



Past, Present and Future of Anarchafeminism in Spain

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Introduction

Spanish anarchist tradition dates back to the end of the 19th century and acquired greater importance early in the following century. Since the beginning, both anarchism and anarchafeminism¹ co-existed for a long time and were well established.

During the 1930s in Spain, a group of women made history in a number of fields (education, employment, personal relationships, debates on prostitution, abortion and free love, for example). Free Women (*Mujeres Libres*, MMLL) was established in 1936 on the basis of affinity, but not just in trade union and employment sectors. They believed it was necessary to develop their own aims as an autonomous women's organisation despite the fact that they had the same anarchosyndicalist² way of thinking as the National Confederation of Labour (*Confederación Nacional de Trabajo*, CNT)³ and the Iberian Anarchist Federation (*Federación Anarquista Ibérica*, FAI)⁴.

¹ Also called anarchist feminist or anarchofeminism, I will choose to use in this text interchangeably anarchist feminist and anarchafeminist. I prefer anarchafeminist rather than anarchofeminism because, as Chiara Bottici (2021a) argues, the term was feminizing by feminist social movements to emphasize the convergence between feminisms and the anarchist theory and practice.

² Anarchosyndicalism can be defined as a method of organization, struggle and direct action of the workers. It has its roots in the postulates of both the First International and revolutionary syndicalism. Anarchosyndicalism is not a doctrine or a philosophy. Its theoretical content is extracted from humanist socialism and mainly from anarchism. Defending in its postulates the total emancipation of human beings, freedom, solidarity, mutual support and a voluntary and federative association (Esgleas 1976).

³ By 1911, its initial 9,000 members had swelled to 30,000 (half of them were Catalans but numbers were strong in Andalusia, Zaragoza, Gijon and La Rioja). In 1916 it had increased to 50,000 members. After the congress that was held on the outskirts of Barcelona in 1918, the numbers rose to 80,000 (above all in Catalonia, which accounted for 70,000) and two months later they reached 114,000 members. There were more than 450 delegates representing almost 800,000 male and female members at the Madrid congress held in 1919 (Iñiguez 2001).

⁴ The *Federación Anarquista Ibérica* came into being in Valencia in 1927 with the aim of bringing together the specific anarchist groups that were dotted over the Iberian Peninsula or in exile abroad. Its mission was to develop anarchist propaganda from those groups with a view to spreading the libertarian idea to every corner, maintaining fraternal relations with the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*-CNT, but guaranteeing the independence of each of the organisations. Several groups and bodies shared in its founding (Gómez 2002; Vadillo 2007).



The coup d'état led by Francisco Franco in 1936 also heralded the start of the so-called "Spanish Revolution", in which the CNT, the FAI and MMLL collectivised factories, hotels, hair salons and barbershops, restaurants and agricultural areas during the three years that the Spanish Civil War lasted (1936-1939). Their workers—men and women—used committees and cooperatives based on anarchosyndicalist and libertarian communist principles to organise a number of workplaces throughout the country.

It is estimated that the number of members of *Mujeres Libres* grew to approximately 20,000 (Nash 1977). Its constituent organisations increased during the war in every village and neighbourhood of large cities, reaching a total of 28,000 women who engaged in countless activities, among which the recruitment of women for performing the most urgent war-related jobs, their general and technical training, and participation in the collectives of various industries and on the land (Agulló 2018).

The Republican faction was defeated in 1939 and Franco imposed a national Catholic-oriented dictatorship for more than three decades (1939-1975). During that period, Republican women, particularly those with anarchist leanings, were brutally repressed for having challenged the political, social and private status quo. Many women were forced to go into exile in or outside of Spain. Anarchist women were silenced and forgotten both in Spain and abroad.

This piece of work is a part of ongoing research that analyses the memory of all these women who still define themselves as anarchafeminists, who belong to the CNT, the General Confederation of Labour (*Confederación General de Trabajo*, CGT), social movements, autonomous groups or are currently not linked to any political or social group. The aim of it is not only recovering anarchafeminist insights by "enlarging feminist strategies precisely in a moment when, as intersectional feminists have argued, different factors increasingly converge to intensify the oppression of women by creating further class, cultural, and racial divisions among them" (Bottici 2021b: 217), I will also make the Spanish anarchafeminist tradition more visible as part of historical continuity of present women's struggles.

