Rebecca Swanger


The position of women in Spanish society during the early twentieth century was both uncertain and transformational. Liberal and feminist ideas began to take root in Europe, and an increasing number of women gained a heightened awareness of the societal differences between themselves and men. This situation was the case in Spain when, in 1931, the liberal (in modern terms including freedom of speech/press, separation of church and state, and universal suffrage) Second Republic came into existence and issued numerous rights to women for the first time. Such freedoms included the right to divorce as well as legally to obtain an abortion.¹ Before long, one of Europe’s most conservative and least-developed countries made a volte-face and attempted to effectuate social change through legislation.² These civil rights, however, were curtailed by the 1936 military uprising that led Spain into a brutal Civil War and challenged the legitimacy and laws of the Second Republic. With the government and various political bodies locked in an intense battle that rose to the level of civil war, society also split along ideological lines, calling into question social structures, especially those regarding women.³

The history of the Spanish Civil War, and specifically that of women in the conflict, remains a relatively new topic in historical scholarship. Although the war occurred from 1936 to 1939, it was only around the time of the death of dictator Francisco Franco in 1975 that most primary sources became available. In addition, it is believed that countless leftist sources (and lives) were destroyed during the repressive Franco dictatorship. Nevertheless, nearly all research

on women in the Spanish Civil War focuses on leftist women within the Popular Front. In broad texts on the war in general, women are often ignored or given very little attention, as is the case in George Esenwein and Adrian Shubert’s general text, *Spain at War: The Spanish Civil War in Context, 1931-1939*. Despite its recently publication in 1995, women receive little analysis throughout the book.

Some scholars argue that the women’s movements in the Popular Front, the body composed of left-wing organizations including communists, anarchists, socialists, and those favoring democracy, were revolutionary; others contend that the role of women was irrelevant to the movement and that little substantial change was accomplished. One of the most obvious observations by scholars of women in the Spanish Civil War is that they are themselves women. While male scholars have typically composed broad histories of the war, examining the experience of women appears to be dominated by female academics. Scholars differ on the significance of women’s roles during the war; they also differ in how they examine the war in terms of historical methods, beginning with political and celebratory and then shifting to cultural, social, and feminist/gender perspectives. The most notable scholars and sources on the subject include Shirley Mangini’s research on memoirs and oral testimonies, Mary Nash’s *Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War* that examines the conflict as rooted in social and cultural history and combats the political and “heroic” approach many took in the 1970s, and Frances Lannon and Gina Herrmann’s research involving the portrayals and images of women during the war. Many scholars utilize a feminist theoretical approach or gendered approach to examine women within the conflict; most use a broad range of sources, with a fair number focusing specifically on oral or autobiographical testimonies. Mangini, Nash, Lannon, and Herrmann all focus on women’s social and cultural history, as was popular during the 1990s.
Although given more attention in recent decades, the subject of women in the Spanish Civil War remains a topic in need of further study and analysis. Historians, while first examining the war in terms of political focus, have switched to favoring a cultural and social focus, in correlation with overall historical trends. Leftist women remain overwhelmingly studied in comparison to their conservative counterparts, a situation that should be corrected by more scholarship on Nationalist women. In addition, nearly all scholars have utilized, in some form, a feminist and gendered perspective in recent years with the rise of women’s and gender history. Authors have examined a broad range of primary sources, but few have fully explored the significant amount of propaganda images available. My paper will therefore contribute to this field of study because I will specifically examine women’s portrayal in propaganda, and how this depiction changed over time to reflect societal sentiments and confusion on women’s place in society. I also will attempt to utilize postmodern theory to discuss women in imagery, thus adding a new framework and dimension to the study.

