take women seriously. They thought all women needed to do was cook and sew...Women barely dared to speak in that context.

"He visto muchos hogares...de anarquistas regidos por las más puras normas feudales." (I have seen many anarchist homes guided by the most purely feudal norms.)<sup>83</sup> There were those who wanted women to be active, but not for the ends of feminine autonomy, but rather for revolutionary victory.<sup>84</sup> "Cómo dirás a la compañera 'ayúdame a llevar esta carga' cuando no es dueña de sus pies ni de sus manos?" (How will you say to your *compañera* "help me carry this load" when she is not the owner of her own feet or hands?)<sup>85</sup>

Not only were many of their male *compañeros* hostile to the idea of a separate woman's group (one which would not simply be a woman's branch of the anarchist movement), but they encountered hostility from the organization itself for this very reason. *Mujeres Libres* tried to become associated with the main anarchist establishment: the CNT (the National Confederation of Work). They needed financial support, and believed anarchism to be the best context for women's emancipation. Ackelsberg reports that

Members of *Mujeres Libres* who met with the leaders of the CNT reported that (they) agreed to "accept" *Mujeres Libres* as part of the movement - even to fund its activities - on the condition that *Mujeres Libres* would allow the *movement* to determine its programs and set its

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<sup>82</sup> Ackelsberg, "*Mujeres Libres: Individuality*" 5.

<sup>83</sup> Nash, "*Mujeres Libres*" 44.

<sup>84</sup> Nash, "*Mujeres Libres*" 48.

<sup>85</sup> Nash, "*Mujeres Libres*" 55.

priorities.<sup>86</sup>

But Mujeres Libres insisted upon retaining their autonomy and freedom to determine their own program and methods. Lucía Sánchez Saornil believed strongly that

It is not the place of men to establish the role of women in society, however elevated that might be. The anarchist way, I repeat, is to let *the woman act on her own freedom, without either guides or enforcement*, to let her move in the direction that her inclinations and abilities direct.<sup>87</sup>

The CNT was hostile to this attitude despite the fact that Mujeres Libres were getting women involved in anarchism who otherwise might not have been involved with it in any manner whatsoever. The CNT, as supposed anarchists, had no right to deny Mujeres Libres their right to a separate women's organization. One modern writer on anarchism states that

Spanish anarcho-syndicalism had long been concerned to safeguard the autonomy of what it called "affinity groups". There were many adepts of naturism and vegetarianism among its members...

He continues on to say that the CNT provided for delegates from these groups to "negotiate special economic agreements" so that they could be provided for when they could not provide for themselves.

On the eve of a vast, bloody, social transformation, the CNT did not think it foolish to try to meet the infinitely varied aspirations of individual human beings.<sup>88</sup>

But only if those human beings were men.

Not only did Mujeres Libres refuse to depend on a political organization to represent their interests, but they did not depend on a revolution either. If, as

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<sup>86</sup> Ackelsberg, "Mujeres Libres and the Role" 123.

<sup>87</sup> Nash, Mujeres Libres" 64. Translated in Ackelsberg, "Mujeres Libres: Individuality" 7.

<sup>88</sup> Daniel Guerín, Anarchism: From Theory to Practice (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970) 123.

Montseny said, "an anarchist (becomes) of necessity a permanent rebel",<sup>89</sup> then Mujeres Libres were the rebels' rebels. Anarchists supposedly opposed "piecemeal reforms"; for example, rather than provide temporary legislation to better working conditions, they preferred full scale revolution.<sup>90</sup> But by providing a revolution that was still based in patriarchy, one in which men and women did not participate equally, they *were* making piecemeal reforms. Only the women of Mujeres Libres clearly understood the role that women must play to make the revolution truly full scale.

With the coming of the Spanish Civil War, Mujeres Libres had to change their tactics. No longer could they concentrate so much on vocational training for women; they now had to make their efforts war related. They began to try to incorporate women into production and raise their consciousnesses about the significance of the times in the fight for a social revolution.<sup>91</sup> Therefore they created a rearguard. They organized women to be sent to the front, where they would work as nurses, as well as do washing and ironing of the soldiers' clothing. They also sent provisions to the hungry in Madrid, got syndicate help for and organized courses in nursing and pediatrics for 15,000 women in public services.<sup>92</sup> It is evident from these activities that Mujeres Libres did not seek to change the traditional division of labor by gender. Although some women did go to the front to fight, and the first of these women were anarchists, Mujeres Libres themselves did not send women for this purpose. One member, Pilar Grangel, said

El primer deber de la mujer como ser viviente es el trabajo... El trabajo

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<sup>89</sup>Fredricks, "The Social" 51.