The History of Anarchist Feminism in Spain

We can find the overall background of anarchist feminism in the origins of both schools of thought and in the socio-historical experiences provided by the French Revolution and industrial capitalism in Europe. Up until then, all this critical thought was included in what was known as utopian socialism or primary socialism, as exemplified by Robert Owen in England, Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier and Étienne Cabet in France,



besides other authors such as the insurrectionist Graco Babeuf, Filippo Buonarroti and Auguste Blanqui. The different currents of this utopian socialism subsequently began giving shape to the International Workers' Association- IWA (*Asociación Internacional de Trabajadores*, AIT; 1864-1876), which was divided into two large dominant ideological blocs: that of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and that of Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876).

The line of thought of women such as the English writer Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) and the French Peruvian writer Flora Tristán (1803-1844) shared some of the features of anarchist authors such as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Mikhail Bakunin. It was not until after the First International meeting had been held in London (1864) that obvious insurmountable differences could be seen between Marxist and Bakuninist thought. The anarchist women who stood out from the start were Louise Michel (1830-1905) in France, Charlotte Wilson (1854-1944) in England, Lucy Parsons (1853-1942) and Voltairine de Cleyre (1866-1912) in the United States of America, Emma Goldman (1869-1940) from the Russian Empire and of Jewish origin, Leda Rafanelli (1880-1971) and Virgilia d'Andrea (1890-1933) in Italy, Juana Rouco (1889-1969) in Argentina, Luisa Capetillo (1879-1922) from Puerto Rico and María Lacerda de Moura (1887-1945) in Brazil, among a great many more. In Spain, Belén Sárraga (1873-1951), Teresa Claramunt (1862-1931) and Teresa Mañé (alias Soledad Gustavo, 1865-1939) were important forerunners of anarchist feminism.⁵

Utopian currents were received in Spain chiefly in the 1830s and had two focal points of development, an Andalusian epicentre, in Cadiz to be precise, with clear Fourierist leanings, and another that was Catalan, in which the greatest influence is attributable to Cabet (Espigado 2005). We should also remember the Spanish context of those times where, in the second half of the 19th century in particular, a process of rapid industrial and economic growth was taking place across the entire peninsula, with particular incidence in the north, which also led to a notable urban workers' movement being formed. Nevertheless, the social and employment discrimination against women was obvious and they had to make do with unskilled salaried employment that was poorly paid. The alternative to a job in industry was domestic work or to take in sewing. Prostitution came after that. Industrialisation had brought with it a life that was unbearable for the working woman and, on the other hand, had caused part of the value

⁵ It is worth highlighting that back in this period feminism was more monolithic, coming from bourgeois, white, upper and middle-class women. As a result, the majority of these women were against that hegemonic feminism and they didn't call themselves feminists (as Free Women from Spain, Emma Goldman or Lucy Parsons). Despite that, today we could call them feminists, understanding that feminism alone is not enough; it has been shown that it can be compatible with structures of domination, which makes an anarchafeminist philosophy essential (Bottici 2021a). In this sense, anarchafeminist becomes almost a category of affiliation, rather than a canon's frame or construction. Therefore, anarchism provides a framework for social transformation and feminism is the connection that links anarchism to the future (Kornegger 1975).



of domestic skills to be lost. Given this social scenario, anarchist ideas and, along with them, anarchafeminist opinions, made their impact (Puente 2017).

It could be said that anarchism was brought to Spain through the Bakuninist ideas of Giuseppe Fanelli (1827-1877). This Italian from Naples travelled to Madrid and Barcelona in 1868 with a view to extending the IWA networks. Paul Lafargue, son-in-law and disciple of Karl Marx, had also arrived in Spain at that time, and was suggesting other ideological and organisational types to the Spanish workers' movement that had opted for anti-authoritarianism. Both of these prominent people, Fanelli and Lafargue, left their mark on the ideological imprint of what were to be the two great schools of the Spanish workers' movement in the future: anarchism and socialism. However, the Spanish workers' movement took a long time to comprehend what the concepts transmitted by both Marx and Bakunin were (Vadillo 2017).