SPAIN DURING THE SECOND REPUBLIC AND THE PRELUDE TO WAR

Traditionally, women in Spain were held to orthodox gender roles. “The predominant discourse on women…was based on the ideology of domesticity, evoking a female prototype of the perfecta casada (perfect married lady), whose primordial gender role was that of caring for home and family.”4 Women in Spain had always been associated with the home and the rearing of children, in accordance with societal norms and Catholic teachings. In spite of some liberal resistance by women in the late nineteenth century during the first-wave of feminism,5 women continued, through the outbreak of the Civil War, to be subordinate to their husbands in terms of

legal standing, social expectations, and opportunities. As an example, the education of women was so limited that in 1920, sixteen years before the outbreak of the Civil War, only two percent of the Spanish university student population was female. As noted, it was not until enactment of the liberal constitution of the Second Republic that women began to gain some level of legal equality, breaking from the civil and penal codes of previous generations that had all but ensured women’s subservience to men. This move toward gender equality represented an utterly fundamental change in Spain’s social structure, a change many groups such as the Catholic Church and right-wing political bodies found objectionable and even regarded as against nature. This alteration of norms shifted society in a new direction, far from the deeply conservative and conventional social values to which both men and women in Spain were accustomed. Yet when tensions became evident within the Second Republic and the Civil War erupted, a substantial number of women stood against fascism in an attempt to preserve their newfound freedoms.

In fact, through the war women gained societal liberties they previously had not possessed. Women’s presence in the workplace was more tolerated, as the demand for females in the economic sector grew more pronounced with the exodus of men to the warfront. Some women even achieved managerial positions, producing a, while small, significant change in the workplace. In addition, the legalization of divorce and abortion and increased opportunity for education instilled many women with a sense of liberty and self-worth they had, for the most part, not experienced before. Various social spheres were also suddenly open to women, and

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they were free to fraternize with others in a variety of public places such as restaurants and pubs, although custom still prevented many from going to these places without a chaperone.\textsuperscript{11} One of the most visible ascents of women in society was the political role a number of them began to play; one example was the prominent Dolores Ibárruri, known as La Pasionaria, who served as a crucial figure in the anti-fascist resistance.\textsuperscript{12} Other prominent women such as Frederica Montseny, who was the first woman in Spain to be a member of a government cabinet, and Teresa Pàmies advanced in public life through their importance to political processes.\textsuperscript{13} These women, and the example of their achievements and independence, served as models to many Republican women, although very few experienced the same level of success.

Women of the Popular Front had various reasons for joining the anti-fascist cause. A desire to protect their recently gained civic freedoms during the liberal Second Republic was the principle cause for many, especially rural and city-dwelling working-class women.\textsuperscript{14} In a mutual effort, “female popular mobilization took place on a vast scale…and there was an intense burgeoning of activities among ordinary women.”\textsuperscript{15} The number of average women contributing to the war effort is of significance, yet often has been ignored by historians to report on more prominent individuals. It was not simply the political elite that moved against the nationalists; thousands of middle-class women committed to the anti-fascist cause formed organizations to lend their talents to the Popular Front war effort.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{11} George Esenwein and Adrian Shubert, \textit{Spain at War: The Spanish Civil War in Context, 1931-1939} (New York, 1995), 128.
\textsuperscript{13} George Esenwein and Adrian Shubert, \textit{Spain at War: The Spanish Civil War in Context, 1931-1939} (New York, 1995), 127.
\textsuperscript{15} Mary Nash, \textit{Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War} (Denver, 1995), 60.
\textsuperscript{16} Mary Nash, \textit{Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War} (Denver, 1995), 61.
WOMEN’S ORGANIZATIONS AND THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR, CIRCA 1936-1937

Before detailing women’s portrayal and experience at the beginning of the war, it is important to differentiate between the various women’s organizations. While the women in these various Popular Front organizations had varying objectives in relation to gender roles and women’s position in society, they nevertheless banded together to confront the threat of a fascist government.17 Women of the Agrupación de Mujeres Antifascistas (AMA) and the similar organization from Catalonia, Unió de Dones de Catalunya, focused on assembling women for the antifascist cause and paid little attention to feminist rhetoric, while the Marxist Female Secretariat of the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM) viewed the liberation of women as viable only within a communist nation; this view contrasted with the most extreme outlook adopted by the Mujeres Libres, the anarcho-syndicalist association that rejected feminism and fought to topple capitalism and infuse society with libertarian tenets.18 While these organizations and additional other associations disagreed on many key issues, all subscribed to a belief that social gains would be oppressed under a Franco dictatorship, causing them to band together under the Popular Front.