<sup>90</sup>Kaplan, "Other" 410.

<sup>91</sup>Nash, Mujer 87.

<sup>92</sup>Nash, "Mujeres Libres" 72.

es la ley del progreso humano, y el que se niegue a cumplir esta ley es un perturbador, es un parásito y, como todo parásito, es, forzosamente, una carga para los demás. (Woman's first duty as a living being is work. Work is the law of human progress, and whosoever refuses to fulfill this law is a subversive, is a parasite, and like all parasites, is inevitably a burden to the rest.)<sup>93</sup>

But housework did not count as work. Grangel affirms that the woman who is only a housewife is a "parasite of society" who lives at the expense of the rest of the collective.<sup>94</sup>

Toda la propaganda, todas las acciones en favor de la familia, de ese ficticio calor hogareño, mantienen a la mujer en su posición de siempre: alejada de la producción y sin derechos. (All the propaganda in favor of the family, of that fictitious warmth of the home, keeps woman in her position of always: removed from production and without rights.)<sup>95</sup>

It is important to note that not all members of *Mujeres Libres* shared Pilar Grangel's view. Nevertheless, hers was a sadly typical stance, and Grangel, like most, did not suggest that men share in these tasks so that both partners would have time to work in the factories. Although women in the left had more possibilities than most, they still had their duties toward their *compañeros* and the housework.

Temma Kaplan notes that

Male anarchists' initial response to an increase of women into the labor force came in 1871, when the Congress of Valencia went on record as supporting women's return to the household in future anarchist society.<sup>96</sup>

The anarchists, for all their principles, were born and raised in a society where women were considered inferior, thus men considered the work traditionally done by

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<sup>93</sup>Nash, *Mujer* 106.

<sup>94</sup>Nash, *Mujer* 109.

<sup>95</sup>Nash, *Mujer* 108.

<sup>96</sup>Kaplan, "Other" 406.

women to be beneath their dignity. *Mujeres Libres* made it of primary concern to incorporate women into the work force, but they never really considered the integration of men into domestic work. Once again, Daniel Guerín typifies the male anarchist attitude. He writes:

Throughout their lives all men were to be assured of access to science, art, and research of all kinds...once his day's work as a producer was finished the individual was to be the absolute master of his own time.<sup>97</sup>

These are high ideals, but if women must work in the factories as well as take care of the home, they will hardly be the "mistresses of their own time" once their day's work at the factory is done. Of course men would have been able to be masters of their own time - in a sense they always had been - because there had always been women to take up the domestic slack. By not challenging this labor division explicitly, *Mujeres Libres* may have, for all their good intentions, imposed a new double burden on women - that of having to be both housewife *and* factory worker - our modern day "superwoman".

The old double burden was, of course, that of worker and woman. As a woman one had to combat both the bourgeoisie and the patriarchy. *Mujeres Libres* promoted themselves as the female masses who were struggling to overcome that double burden. They saw education as instrumental in the fight; in fact, Montseny collaborated with them on many of their programs. Education, in their opinion, would not only serve to give women a greater understanding of the importance of anarchism, but would also serve to increase their independence by giving them the faculties to form their own opinions.<sup>98</sup> *Mujeres Libres* therefore sponsored a number of programs, some in collaboration with Federica Montseny.

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<sup>97</sup> Guerín, *Anarchism* 122.

<sup>98</sup> Nash, "*Mujeres Libres*" 27.

## PART IV

### The Collaboration of Montseny and Mujeres Libres

Montseny herself was particularly active concerning abortion and prostitution. Her first act in office was to legalize abortion. She argued in favour of birth-control education, and fought for the reform of laws governing prostitution.