In 1870, what was to be the first anarchist newspaper, called "*La Federación*" (The Federation), appeared and the Spanish Regional Federation (*Federación Regional Española*, FRE), that was part of the AIT, was formed (Prado 2011). That was also when the FRE Congress was held in Barcelona with internationalist women being there too. These women came from having militated in support of the First Spanish Republic (1873-1874) in which they were already levelling criticism against the traditional lifestyle of women and the hierarchy of men and the Catholic Church, apart from being in favour of female freedom and autonomy. Anarchist circles, initially formed by well-off workers or middle-class liberals, were a highly complex conglomerate of organisations. Freemasons, spiritualists and freethinkers, among others, accepted and took responsibility for spreading this new political and philosophical trend (Puente 2017) that was later joined by sectors of the working class.

Female Freethinkers belonging to the urban petite bourgeoisie and, to a lesser extent, the working classes, taught in secular schools, took part in rallies, created their own newspapers, became Freemasons and frequented spiritualist and theosophical centres. They defended a new attitude to sexuality, exploring sexual desires and using birth control, which was to liberate the working class, women in particular. All of this also led to new perceptions being expressed regarding relationships of the heart and 'free love' (Vicente 2018).

Because of the discrimination existing in the society of the times, not only were women slow to join and become active members of these schools of thought, but there were fewer of them. However, this entire hotbed was what allowed truly Spanish anarchist feminism to emerge through pioneers such as Teresa Claramunt and Teresa



Mañé, both of them born in Barcelona, among other women who played an important role in the society of that period, many of whom still remain anonymous.⁶

Anarchist Women in Spain

The National Confederation of Labour (*Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, CNT*), the most important anarchist trade union in Spain, was established in 1910 and soon spread quickly throughout the country. The topic of gender difference and equality was divided between those who followed the ideas postulated by Proudhon, for whom women ought to remain in their roles and traditional sphere, in other words, the private domain, as mere reproducers and breeders of children. On the other hand we find those who followed the ideas put forward by Bakunin, in which women and men were equals in rights and obligations, for which reason women ought to lead an active life, even in politics and society. Ever since it was founded, the CNT had had female members and recognised a woman's right to have economic freedom and the same salary as a man, but little or nothing was proposed for a long time as initiatives for a specific campaign in relation to them, and it was barely at the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s when the presence of women began to make itself more conspicuous in the employment arena. Besides that, with women being given the vote shortly after the Second Republic had been established (October 1931), a political and cultural dynamic was created: this opened up new possibilities for women to take part in the class struggle (Méndez 2002).

Although anarchism generally started out with a strong anti-authoritarian, egalitarian identity with the emphasis on women's emancipation, it could be said that right from the outset it was incapable of developing a forceful feminist policy and being seen to support women's struggles (Gemie 1996; Kinna 2017). Besides, the vast majority of anarchist discussion "has paid little attention to the manifestations of the state in our intimate relationships nor with the individual psychological thought processes which affect our every relationship while living under the tyranny of a power over ideology" (Flick n.d.).

In particular, the most important topics to be debated within the anarchist movements in Spain, in the context of issues related to women, were education, employment and generic gender relations. And it was there that most differences and complexities showed up in the speeches made by male and female militants. Such was the case of Teresa Claramunt and Teresa Mañé who, despite having the same way of

⁶ Some of these women were: Isabel Vilà i Pujol, from Gerona, (1843-1896); Guillermina Rojas y Orgis (Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 1849, date of death unknown); Encarnación Sierra (Madrid, date of birth and death unknown); Francisca Saperas Miró (Barcelona, 1851-1933) and Salud Borrás Saperas (Barcelona, 1878-1954).



thinking on most issues, found that there were practical difficulties, at an organisational level, for example. Neither of them defined themselves as feminist because, as Laura Vicente explains, this concept was associated with women's suffrage, a movement that, in their opinion, was bourgeois and in favour of involvement in political institutions, being neglectful of conferring dignity on working women. Just like the rest of 19th century Spanish feminism, the 'two Teresas' defended a social feminism that was based on gender difference and projection of the female social role of wife and mother into the public arena. They both confirmed that men were responsible for the inferiority of women and that society had been built on inequality of the sexes, and de facto recognised the existence of a patriarchal system (Vicente 2017).