The most radical female organization of the Spanish Civil War, the Mujeres Libres, or Free Women, undoubtedly held the most radical view of women and the necessity of social and cultural changes in terms of sex and gender roles. This is demonstrated in Figure 1, with the female depiction centered and in an authoritative pose, combined with the message roughly

translated, “Women! Our family constitutes all the fighters for liberty.” Interestingly, however, it appears that guns are being pointed at her from the bottom right corner. This likely illustrates the contempt many held for them, for their obviously unconventional stance. One specific incident references men laughing at a poster promoting a speech to be given by a member of Mujeres Libres, because they found the concept of a woman giving a lecture in public so unrealistic as to be humorous. Another issue women of the Mujeres Libres faced was the assumption by many men within the Republican movement that a liberal and free woman was therefore a “loose” one. It was under such circumstances that Mujeres Libres attempted to spread its message of absolute equality and other libertarian ideals. In its anthem, the organization declares that ‘afirmando promesas de vida/ desafiemos la tradición/ modelemos la arcilla caliente/ de un mundo que nace del dolor.’ Explicitly radical in its language and tone, the anthem of the Mujeres Libres matches the revolutionary message of the organization, visible in the line ‘we defy tradition.’ In addition, the line ‘we model the warm clay’ implies that the women of Mujeres Libres believed they would have to achieve gender equality with their own hands.

Despite such goals and rhetoric, as well as those of their contemporary anarchist

Figure 1 - “Mujeres Libres,” by unknown artist. Reads: “Women, our family constitutes all the fighters for liberty.” From Sociedad Benéfica de Historiadores Aficionados y Creadores. [http://www.sbhac.net/Republica/Carteles/Anonimos/Anon.htm](http://www.sbhac.net/Republica/Carteles/Anonimos/Anon.htm)

19 “Mujeres Libres,” by unknown artist. From Sociedad Benéfica de Historiadores Aficionados y Creadores. [http://www.sbhac.net/Republica/Carteles/Anonimos/Anon.htm](http://www.sbhac.net/Republica/Carteles/Anonimos/Anon.htm)


22 en in World History, project by the Center for History and New Media (CHNM) at George Mason University ([http://chnm.gmu.edu/wwh/p/245.html](http://chnm.gmu.edu/wwh/p/245.html)) (27 October 2008).
organizations, women of the *Mujeres Libres* and the CNT (*Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*, the anarcho-syndicalist federation of labor unions, commonly associated with the FAI, *Federación Anarquista Ibérica*, the Iberian Anarchist Federation) faced the same domestic responsibilities and inequality as members of other Popular Front organizations:

> When urban working women did join unions, they faced incomprehension, when not downright hostility, from the male-dominated bureaucracy and/or membership... In spite of anarcho-syndicalism’s abstract espousal of female equality the daily practice of the vast majority...was as patriarchal as their non-libertarian counterparts.\(^{23}\)

Although they may not have practiced equality, the anarchist organizations grew significantly during the war, even among women.\(^{24}\) While the *Mujeres Libres* was the most radical female organization in terms of concepts on social change, its members did not identify with feminism.\(^{25}\) However, in actions and messages, *Mujeres Libres* was the female organization most similar with typical feminist ideology. The various political parties and unions to which women’s organizations belonged often manipulated the groups as a way to entice women to join their coalition, while the women’s organizations continued to be subordinate and dependent to the overarching political body,\(^{26}\) an ironic parallel to the way women continued to be subservient to men in society. *Mujeres Libres* was an exception to this trend, as it attempted to remain autonomous from the anarchist organizations and maintained goals and messages with much more resilience than other female organizations.\(^{27}\)