Montseny says in an address given in 1937:

Que la prostitución será abolida en el momento en que las relaciones sexuales se liberen. En el momento en que se transforme la moral cristiana y burguesa, en el momento en que la mujer tenga una profesión y una posibilidad social que asegure siempre su vida y la de sus hijos, en el momento en que la sociedad esté organizada de manera que ningún ser quede al margen de ella.<sup>99</sup> (Prostitution will be abolished when sexual relations are liberalized; when Christian and bourgeois morality is 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.)<sup>100</sup>

If prostitution was theoretically abhorrent to the anarchists, many did not express this in practice. In a poster distributed by Mujeres Libres during the war, it is noted that the music halls and brothels are full of anti-fascist men from all sides, including many anarchists. A plea is made to these *compañeros*; "No seais vosotros, nuestros propios camaradas, los que entorpezcáis con una conducta de señoritos, una labor de por sí tan difícil." (Don't you, our own comrades, be those

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<sup>99</sup>Federica Montseny, Mi Experiencia en el Ministerio de Sanidad y Asistencia Social Conference given June 6, 1937 in Valencia, Spain. (Barcelona: Ediciones de la Comisión de Propaganda y Prensa del Comité Nacional de la C.N.T.) 27.

<sup>100</sup>Translated in Kaplan, "Spanish" 108.

who hinder, with bourgeois conduct, a task that is in and of itself so difficult.)<sup>101</sup> Mujeres Libres worked hard to establish *libertarios de prostitución* - establishments where women could go to receive shelter and be trained to do skilled labor, so that they would not need to return to prostitution for their livelihood. Montseny encouraged Mujeres Libres' efforts to establish schools and to train women for useful, skilled and honorable employment, as well as their efforts to provide medical care and homes for orphans and unwed mothers and teach health and sanitation.

Montseny and Mujeres Libres were strong advocates of sexual education for women - to teach them about their own bodies and provide them with birth control, thereby enabling motherhood by choice, and the reduced incidence of unwanted children. Consequently, Mujeres Libres provided courses in sexual education and gave instruction in birth-control to the women with whom they worked.<sup>102</sup> Birth control was also provided to a large extent by "storefront cultural centers and free schools that sprang up in many rural towns and in every working-class neighborhood of Barcelona and neighboring cities in the early years of the Republic by CNT unions."<sup>103</sup> (Remember that Montseny was the Minister of Health and Public Assistance - her contribution to sexual education may be seen as part of this larger effort by the CNT). Montseny also helped Mujeres Libres set up schools and nurseries for working mothers. She also worked in the CNT's evening schools teaching men and women to read, and Mujeres Libres sponsored literacy campaigns.

Despite her extensive collaboration with Mujeres Libres, Montseny felt, as did many others, that they might end up turning women against men. But Mujeres

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<sup>101</sup> Jaume Miravittles and Josep Termes, *Carteles de la República y de la Guerra Civil* (Barcelona: Editorial La Gaya Ciencia, 1978) Poster marked: Centre D'Estudis D'Historia Contemporania, Biblioteca Figueras; Mujeres Libres. Pi y Margall, 14 - Madrid. Designed by C. O. Avant.

<sup>102</sup> Kaplan, "Spanish" 108

<sup>103</sup> Ackelsberg, "Revolution" 93.

Libres considered the interests of men and women to be intricately linked, and for this reason they did not trust in the social revolution to bring about their goals for women. They felt the anarchist struggle for a revolutionary new society to be quite different from the feminist struggle. In the anarchist analysis of class struggle, the interests of the workers were not and could not be compatible with the interests of the bourgeoisie; the two could not co-exist. But the case was not the same when one considered men and women's interests, argued Lucía Sánchez Saornil.<sup>104</sup> Men and women ultimately have the same interests. The two can not be in opposition because they naturally need one another. If in the existing society the interests of men and women were antagonistic, then it was due to capitalism and women's inability to be economically independent. If capitalism was thus linked to patriarchy, then naturally anarchism was incompatible with patriarchy. It was probably Mujeres Libres conviction that the social revolution, conceived as it was, would not bring about women's equality to which their *compañeros* in the CNT and elsewhere took offense.

Mujeres Libres' view on women and revolution was not the only one that fell outside the realm of mainstream anarchist thought. On the whole, they were also in disagreement with the traditional anarchist ideal of "free love". Too often this concept translated: men may be promiscuous, and women may not refuse. It ultimately meant that women would be expected to give themselves to who ever might want them without the possibility of choosing someone themselves, and most importantly, without the possibility of saying no. "Free love" is based on the equality of the sexes; without true freedom, women would simply continue to be abused in this realm too. Montseny agreed with Mujeres Libres on this point. She felt that "un amor de este tipo constituiría la negación de la individualidad de la

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<sup>104</sup>Nash, Mujer 95.



persona" (a love of this type would constitute the negation of the individuality of the person)<sup>105</sup> because it would become a mere satisfying of sexual desires.