Many women⁷ served as a link between the generation of forerunners and the *Mujeres Libres* generation, one of whom was Emma Goldman, who visited Teresa Claramunt when she came to Spain (as early as 1928) to collect testimonials and documentation. The proposal made by Goldman regarding the need for the 'internal emancipation' of women in order to value themselves, learn self-respect and reject dependence on men, was identical to that made by Claramunt (Vicente 2017).

Beyond Utopia: *Mujeres Libres* and the Spanish Revolution

The main anarchist tendencies that proposed women's struggle and emancipation can be summed up in 'humanist feminism', as was to be the case of Federica Montseny and her mother Teresa Mañé, or the anarchafeminism conferred on the *Mujeres Libres*-MMLL option (Espigado 2002), in which the main difference was at an organisational level, either in a mixed way represented in the former or consisting of women only, as considered by MMLL. Both tendencies did, in any case, reject the term 'feminism'. Suceso Portales, who was a member of MMLL, stated: "We are not, and never were, feminists who fight against men. We did not wish to replace the male hierarchy with a female hierarchy. It is essential that we work and fight together. Because if we do not, there will be no social revolution. We did, however, need an organisation of our own in order to fight for ourselves", she added, referring to the need for and meaning of *Mujeres Libres*

⁷ These anarchist women, among others, were (CGT, 2017): Antonia Fontanillas Borràs (Barcelona, 1917-Dreux, France, 2014); Joaquina Dorado Pita (A Coruña, 1917-Barcelona, 2017); Rosario Dulcet (Vilanova i la Geltrú, Barcelona, 1881-Carcassonne, France, 1965); Lola Montiel Pérez (Alicante, 1919-Zaragoza, 2005); Federica Montseny Mañé (Madrid, 1905-Toulouse, France, 1994); Antonia Maymón Giménez (Madrid, 1881-Beniaján, Murcia, 1959); Isabel Hortensia Pereira Dagedo (place and date of birth and death unknown); Julia Miravet Barrau (Zaragoza, 1911-2000); María Castaneda Mateo (Zaragoza, date of birth unknown-shot in 1939); Dolores Prat Coll (Ripoll, Girona, 1905-Toulouse, France, 2001); Aurora Molina Iturbe (Spain, place and date of birth unknown-Gijón, 2014); Amelia Jover Velasco (Cullera, Valencia, 1910-Paris, France, 1997); and María Silva Cruz (Casas Viejas, Cadiz, 1917-Laguna de La Janda, Cadiz, 1936).



(Ackelsberg 1999: 25). Despite the fact that the anarchist women themselves did not consider themselves to be feminist because the dominant feminism of the period was 'white', high class and heteronormative, they could, in fact, fall into what we currently know as dissident, diverse and critical feminisms. Dolors Marín (2014: 133) wrote of them:

Spanish feminists will find in anarchafeminism, as did Emma Goldman or Voltairine de Cleyre, a free medium in which they were able to speak, write and think. That was true from the pioneers Teresa Claramunt, Teresa Mañé and the anonymous female trade union members down to the 1930s generation that was to give rise to *Mujeres Libres*, a group that brought together female doctors, textile workers, intellectuals and secretaries. *Mujeres Libres* was not just a group of anarchosyndicalist women, it opened up a space for freedom in a backward country with a long record of repression and criminalisation of women as a body.

Mujeres Libres was formally established as a federation in Valencia in 1937, but had its beginnings years earlier through small groups in different parts of Spain.⁸ It identified with the ambitions of the Spanish libertarian movement, and despite the fact that the CNT and FAI gave them a certain degree of economic support, places to meet and space in the anarchist communication media, when it wanted to be formally recognised as an autonomous branch of the Libertarian Movement in 1938, its request was turned down by most of their members, who were predominantly male. Their argument in that decision was: "a specifically female organisation would be an element of disunity and inequality within the Libertarian Movement and would have negative consequences for the development of working class interests" (Nash 1977:19). Even so, *Mujeres Libres*, which arose from the heat of confederate militancy but in an open struggle against the less flexible sectors of Spanish anarchism, was to opt firmly for women's emancipation and was to criticise the perversions that arose out of the revolution itself as no other group would (Marín 2014).