Unlike the *Mujeres Libres* and its independent status from the anarchist organization, the Female Secretariat was an established branch of the *Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista*, or

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POUM.\textsuperscript{28} Despite its communist nature and therefore inherent belief in liberation for women, the Female Secretariat experienced the same resistance against gender equality as the 	extit{Mujeres Libres}. With the Female Secretariat, however, this resistance originated directly within its parent organization and the dominant POUM. Recognizing this, the Female Secretariat took to publishing a newspaper entitled 	extit{Emancipación} in which members focused on the role of women in the revolutionary process as well as promotion of gender equality.\textsuperscript{29} These women were aware of the failure of many men in the POUM to acknowledge the equality of sexes that the party rhetoric emphasized, and often published sections of the newspaper lamenting the negligence of men in accepting these ideals and putting them into practice.\textsuperscript{30} Although the goals of the 	extit{Mujeres Libres} and the Female Secretariat of the POUM varied substantially, women in both nevertheless experienced the same gender discrimination by members of their own or peer organizations.

By far the most ‘mild’ women’s organization and least-concerned with gender issues was the communist-inspired 	extit{Agrupación de Mujeres Antifascistas} (AMA). The AMA was a unique organization, and the members of its constituency consisted of a variety of political parties—Republican, communist, socialist, and notably Basque Republicans—but also a large group of women with no political affiliation.\textsuperscript{31} Being the least radical of the women’s organizations, and the only to be officially supported by the government,\textsuperscript{32} the AMA strongly appealed to and attracted many “regular” women in Spain, especially because the AMA focused on providing women with activities related to the home front, and did not espouse radical notions on gender equality and roles. By appealing to women with activities that were often feasible and typically

\textsuperscript{28} Mary Nash, \textit{Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War} (Denver, 1995), 93.
\textsuperscript{31} Mary Nash, \textit{Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War} (Denver, 1995), 66.
\textsuperscript{32} Mary Nash, \textit{Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War} (Denver, 1995), 71.
not outside gender norms, the AMA was able to consolidate a large body of women in support of the Popular Front war effort.

Focused on preparing women to assume factory jobs earlier held by men, the AMA also helped women to gain work on public transit, in other industries related to the war effort, and in hospitals. As its name states, the AMA was more concerned with halting the spread of fascism than with promoting women’s rights. The AMA “defined feminism not as a struggle for women’s rights, equality, or emancipation but as a fight against fascism. Gender-specific issues were lost in this designation of feminism.” Therefore, while the AMA provided a common ground through which women could associate with one another and work against the fascist cause, it did not stand for the same gender equality that fellow Popular Front organizations did. Although the AMA organized women in various ways to aid the home front, the organization did not give much consideration to gender equality and was more traditionalist in its notions of women’s activities during war, which may be a reason why it appealed so greatly to non-politicized women, who were, like many others, still uncomfortable with the radical rhetoric of other female organizations.

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Many of the women’s wartime efforts took place inside factories throughout the entirety of the war, where the women found a growing demand for their presence following the outbreak of the war. Until the war, women had incredibly few job possibilities, received much lower wages than male coworkers, and were often unambiguously discriminated against because of attitudes about women working outside her domestic responsibilities.36 However, when the war commenced, men had to abandon the factories for the frontline. Their exodus left many industries in desperate need of workers, and women willingly filled the empty factory positions to help on the home front, specifically with the encouragement of the communists and anarchists (see communist propaganda poster Figure 2).37 Posters such as these were arguably geared not only toward men, to convince them to welcome women into the economic sphere, but also toward women, to encourage them to take up the jobs on the home-front. Both men and women were very unaccustomed to the idea of women working in factories, and through the various posters left wing organizations attempted to establish a connection between women and the economic sector. This is visible in Figure 3, which features a woman pouring iron on this 1937 CNT advertisement for a National Congress on Industry. Mujeres Libres and their larger political colleague organization CNT-FAI explicitly advocated for women’s right to equally paid work, as

they linked this right to independence and liberation.  