Although there may have been a consensus of opinion about free love, several opposing attitudes existed on maternity among the members of *Mujeres Libres*. Some, like Amparo Poch y Gascón, agreed with Federica Montseny that a woman without children had not realized herself yet.

A la maternidad habría de considerársela como una de las bellas artes. La madre ha de ser un artista, un poeta de la forma y del sentimiento. Y el hijo la culminación artística, la obra legada a la posteridad...mujer sin hijos, árbol sin fruto, rosal sin rosas." (One might consider maternity a fine art. The mother must be an artist, a poet of form and sentiment. And the child the artistic culmination, the legacy to posterity...women without children, tree without fruit, rose bush without roses.)<sup>106</sup>

This is a strange view for a woman who values self-realization so highly and recognizes that "free love" negates one's individuality. Assigning woman the duty of bearing children negates her will as an individual - it negates her individuality under the concept heading of motherhood. If Montseny agreed with her father that motherhood was a duty, maybe it was because she was comparing people to the natural ways of animals, who exist solely to propagate their species. But human beings can think, and are capable of much greater (or worse) things than mere reproduction.

Motherhood versus birth control was and still is a sensitive issue for some leftist factions. In the opinion of some, an ideal society should be structured so as to be able to support any and all children. (Birth control might be seen as a necessity if this society does not exist.) Montseny may have been a proponent of this view; it is not clear. Others, like Lucía Sánchez Saornil recognized that the

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<sup>105</sup>Nash, "Dos" 80.

<sup>106</sup>Nash, Mujer 56.

conception of motherhood as a duty was just one more way in which women were oppressed. The problem lay in "el concepto de madre absorbiendo al de la mujer, la función anulando al individuo." (the concept of mother absorbing that of woman, the function annihilating the individual.)<sup>107</sup> Saornil contested those who disagreed with her "Que las mujeres sean mujeres ante todo; solo siendo mujeres tendréis después las madres que necesitáis." (Women must be women before all; only by letting them be women will you have afterward the mothers that you need.)<sup>108</sup>

The annihilation of the individual with the concept of mother also led Saornil to say

Frente a (estos anarquistas) me asalta esta duda: si son anarquistas no son sinceros, si son sinceros no son anarquistas. (Faced with such anarchists I am struck with this doubt: if they are anarchists, they are not sincere; if they are sincere, they are not anarchists.)<sup>109</sup>

To truly be an anarchist, one must believe that the individual comes before all else. Nevertheless, the ideal of woman as mother was prevalent for most anarchists. Oken said "La mujer no es el fin, sino el medio de la naturaleza; el único fin y objeto es el hombre" (Woman is not the end, but rather the means of nature. The only end and objective is man.)<sup>110</sup> An opinion such as this is extremely disheartening for any feminist to hear, and it greatly dismayed Saornil. But the anarchists, having been educated by the church, were hardly immune to the dichotomous view of women prevalent at that time. A woman was either a prostitute or a virgin-turned-mother. Similarly, women to the anarchists were either poor (ignorant, superstitious, servile drones), or liberated (virtuous mothers of revolutionary

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<sup>107</sup>Nash, "Dos" 89.

<sup>108</sup>Nash, "Dos" 90.

<sup>109</sup>Nash, "Dos" 57.

<sup>110</sup>Nash, "Mujeres Libres" 55.

sons.<sup>111</sup>) Saornil recognized this categorization and correctly perceived that women had always been seen in terms of their relation to men - *i.e.* their roles as mothers. In primitive society, women were the mothers of warriors. In Roman society, they were the mothers of citizens of the Republic. In Christian society, woman is the mother of God. The other side of the coin is prostitution. Woman is one or the other.<sup>112</sup> Despite the variance in opinions on motherhood, both *Mujeres Libres* and Federica Montseny recognized the need for conscientious motherhood.<sup>113</sup> Population control - motherhood by choice - was very important to the formation of a new society in which children would grow up psychologically healthy, knowing that they had been wanted and were loved.