Its main watchwords were training and recruitment, and its proposals for improving the situation of women in Spain focused on (Ackelsberg 1999): decent paid work, as well as full female participation in the labour market, which was a basic requirement for economic independence that would also have an impact on relations between partners being freer, more equal and more caring, as ought to be the case also with the family structure. In this respect, a basic building block was education, which would not be based on authority and punishment as was the custom in that period, but on freedom. Schools would naturally be mixed, something that was unthinkable at the

⁸ *Mujeres Libres* founders were Lucía Sánchez Saornil (1895-1970), Mercedes Comaposada (1901-1993) and Amparo Poch y Gascón (1902-1968). Also prominent were Concha Liaño Gil (1916-2014), Lola Iturbe Arizcuren (1902-1990), Sara Berenguer Laosa (1919-2010), Soledad Estorach Esterri (1915-1993), Áurea Cuadrado Castellón (1894-1969), Libertad Ródenas (1892-1970), Pepita Carpeña Amat (1919-2005), Pura Arcos (1919-1995) and Suceso Portales Casamar (1904-1999), to mention but a few.



time, and based on the experience of libertarian pedagogy, one of whose prime movers was Ferreri Guardia.⁹ Emphasis was also placed on encouraging information and prevention where sex education was concerned, making the case for birth control methods and abortion. They considered that prostitution resulted from the capitalist system and so all aspects of this problem needed to be addressed through shelter centres for women seeking to escape prostitution (*liberatorios* in Spanish), using medical and psychological treatments, in addition to providing training for other jobs that would lead to its disappearance.

During the three years of its existence, from 1936 to 1939 and in the thick of the Spanish Civil War, *Mujeres Libres* put a number of social initiatives into practice, taking part in those undertaken by the CNT and other anarchosyndicalist groups as well as its own. It carried out extensive basic education training and apprenticeship work aimed at female workers and countrywomen. In many places the organisation achieved this by participating in initiatives fostered by the trade unions, while in Barcelona MMLL acted separately when it started up the “*Casal de la Dona Treballadora*” (Working Women’s Centre), where between 600 and 800 women were given classes in literacy, basic schooling, mechanics and agriculture, besides being taught about trade union topics plus economic and social matters (Méndez 2002). Programmes were drawn up for radio broadcasts, libraries, events and cultural seminars, publications of its own and participation in the anarchist press and media. Its namesake magazine, *Mujeres Libres*, stood out as being an essential tool for developing the training, propositional and organisational work of the MMLL movement (CGT 2017), which published as many as thirteen issues between the spring of 1936 and the autumn of 1938.¹⁰ Lastly we should mention the creation and management of kindergartens and soup kitchens, in response to an immediate demand made by working women. It also forged ahead with running orphanages and support centres for refugees, to assist the most vulnerable victims of the Spanish Civil War (Méndez 2002).

⁹ Francisco Ferrer i Guardia (1859-1909) was an anarchist educator and freethinker who founded the *Escuela Moderna* (Modern School) in Barcelona in 1901. This type of education was based on rationalism and humanism, was lay and did not engage in gender segregation. Its aims were to develop critical thought and individual emancipation. This clashed with the interests and privileges of the more conservative sectors of society and with the Catholic Church, who ended up having him court-martialled with the accusation of being the instigator of the *Semana Trágica* (Tragic Week) that took place in Barcelona in July 1909, and having him shot.

¹⁰ The 13 digitalised issues can be consulted at the following address:

<http://cgt.org.es/noticiascgt/noticias-cgt/revista-mujeres-libres>



Women Exiled by the Spanish Civil War: The Case of the Anarchists

In the public imagination, war is still thought of as “a man’s thing”. Despite having undergone a slight change, the common belief continues to view women as victims rather than fighters, attempting to prove that their direct participation in political violence is something unusual. However, research carried out in recent decades confirms that the fact of women’s participation in wars and armed conflicts being neither known nor visible is usually more related to gender stereotypes and prejudice towards them rather than because of their biological characteristics (Bennett, Bexley and Warnock 1995; Strobl 1996; Fernández Villanueva 2007, 2011; Romero-Delgado 2017). Even so, women are sometimes turned into a ploy used by both sides in the conflict so as to improve recruitment, but only of men, and not as participants. An example would be by appealing directly or indirectly to their maternal instinct, as was found during the Spanish Civil War. So, in these cases “the frontiers between private and public maternity became blurred and women were encouraged to hand over their sons to defend the nation” (Osborne 2009: 166). And in the case of Spain, it also happened that during the war, the ploy could have contained sexual connotations and other patriarchal and sexist appeals, albeit made by the supposedly more progressive side that was favourable to gender equality. According to Nash (1999), the militia woman appealed to a masculine imagination, she seduced, attracted or shook men up to encourage them to do their military duty. Rather than conjuring up an innovative image of women according to a new reality, it seems to have been generated in order to make cynical use of women for war purposes. The image stimulated the masses to take action while at the same time challenging the male cultural identity and inciting men to do their traditional duty as soldiers.