Various groups interpreted women’s presence in industry during the war differently; communist and anarchists favored women’s place in the factories as a desired societal alteration and deemed the change necessary for liberation. But for the majority of Spanish society, consisting of conservative Republicans, Nationalists, and traditional Spaniards, the presence of women in factories was quite difficult to accept. Evidence of this attitude is present in the continuing wage discrimination that affected many women, even in the libertarian collectives of the anarchists in the Republican zone; in half the cooperatives, women gained lesser wages than men.  

In addition, preferential treatment was commonly given to women related to or closely connected with men who held an official post. This unequal practice was even made official in late 1937 by government regulation.  

And despite the need for women in factories, they still met with resistance as the result of their traditional absence within the economic zone. Although some women worked in factories to aid the Republican cause and supported economic equality for women, many others undeniably worked out of necessity. While leftist organizations specifically modeled women in propaganda as economic figures, women faced opposition from all sectors of Spanish society, even those organizations portraying them in propaganda.

39 George Esenwein and Adrian Shubert, Spain at War: The Spanish Civil War in Context, 1931-1939 (New York, 1995), 129.
While some believed that a woman working in the factories was a bold step, this change was not nearly as challenging of gender norms as that of the *miliciana*, or militiawoman that burst into Spanish society at the outbreak of the war in 1936. Clad in revolutionary and masculine blue overalls, totting a gun, and marching among men, the *miliciana* was a staunch and powerful figure of the antifascist resistance in the beginning of the war.\footnote{Mary Nash, *Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War* (Denver, 1995), 50.} For many, the image was mesmerizing, and a near-complete representation of the radical rhetoric of many Popular Front organizations toward women. An example of this is Figure 4, a 1936 poster from the Barcelona CNT, reading “for the militias.” While this woman is the focal point of the image, she is surrounded completely by men, a very common trait of posters featuring *milicianas*. In addition, the *miliciana* is holding a flag to rally support (another common theme that will be discussed in further detail later) in contrast to her male counterparts with guns. Even though this depiction of women was radical, women were still depicted with traditional undertones. In contrast with the early use of the *miliciana* as a symbol of the Republican cause, very few women became fighters for the Republic.\footnote{Shirley Mangini, *Memories of Resistance: Women’s Voices from the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven, 1995), 80.}

Although exact statistics are unknown, some historians suggest that there were fewer than 1,000 *milicianas* serving on the frontlines.\footnote{Mary Nash, *Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War* (Denver, 1995), 50.} Moreover, despite her enthusiastic portrayal by the antifascist resistance at the beginning of the war, the *miliciana* was quickly withdrawn and her...
presence on the front completely absent by 1937.\textsuperscript{43} “The image is associated only with the initial phase of the war and the early enthusiasm created by antifascist and revolutionary fervor.”\textsuperscript{44} Surprisingly, the withdrawal of the miliciana was supported by the various antifascist women’s organizations so that women could fill the depleted workforce as well as fulfill supportive duties on the home front.\textsuperscript{45} More surprising than the fact that the miliciana came into existence at the outbreak of the war was the speed with which she was withdrawn by the previously supportive Republican government, only months after her deployment to the front. Again, women were relegated to specific supportive roles during the war on the home front, despite the egalitarian tenets of the majority of Popular Front organizations. “For all the social revolution going on around them, Spanish men’s attitudes had not changed much.”\textsuperscript{46}

Despite the initial enthusiasm displayed by the various Republican groups for this radical representation of women, it was far from the reality:

The innovative imagery of the miliciana appeared to be a break with former models of norms and social roles for women. Nonetheless…the model projected is not that of a “new woman” who arises from the socio-political context but one created to fill the needs of the war…Despite the strong female protagonism depicted, they are not necessarily mirrors of reality or a sign of female incorporation into the war effort at the front.\textsuperscript{47}

While the milicianas were only supported for a few short months, the idea of the miliciana continued to be used in images and propaganda as a way to mobilize support for the war effort, as seen in Figure 5, which reads, “The Militia needs you!” This piece of propaganda, from 1936, depicts a miliciana front and center, wielding a gun, but her outstretched hand may have been more of a offering gesture to men seeing the poster (soldiers) more than for her own use. She is

\textsuperscript{44} Mary Nash, \textit{Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War} (Denver, 1995), 53.
\textsuperscript{47} Mary Nash, \textit{Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War} (Denver, 1995), 53.
certainly drawn as a *miliciana*, however she stands out from the line of men marching behind her, suggesting perhaps that *milicianas* served more as rallying forces than actual fighters.

Countless times in propaganda featuring *milicianas*, artists drew *milicianas* as prominent figures from the other male figures in the propaganda, emphasizing their radically unconventional position in the context of Spanish culture. Her image was used in posters and propaganda not only to appeal to women, but also to men. The purpose of the *miliciana*, then, was to stir up traditional notions of gender roles – “It seduced, enticed, or shocked men into carrying out their military duties.”\(^{48}\) Therefore, Republicans again portrayed women in a traditional sense, manipulating her image to rally support for the war, but making certain she was not directly engaged in fighting on the front.

Shortly after their appearance on the front, the *miliciana* began to be used in a derogatory sense. The sight of women, some with children, going willingly to fight on the front line was viewed as unnatural and unsuitable to many (see Figure 6), especially with the growing view of women as being heroic through their position as mothers, not as fighters. Despite the fact that “there are countless tales of heroism of the *milicianas*…one can detect a slight element of surprise in the reaction of the militiamen when they described acts of direct combat and bravery

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performed by women that they had witnessed.”49 At the outbreak of the conflict, when the militia and army were disjointed at best, political figures of the Republicans as well as other soldiers accepted women into the militia as a result of the army’s disorganized state, but demanded their withdrawal from the front as soon as the military became more stable.50 Women therefore, overall did not have consent to join the frontlines as a few did at the onset of the war, despite the seeming approval of the Republican government.

These military women faced traditional gender norms at the front as well, despite the fact that their fellow soldiers fought for organizations that, in theory, supported women’s equality.51 One miliciana even recounted that her fellow soldiers expected her to do their laundry for them.52 In addition, the milicianas were often not taken earnestly, because their image was one never before seen in Spain. Furthermore, many dressed in revolutionary attire, but also flaunted traditional feminine (and unconventional for front-line purposes) items such as cosmetics and high-heels.53 Naturally, this combination made taking seriously the milicianas more difficult, if not nearly impossible. This situation was obviously not the case for all.

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milicianas, but enough so that it left a negative impression on her figure, which was already warily and distastefully viewed by many within the Spanish population. Rumors surrounding the milicianas and prostitution also made achieving recognition difficult, as they were often blamed for outbreaks of venereal diseases on the front.54 Fearful of this radical change in women’s role, even from as small a group as the milicianas, the majority of soldiers and others of the Popular Front chose not to change their own traditional notions of gender norms to those expressed in liberal rhetoric.

The portrayal of the milicianas as well as other Republican women as prostitutes was a common line of attack. Organizations such as the various anarchist bodies that promoted free love (although the extent to which this philosophy actually was carried out greatly varied55) troubled the conservative Catholic populace.