Traditionally anarchists have wished to do away with the family because they feel that it is the perpetrator of patriarchal capitalistic values; the father has monetary and social control over his children and wife. But the family is an intricate part of most cultures, and Spanish culture is certainly no exception. Thus, most anarchists thought that at least one parent (probably the mother) ought to be concerned with raising the children. Home education was therefore seen as preferential to collective formation.<sup>114</sup> Montseny agreed strongly with this view. She believed that children belong to the mother by virtue of a "natural law,"<sup>115</sup> and that she ought to be responsible for their education.<sup>116</sup> *Mujeres Libres*, on the other hand, believed that once the children were born it was the responsibility of *both*

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<sup>111</sup>Kaplan, "Other" 417.

<sup>112</sup>Nash. "Mujeres Libres" 56.

<sup>113</sup>Nash, "Mujeres Libres" 33.

<sup>114</sup>Nash, "Mujeres Libres" 36.

<sup>115</sup>Nash, "Dos" 82.

<sup>116</sup>Nash, Mujer 54.

parents to take care of them. "El deber de la mujer era dar a la sociedad 'hijos dignos, hombres educados', pero de 'este deber no puede desligarse el hombre'." (The duty of the woman is to give society 'dignified children, educated men,' but man cannot extricate himself from this duty.)<sup>117</sup> This is the first visible sign of changing gender roles.

It is ironic to note that those women who became the most deeply involved with the anarchist movement did not have children of their own.<sup>118</sup> Montseny too, although she did have three children, began her revolutionary work long before they were born. She asserts (of course) that her children never impeded her; she could just leave them with her parents when she needed to attend to some business.<sup>119</sup> Montseny, in addition to believing that children belong to the mother by a "natural law", did not favor co-habitation between men and women. Although they might have children, she considers co-habitation to be the ultimate destructive factor to true love. For her, the children are raised by and live with the mother. But this would be a great hinderance to any woman striving for self-realization. Obviously any woman without an instant babysitter would be far less likely to make significant contributions to the anarchist movement.

The anarchists were known for their "back to nature" views, and Montseny was no exception here either. They influenced her ideas about what men and women were like inherently, and her ideas on motherhood.

On one occasion Montseny synthesized the two aspects (of women's strength of character and a soul in tune with nature) by likening a woman to the Valencian countryside, the countryside with its "soul flowing in its natural richness, in its fertile pastures, in its women as

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<sup>117</sup> Nash, Mujer 110.

<sup>118</sup> Ackelsberg, "Mujeres Libres: Individuality" 5.

<sup>119</sup> Alcalde. Federica 46.

fertile as its countryside--women who do not give birth to sons for slavery or war."<sup>120</sup>

This quotation nicely supports Saornil's contention that women have always been seen as the mothers of sons. Several authors have written cogent criticism of the idea of "woman as nature".<sup>121</sup> One, Robin Morgan, says about this idea

To embrace nature as some mystical special sister of women and not men is to place female human beings on the other side of a senseless barrier already erected by (society).<sup>122</sup>

Thus Montseny, by insisting that women were so intimately linked to nature, may have unwittingly been fomenting the very division between men and women that she feared *Mujeres Libres* would create.

There are many contradictions present in Montseny's theories on marriage and childbirth. She sees monogamy and the nuclear family as sure death for true love. Thus she recommends that people not live together. Yet we learn that after their exile from Spain, Federica did live with her *compañero* Germinal in Toulouse. But it is possible that after their children left home she reconsidered her theory on co-habitation. She feels that children belong to the mother; their upbringing and education must rest with her. She therefore rejects any sort of programs to collectivize children.<sup>123</sup> Nevertheless, Montseny admits that the biggest obstacle to self-realization are children.<sup>124</sup> Nash points out that Montseny does not seem to see any contradiction between a mother educating her children to critically analyze the

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<sup>120</sup> Fredricks, "The Social" 133.

<sup>121</sup> see Robin Morgan (cited below) and Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" *Woman, Culture, and Society* ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1973) 67-87.

<sup>122</sup> Robin Morgan, *The Anatomy of Freedom: Feminism, Physics and Global Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1984) 45.

<sup>123</sup> Nash, *Mujer* 55.

<sup>124</sup> Nash, "Dos" 81.

world around them, and her support of the anarchist doctrine of allowing people to come to their own conclusions. In other words, self-realization does not apply to children.<sup>125</sup> Why then should it apply especially to women? If women are just as ignorant of their situation as (shall we say) children, then why do they not have the right to education too?