Despite the fact that during the early days of the Civil War women spontaneously joined the ranks of the anarchist militias, the outcome of the war itself and the increasingly serious conflict on the battlefield, but also in the propaganda context, the division of gender roles made its appearance and women were left to provide auxiliary and support service in the rearguard. There was consensus among all the political parties and trade unions on the need to force female militias to withdraw from the battle fronts, and in late 1936 Largo Caballero, the President of the Second Republic, approved some military decrees that ordered women to withdraw from the front lines (Nash 1999).

The victory of the insurgents occurred officially on 1 April 1939 and resulted in the establishment of Francisco Franco’s dictatorship, which was to last until he died in 1975. When the war ended, tens of thousands of people staged a massive exodus that took them to countries such as Mexico, Argentina, the United States of America but mainly to France. Although the Spanish war had ended, the misfortunes for the vast majority had



not, as they were held in concentration camps in southern France and North Africa. That situation was to worsen further after the outbreak of World War II, in which they were also imprisoned in the Nazi concentration camps that were spread across Europe.¹¹

In addition to this external exile there was also another that was internal and equally devastating for thousands of people. In fact, although they might have had the possibility, not all of the women who were committed to social and feminist revolution could go into exile or even wanted to. Those who remained experienced difficult times of harsh repression exerted against them or their co-fighters (Agulló 2018). As Tavera (2005) argues, in real, and therefore non-figurative terms, women lost the war and with it the legal recognition of their rights as citizens. However, the possibilities that the changes in gender relations postulated among feminists in intellectual and political discussion might become generalised in Spanish society were also intercepted for many a long year, as was the start of their social, legal and educational reforms from the early years of the Second Republic. The experience of defeat was not always the same or uniform. Its significance for gender, on the other hand, was. Due to Franco's victory, the republican side women (anarchists, socialists, communists and from any other progressive ideology) were 'swept' from public spheres and women were, in general, held in seclusion in households that represented a veritable 'domestic exile'. The repression mechanisms that were imposed varied widely in nature: from persecution, imprisonment or execution and the destruction of their belongings. In other words, the relationships of power in the heart of Spanish society were brutally redefined, and that mainly carried with it the annihilation of the workers' movement as a politically organised force, besides the restoration of the Catholic moral order and the return to a 'patriarchal order' that had been notably threatened by the social breakthroughs fostered by the II Republic (Yusta 2004).

In the specific case of exiled female anarchists, there were quite a few women forming part of the Libertarian Movement in Exile (*Movimiento Libertario en el Exilio*, MLE) in the early 1960s, with part of them in the Libertarian Youth movement (*Juventudes Libertarias*, JJLL) and performing a number of functions related to the Home Defence Movement (*Defensa Interior*). Most of these women were the daughters of CNT militants and their partners also belonged to the Libertarian Movement. The older women had taken part in the Civil War, the younger ones had not done so because of their age, and there were even French, Italian and English women involved in libertarian anti-Franco activities (CGT 2017). So it was that Suceso Portales, Sara Berenguer and

¹¹ Among other studies, see: Alted Vigil, Alicia (2005) *La voz de los vencidos: el exilio republicano de 1939*, (The Voice of the Defeated: The Republican Exile of 1939, Madrid); Abellán, José Luis (1983) *De la guerra civil al exilio republicano, 1936-1977*, (From the Civil War to the Republican Exile 1936-1977); Bermejo, Benito and Checa, Sandra (2006) *Libro Memorial. Españoles deportados a los campos nazis, 1940-1945* (Memorial Book. Spaniards Deported to the Nazi Camps, 1940-1945).



other *Mujeres Libres* published the first issue of the magazine “*Mujeres Libres de España en el Exilio*” (Free Women of Spain in Exile) in London in 1964, which went on to be published in France and held steady with 47 issues up until 1976. It was practically unknown outside small circles of Spanish anarchist emigrants (Méndez 2002). The purpose of that publication can be summed up in this phrase: “writing so as not to be forgotten”, and particularly “to show the reader young people born under the Franco regime and the work of a female proletariat, most of whom had little schooling, with the capacity for personal sacrifice in a hostile exile in which they had managed to maintain the fellowship and commitment that that experience had radiated through their lives” (Rodrigo 2018: 96).