The question of prostitution had become inextricably linked to women’s presence at the war fronts. Thus, a new, more ambiguous allegation—that the milicianas were acting as prostitutes—was decisive in discrediting them and resulted in the popular demand that they be dismissed from the war fronts.56 Testimonies from former milicianas noted that physical relationships occasionally occurred among fighters on the front, but the milicianas denied that they were aware of prostitution on the front lines.57 While there were some cases of venereal disease among soldiers, blame for this situation does not seem to lie entirely on the milicianas at the front, especially when such accusations are examined through contemporary oral testimonies. As noted, the example of venereal disease was most likely a ploy to discredit the milicianas and to expedite their removal from the front lines. Portrayed as radical whores, infecting soldiers with diseases on the front, the

56 Mary Nash, Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War (Denver, 1995), 112.
57 Mary Nash, Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War (Denver, 1995), 112.
milicianas could no longer remain on the front lines in the face of such opposition. More so than
milicianas, however, women in general were often blamed for the outbreaks of disease, as seen
in Figure 7 from 1937, which reads, “Attention! Veneral diseases threaten your health. Guard
against them!” Further illustrating women’s image as the bearers of disease is the woman’s right
arm, where gripping the male soldier, drawn as a skeleton.

In conclusion, women in the Popular Front faced a very different reality from what one
would assume in examining party rhetoric. An example of this dichotomy is apparent in a
pamphlet from 1936, in which a member of the International Youth Commission, Joseph
Cadden, remarks on the status of women in the Spanish Civil War. He states:

In spite of tradition, in spite of rigid, age-old custom, Spanish women rushed to the
defense of their government beside their men when the revolt was begun…In addition to
forming battalions of nurses and domestic workers to take care of the immediate needs of
the militia, women were enrolled with the fighting troops on an equal basis with men. In
many companies they had been the inspiration, had actually led the charge, and many of them became officers.  

Blatantly misleading and used to further the liberal agenda, this pamphlet and its contents are a near-perfect representation of party rhetoric. The tone of the pamphlet gives the reader the impression that Spanish women were able to defy centuries of tradition and establish themselves as equals to men in such a short time. Although it is true that a large number of women rose up and undertook whatever activities they could to aid the Popular Front war effort, thus breaking their traditional isolation from public and political action, they by no means held equal standing with their male counterparts, despite the political tenets of the various Republican parties. Blatantly titling the section on women ‘The Weaker Sex,’ Cadden’s pamphlet reflected the gender bias that continued to exist within the liberal fronts, despite stated principles and rhetoric. After only a year into the war, women’s image and portrayal shifted in combination with popular sentiment.

ADJUSTING WOMEN’S IMAGE: THE SHIFT TOWARD THE HOME FRONT, CIRCA 1937-1938

When the war against the Nationalists was lost in 1939, women of the Popular Front went full circle in their civil rights. At the start of the war, they had few rights; during the Second Republic

59 Mary Nash, Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War (Denver, 1995), 177.
and Civil War they gained a number of rights and freedoms previously unknown; many of these then were lost under the repressive dictatorship of Francisco Franco.

Despite the efforts of the various women’s organizations of the Popular Front, women’s equality in the various sectors of Spanish society was never achieved. Although many women enthusiastically supported the Popular Front in whatever ways they could, whether along the front lines as the *milicianas* attempted at the beginning of the war, in factories replacing male labor, or by fulfilling more auxiliary roles such as nurses, they never achieved the rights and civil freedoms for which many women fought. The political messages of the various parties of the Popular Front, whether anarchist, socialist, or communist, never equated with the continuing and conservative manner in which women of the Popular Front were treated. The conservative values that had dominated Spanish society for centuries remained firmly in place for many people, despite their stated political orientations; to many others, complete equality for women was simply too difficult to accept, despite sympathy over the reduced rights and opportunities for women. Although women of the Popular Front gained rights in several areas, evident in their widespread contribution to the war effort through factory work, clearly they never achieved the equality, nor the republic, for which they fought.

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