Lucía Sánchez Saornil understood that one can not blame the slave for her state of slavery unless she accepts that state with full consciousness, and not when it is imposed upon her by violence, as it often is in the case of women.<sup>126</sup> It is clear that women did not accept their state of slavery with full consciousness. Many women were probably unaware that they were even in a position of inferiority. After all, *Mujeres Libres* and Federica Montseny accepted without protest the gender roles prevalent in their time. We, on the other hand, easily see the injustice of these roles, but it is only because we have been educated to see them. We have become aware that they exist. Similarly, the women of the Spanish Civil War era needed to be educated to see the problems most hindering them. This is in clear opposition to Montseny's view that women must be able to overcome their state of domination through self-realization. Were women able to make their choice with full consciousness, then they would already have undergone self-realization and emancipated themselves from slavery. But the fact that they did not have the faculties means that they needed somehow to be supported and given the opportunity to develop these faculties. What Montseny refused to admit to is that in order for her plan of self-realization to work, women would have to band together in support groups like *Mujeres Libres* that intended precisely to elevate them from ignorance. By definition these groups would be feminist in nature.

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<sup>125</sup>Nash, *Mujer* 55.

<sup>126</sup>Nash, *Mujer* 36.

But in 1938 Soledad Estorach of Mujeres Libres said

Está en error quien se imagina que esto es una entidad feminista. No. Es simplemente un centro de capacitación de la mujer en todos los terrenos. (Whoever imagines that this is a feminist group is wrong. No. It is simply a center for the empowerment of women in all fields.)<sup>127</sup>

She says later on that "There were people who said...that we were in danger of falling into 'feminism'. Now I - and most of us- had never heard of 'feminism' before."<sup>128</sup> It seems clear at this point that Montseny, and indeed the women of Mujeres Libres, knew a meaning for feminism distinct from that which we know today. They knew what it meant in the context of their experience with it, but feminism to the anarchist women of the Spanish Civil War had a very limited meaning. For them "no woman gained equality by cutting her hair, putting on pants, painting her face, or smoking, which 'liberated' women were doing in the 1920's."<sup>129</sup> To these anarchist women, women who participated in capitalist society and demanded an "equality of domination" with men could never be truly emancipated. There were also those "feminists" who met in bourgeois parlors to read and discuss the latest in cultural or intellectual trends - ladies' reading circles, as it were. Neither were these women admirable to the anarchists. When we understand that these were the "feminists" of the 1920's, it is clear why Montseny was so vehement in rejecting their brand of feminism.

Montseny says that

En realidad no existe feminismo de ninguna clase, y si alguno existiera, habríamos de llamarlo fascista, pues sería tan reaccionario e intolerante... (In reality no class of feminism exists in Spain, and if some sort did exist, we would have to call it fascist, since it would be so

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<sup>127</sup> Nash, Mujer 96.

<sup>128</sup> Ackelsberg, "Mujeres Libres: Individuality" 7.

<sup>129</sup> Fredricks, "The Social" 135.

reactionary and intolerant...)<sup>130</sup>

Then it is also clear that Montseny did not consider Mujeres Libres feminist. Feminism of the day reinforced bourgeois morality and therefore a system that the anarchists were working hard to change. What they really needed to do was to redefine feminism. "We ought not content ourselves with all the rights which men have. We ought to aspire, with indomitable will, to all the rights he should have."<sup>131</sup> For future generations they may have unwittingly made a good start at doing just that.

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<sup>130</sup>Nash, "Dos" 85.

<sup>131</sup>Fredricks, "The Social" 136.



## PART V

### Conclusions

It appears that there were four basic types of feminine consciousness during the era of the Spanish Civil War. There were women's literary circles. The women of the 1930's were still working within a society where women's very intelligence was being questioned. In a question and answer page of the magazine Estudios of 1936 the question was raised: is woman as intelligent as man? The answer provided was that with proper education she would *almost* be in some cases.<sup>132</sup> With this in mind, the literary circles were probably formed to show that women were capable of thinking about more than just the home. Secondly, there were the suffragists. To an anarchist way of thinking, these women were asking for the right to privilege too. Next, there was the consciousness embodied by Federica Montseny. As anarchists, privilege and domination are wrong and must be done away with. In this way women and men must become equal, but, also as anarchists, it would not be right to force the necessity of this equality on them. Unfortunately, then, the more ignorant people remain unenlightened. Finally, there were Mujeres Libres. Women and men must become equal in the anarchist sense, and in order bring this about women must be taught to have self-confidence. With this new perception of themselves, they will demand to be taken seriously, and show that they are indeed equal to men. Soon no one will be able to dispute it.