Maintaining contact between exiled people inside and outside of Spain was vitally important in order for them to feel understood, believe that their struggle was worthwhile, re-make their life experiences and, in short, be able to face the years ahead. “The fact that links between them were maintained or re-established after such chequered paths in life is something we owe to those who remained in Spain, and also the fact that they managed to bring in women from much younger generations” (Agulló 2018: 138). As Aguado (2011) pointed out in her study on memories and identities of anti-Franco women, a question arising from the women’s memories of the war and postwar period refers to the broadest reflection relating to relations between political cultures, gender identities and female genealogies. In the process for constructing gender identities in anti-Franco political cultures, the women who took part in defending the Republic and in resistance and opposition to Franco, interpreted their experience from cultural models that not only included a collective policy dimension, but also an individual agency dimension, of rebelliousness and personal prominence. These women acted as a generational link, as heiresses and transmitters. We shall see more of this in the section that follows, where the beginning of a new organised phase of anarchist feminism in the *Mujeres Libres* of CNT and the *Mujeres Libertarias* (Libertarian Women) of CGT is presented.

Rebuilding for a New Start: *Mujeres Libres* of CNT and *Mujeres Libertarias* of CGT

The years went by but the differences and tensions among the anarchists exiled in the various countries remained, so internal vs. external exile and different views of anarchism (between a more reformist aspect and another that was more orthodox, with a clear majority in this latter) gave rise to disbandments, expulsions, splits and reunifications that during the 1960s kept up a fragile unity that was finally broken on different points and for various reasons when Franco died. Even so, reconstruction



started in Barcelona in 1976 and soon spread to the rest of the country, particularly throughout Catalonia¹² (Íñiguez 2001).

The first time that many women heard about MMLL was with the publication of the book written by Mary Nash about this organisation in 1975 (Molina 2018). The book was a total revelation in the minority feminist and anarchist circles of the time because, after so many years, a genealogical link could be made once more with women who were in exile or silenced in the interior. The first nuclei of women were formed within the Libertarian Movement in that same year in Barcelona, and they drew up a manifesto entitled 'What is *Mujeres Libres*?' This manifesto explained that the said organisation was resuming activity. The *Mujeres Libres* magazine (2nd phase) was, in fact, published once more in May 1977, and they took part in the International Libertarian Conference that was held between 22 and 25 July of the same year (Vicente 2017).

The CNT called for mass demonstrations in 1977¹³ and that was not well received among the political forces in charge of overseeing the Spanish Transition (from Dictatorship to Democracy) because, in addition, the people who formed part of this trade union were the only ones to vote against the "Moncloa Pacts". During that same year hundreds of federations and trade unions were founded, their membership exceeding 200,000. However, the police hoax set up in 1978 in the "Scala Case"¹⁴ intensified internal tensions, bringing with it a certain degree of discredit to anarchosyndicalism; reformists and orthodox groups fought amongst themselves while an immense majority looked on in surprise at the confrontation. The 5th Congress (December 1979) was what broke the CNT. A splinter group was left and in legal terms it lost its name, coming to be known as General Confederation of Labour (*Confederación General del Trabajo*, CGT) (Íñiguez 2001: 153).

In 1978, these women who belonged to the Spanish Libertarian Movement created in Barcelona an *Ateneo Cultural de la Mujer* (Women's Cultural Association) in their search for a useful organisational tool to create a place for reflection and education. In the meantime, contacts were made with women linked to the historical MMLL, such as Sara Berenguer, Matilde Escuder, Concha Liaño and others (Vicente 2017). From the

¹² See, *inter alia*, these works: Several Authors (1979) "*CNT. Ser o no ser. La crisis de 1976-1979*" (To Be or Not to Be. The 1976-1979 Crisis) and Peirats (1988) "*La CNT en la Revolución española*" (CNT in the Spanish Revolution).