Mary Nash concludes that the fundamental difference between Mujeres Libres and Federica Montseny were their assessments of what anarchism meant. This

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<sup>132</sup>Nash, Mujer 28.

could be true in part - Montseny believed in strict individuality - we see this in her theory of self-realization and her rejection of co-habitation. *Mujeres Libres*, on the other hand, believed in collectivization;

Una organización femenina *per se* reconoce la existencia de una cierta especificidad en el problema de la mujer y al mismo tiempo, al ser una organización, la solución del problema se plantea no sólo a nivel individual sino también a nivel colectivo. (A feminine organization *per se* recognizes the existence of a certain specific women's problem and at the same time, in being an organization, the solution to the problem is based not only on an individual level, but on a collective one too.)<sup>133</sup>

More may be said in an analysis of their differences than just this, however. Montseny takes an approach to women's emancipation that ignores the legacy of history. She sees people as responsible for their own states of being as if they were in a vacuum - uninfluenced by society - as if there were no history to contend with, or violence done against women. Therefore, people are individually responsible for recognizing the problem and initiating the process of emancipation themselves. Montseny believed that inequality was perpetrated in a present day situation - the way people formed their love relationships.<sup>134</sup> Of course, forming unions based on equality presumes a prior state of equality, and therefore her analysis is faulty. *Mujeres Libres*, on the other hand, thought that women could not be responsible for history - they had always been relegated a certain position and violence was often used to keep them in that position. Therefore, they saw the problem in terms of the existing structures for gender that had been handed down by history, not in terms of love. Since woman herself was not responsible for this damage done to her, a collective effort was needed to teach her to defend herself, and to alert her to the problem in the first place.

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<sup>133</sup>Nash, "Dos" 98.

<sup>134</sup>Nash, "Dos" 79.

Montseny held opinions quite distinct from those of Mujeres Libres. Yet she did collaborate with them. Why? In what way did they support her own views? Perhaps the answer is given in Montseny's statement concerning the CNT's refusal to recognize Mujeres Libres as an autonomous group:

Mientras se jalea y apoya cualquier obra o acción de Mujeres Antifascistas, Unión de Muchachas, etc., nosotras olvidamos un poco lo que es y representa Mujeres Libres...Nosotros no hemos conquistado a la mujer..., sólo ahora pensamos en hacerlo y es triste que esa obra haya de realizarla un grupo de compañeras luchando a brazo partido con los obstáculos y en medio de todo orden de dificultades económicas, e incluso morales, porque no se sienten lo asistidas que debieran por el apoyo de los sindicatos y del movimiento, colectivamente considerado. (While whatever work or action of Antifacist Women, Girls Union, etc. is encouraged and supported, we forget a little what Free Women is and what it represents. We have not won women over. Only now do we think of doing it and it is sad that this task had to be carried out by a group of comrades fighting bitterly with the obstacles and in the middle of all kinds of economic difficulties, and also moral ones, because they don't feel the assistance that they ought to from the syndicates and from the movement, collectively speaking.)<sup>135</sup>

This quote indicates that Montseny may have collaborated with Mujeres Libres mainly because she knew that they were attracting women to anarchism when nobody else was. Therefore, she may not have joined their ranks because she was one of those who thought that the social revolution was more crucial than women's issues. That is to say that as she felt that anarchism was a prerequisite to feminism anyway, she dedicated herself mostly to anarchism.

But Montseny's ideas appear to have changed. Today she admits that

Había problemas específicos, es cierto, que el anarquismo no resolvía, porque hay problemas que sólo puede discutir la mujer...mi propio pensamiento es el siguiente: Considero que, como partidaria de la libertad, la mujer tiene que disponer de sí misma. Si quiere abortar, ¿por qué se le tiene que impedir? Y, ¿por qué se tiene que permitir que aborte con curanderas?...De todas formas, yo estoy convencida que en la mujer

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<sup>135</sup>Nash, Mujer 105.

hay un instinto maternal que hace que desee tener hijos... (It is true that there were specific problems that anarchism didn't resolve because there are problems that only women can discuss...my own belief is the following: I believe that as a partisan of freedom, woman has to take care of herself. If she wants to abort, why should she be prevented? And why should she have to go to quacks? In any case, I am convinced that woman has a maternal instinct that makes her want children...)<sup>136</sup>

(She hasn't changed entirely!) In an article of February 1, 1981 entitled "Las <<conquistas>> de la mujer: Otra vez el Opus Dei", Montseny appears to have apprehended the modern meaning of feminism, for she now says "no hemos sido jamás ni feministas ni antifeministas." (we have never been feminists, nor anti-feminists.) But we learn that the latest conquest of woman is that she can now be part of the Guardia Civil. Montseny is wry in her assessment: "Era lo que faltaba para demostrar que una mujer vale un hombre en todos los sentidos." (It was the only thing we lacked to show that a woman is equal to a man in every sense.)<sup>137</sup>

Montseny seems to have been one of the first of the modern day superwomen. She not only had an engrossing and busy professional life, but she also found time to shop, clean, cook, and raise her children. She provided other women with a very important example of what they could achieve by virtue of her own activity.

Never did she seem to run out of the energy necessary to assume one more obligation or task. In this way she supported her contention that a woman could be just as capable as a man.<sup>138</sup>

Still, in 1977, Montseny considers herself a "normal" woman. She

takes care of the house, cleans it, washes the dishes, makes the meals, goes shopping. It's only in the afternoon that (she) tries to have a little time to write, to read, to fulfill (her) obligations to her natural

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<sup>136</sup> Alcalde, Federica 46.

<sup>137</sup> Alcalde, Federica 202.

<sup>138</sup> Fredricks, "The Social" 24.

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Unfortunately, to this author's knowledge, nothing has been written that follows up on the lives of Lucía Sánchez Saornil, Amparo Poch y Gascón, or Mercedes Comaposada. One might wonder if any of these women escaped the division of labor by gender in their own lives. It seems doubtful. Yet the ideologies of both *Mujeres Libres* and Federica Montseny were lightyears ahead of the ideologies that preceded them. For this reason they made an enormous contribution to the lives of their contemporaries and Spanish feminism in general.

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<sup>139</sup> Alcalde, *Federica* 26.

Postscript

While doing this study I came to the realization that many of the women I was reading about had very strong relationships with their fathers. This puzzled me. Of course, everyone who learns valuable lessons from their parents is lucky, but why did these women emphasize their father's as opposed to their mother's role? Of *Mujeres Libres*, Sara Guillén "became acquainted with the CNT through attending union meetings with her father." "Soledad Estorach's father...had imbued her with a love of learning..." Pepita Carpeña, "in response to her father's reluctance to allow her to attend meetings at night...told him, 'I am only doing what you should have been doing in my place: fighting for the emancipation of the workers!'"<sup>140</sup> Mercedes Comaposada is also identified as being "the daughter of a socialist father".<sup>141</sup>

I soon realized that I was approaching the question in the wrong way. The question is not "What about these women made them admire their fathers?" but rather "What did their fathers do to become such inspirational forces for these women?" Phrased this way, the answer is quite simple. Their fathers simply treated them as valuable human beings, and probably did not take their opinions any less seriously than the opinions of any brothers they may have had. Therefore, these women grew up to have self-esteem and self-confidence, aware that they were just as intelligent as men. Their fathers gave them their first gift of empowerment. This is *not* to say that a woman's mother might not give her this same gift. My resolution of the question may only pertain to a highly patriarchal culture like the Spanish one. It does appear that in these cases, the father played the paramount role.

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<sup>140</sup> Ackelsberg, "Mujeres Libres: Individuality" 5.

<sup>141</sup> Ackelsberg, "Mujeres Libres: Individuality" 6.

The mothers of these women, on the other hand, may not have grown up having such fathers. Thus they may not have learned to treat their daughters as equal to their sons. This phenomenon persists into modern day Spain; I have observed that women are often very jealous of their more liberated daughters. These women often try to constrain their daughters from fulfilling their academic or professional goals and instead impose upon them the idea that they must try to find a good husband. Of course, the subtext of this message is that you achieve your worth through the status of your husband; he is more important, more valuable than you. In Federica Montseny and Mujeres Libres' time, only women who associated with their fathers could make it in the political realm - their fathers gave them the status and dignity that the church provided to other women. Nowadays we have a new consciousness: women must band together and take their examples from other women - their mothers, their colleagues and historic female figures. Women and their bonds to each other are now the core of our movement.

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