¹³ Thousands of people attended the political rally of 30 October 1976 in Mataró (Catalonia), and around 25,000 people attended the rally held in San Sebastián de los Reyes (Madrid) on 27 March 1977. That same year there were also other mass rallies, that of Valencia held on 28 May and, above all, that of Montjuic, in Barcelona city, held on 2 July, which was attended by approximately 100,000 people (Íñiguez 2001).

¹⁴ In January 1978, and with the aim of discrediting anarchism, the State Office for Security invented the existence of a terrorist commando that was linked to the CNT and the FAI and had thrown Molotov cocktails into a Barcelona nightclub called Scala, causing the death of several people.



following years onwards *Mujeres Libres*-CNT and *Mujeres Libertarias*-CGT groups were set up in various Spanish cities and started becoming coordinated and holding regular meetings, in addition to bringing out a few publications and holding conferences. Another reference book that appeared subsequently and which represented the most complete study on *Mujeres Libres* is the one entitled “Free Women of Spain. Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women”, a piece of research conducted by Martha Ackelsberg, a university lecturer from United States of America, and published in 1991.

During the 1990s, the Catalan CNT-AIT underwent an even more marked shrinkage when 15 Barcelona trade unions ceased to be federated, a matter that was still unresolved in 1999. Nowadays, “CGT has made its propositions more flexible but fail to achieve a significant number of male and female members, while the CNT has been reduced to a fairly small group of unyielding, ideologically pure members that has very little impact, above all in the trade union aspect, but has a broad network of functioning branches” (Íñiguez 2001: 153).

At an academic research level, it was not until early in the year 2000 when there started being more studies on MMLL. The 80th anniversary of *Mujeres Libres* was commemorated in 2017 and organised by CGT. Just a few years previously, in 2015, the Anselmo Lorenzo Foundation, which has links with the CNT, also organised a Conference for the MMLL anniversary, making it quite clear that anarchosyndicalism currently continues to keep the tensions and old grudges intact.

Conclusions

As we have seen throughout this text, the origins of Spanish anarchist feminism lie in the beginnings of historical universal anarchism itself. It has a long libertarian tradition that dates back to the end of the 19th century and which acquired greater importance early in the following century, taking material form in the *Mujeres Libres* group and in a greater anarchosyndicalist reality in the Spanish Revolution, that lasted for three years during the course of the Spanish Civil War. The culmination of this far-reaching sociohistorical process has become a global benchmark.

This has been a first approach and contextualisation in order to make progress in future research work. My interest lies in analysing the identity and memory of anarchist women at the present time. I am also interested in finding out what became of those women who took up the baton from *Mujeres Libres*: How did they live through Francoism? Were they held prisoner in Franco régime jails? Did they experience an internal exile in Spain or did they have to go into exile abroad? How did they get to know



about anarchafeminist ideas? What was, and still is, their relationship with CNT in general and with *Mujeres Libres* in particular?

Anarchist feminism remains as valid as ever, given that most social movements are influenced by its tenets, even though nobody actually says so. Also, the national and international invisibility associated with the legacy of MMLL is no accident, and it is because of the systemic criticism they levelled at all social authority and control that they were considered to be ‘dangerous’ women on three counts: for being women, for being workers and for being anarchists. Not only that, but they were dangerous to the inner workings of their anarchist movement because, as Hermida remarks, “MMLL and its heritage have been ignored and made invisible as they were a nuisance, because within the Libertarian Movement they were annoying: as they would not keep quiet about the gender injustices they experienced and witnessed” (2018: 268). Consequently, my research work is aimed in other directions: to disseminate and dignify the social and political work and human effort involved in anarchafeminism. It is, however, also my intention to recapture the memory and legacy of not only *Mujeres Libres*, but also of the generations of women who followed, taking up the baton to build a different world, in addition to those who are still doing that today. Although the libertarian and anarchist movement is not the same at a quantitative level and does not have the same social impact as in the 1920s and 1930s, at the present time there are still countless social movements and autonomous groups with libertarian practices, and even organisations that define themselves as anarchosindicalist that deserve full recognition and respect.

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