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Authoritarian Women: A Threat to Spanish Patriarchy

Dolores Ibarruri—often referred to as *la pasionaria*—literally the passion flower in Spanish—a staunch and outspoken communist, was democratically elected to represent the Spanish region known as Asturias in 1936 in the national Parliament. She campaigned and was elected as a member of the Communist Party of Spain, as well as of the Popular Front, the liberal political coalition whose democratic success sparked an attempted military coup d'état and, subsequently, the Spanish Civil War. Shortly after the initial military uprising, Ibarruri took to the radio and declared, “¡No pasarán!” (They [the conservative rebels] shall not pass!).¹ This call to arms for the Popular Front and Republican forces to withstand the coup, according to historian Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, “transformed [Ibarruri]...into the embodiment of the Loyalist struggle.”² Despite the valiant resistance of the Republican forces, in 1939 General Francisco Franco and the Nationalist army won the gruesome conflict that was the Spanish Civil War, ushering in a nearly forty-year fascist regime. Ibarruri fled Spain, where, had she remained, her execution at the hands of the Nationalists was assured, for the Communist haven, the Soviet Union. She would not return to Spain until Franco's death in 1975.

Conversely, Pilar Primo de Rivera, the daughter of one of the most prominent conservative families in Spain prior to the Spanish Civil War, would never hold elected office, but became one of the most powerful and recognizable female figures within the Franco regime and twentieth century Spain. Primo de Rivera founded the Women's Section, *la sección*

¹ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, “Exile, Gender and Self-Fashioning: Dolores Ibarruri (La Pasionaria) in the Soviet Union” in *Slavic Review*, 71(3) (Fall 2012): 567.

² Kirschenbaum 567.

femenina, as an auxiliary organization meant to support the goals of the Falange, the Spanish fascist political party founded by her brother, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, in the wake of the overthrow of their father's, Miguel Primo de Rivera, military dictatorship, and the subsequent election of the progressive Second Republic. The Falange advocated a totalitarian system in which every individual would work towards the common good without the distraction of competing institutions such as trade unions, thereby eliminating the "disunity," caused by regionalism, political parties, and class struggle.³ Pilar Primo de Rivera was passionately dedicated to the Falange and its goals; she supported the Nationalist forces during the Spanish Civil War, as well as other groups and institutions that sought to maintain the traditional Spanish society in which her family had prospered. When General Franco and the Nationalist forces proved victorious, the Falange and therefore the Women's Section were absorbed into Franco's government. The Women's Section became the only organization within the government completely devoted to the needs and education of Spanish women, and Primo de Rivera became the most powerful female in the country. Though her brother was assassinated during the Civil War, in Pilar the orthodox tenets of his political doctrine survived.

Though raised in entirely different economic and geographic contexts, Primo de Rivera and Ibarri were both instilled with a strong sense of pride in their Spanish identities. Primo de Rivera's upbringing in one of Spain's most influential families resulted in her lifelong ideological loyalty to the traditional and conservative forces that constituted the base of her family's power. Conversely, Ibarri's birth outside of the country's elite, and the struggles produced by her family's exclusion from the traditional power hierarchy, led her to support

³ Kathleen Richmond, *Women and Spanish Fascism: The Women's Section of the Falange 1934-1959*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 2.

communism. This ideology proposed an egalitarian vision of Spain, so unlike the country in which her family had struggled to survive. Thus Primo de Rivera and Ibarri became two of the twentieth century's most prominent Spanish female figures, as each dedicated her life's work to the advancement of distinct and diametrically opposed, visions of Spain and its female citizens' futures. The differing but transformative private spheres of Primo de Rivera and Ibarri's childhoods led them to pursue contradictory goals in their roles as leaders within the public sphere. Though Ibarri's *They Shall Not Pass: the Autobiography of La Pasionaria* and Primo de Rivera's *Recollections of a Life*, respectively, convey details of those two influential women's lives; their personal recollections primarily serve as narrations of and justification for the development of their strong and opposing political convictions. Both women detail the evolution of their relationship to Spain; Ibarri and Primo de Rivera often had opposing reactions to the frequent shifts in power that marked Spain's political landscape in the early twentieth century.

The early chapters of Ibarri's autobiography are marked by her disillusionment with the Spanish government. The first chapter of the text does not detail the beginning of her life, or that of her either of her parents, but instead outlines the history of Biscay, the province in which she was born, and the origins of the socialist movement that developed there. She depicts the geography of Biscay and the rest of the Basque country as rich in natural resources, and the people that inhabited and cultivated that land as "hardworking and long suffering, forged in a permanent struggle with the hard earth...[and] the untamed, stormy sea."⁴ The fame of the enduring Basque people and their treacherous, yet bountiful, land, Ibarri writes, has been well recorded since the time when Spain was but a Roman province and a detail in a history written

⁴ Dolores Ibarri, *They Shall Not Pass: The Autobiography of La Pasionaria* (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc, 1966), 11.

by more powerful peoples.⁵ The breadth of resources, such as coal and iron ore, available in the Basque country led to foreign exploitation of the region's natural wealth that the Spanish government, in Ibarri's opinion, was too short sighted and inept to prevent. Ibarri goes on to list a multitude of ways she perceives the Spanish government to have mistreated the Basque country and mishandled its economic interests. She pays specific attention to the infiltration of capitalistic values into the traditionally community focused society of the Basque country; where there had previously been a communal plot of land, now lay several individual plots that each belonged to a specific family.⁶ Through her interpretation and selective recollection of Basque history, Ibarri makes clear her political objectives at the time of the autobiography's publication. She criticizes capitalism's role within Spain's economy, resents its unnatural introduction into the spirited and independent Basque country, and cites it as the source of many of twentieth century Spain's problems.

Ibarri goes on to depict the inequalities of capitalism and the failures of the government within the Basque mining community in which she was raised. The process of industrialization and the natural resources of the land resulted in mining becoming primary industry in the Basque country; Ibarri came from a mining family and most everyone within her community did, as well. She characterizes the industry and mines in which her relatives and almost everyone she knew toiled, by "the greedy way in which the country was plundered of its principal wealth but also by the brutal treatment of the men who worked in them."⁷ She illustrates the ruthless nature of the mine owners through the story of a local boy named Bonifacio, a skilled young miner who was forced to work on the adult crew at the age of fifteen, despite the fact that he would not be

⁵ Ibarri 11.

⁶ Ibarri 14.

⁷ Ibarri 16-17.

paid adult wages until his nineteenth birthday. Soon after, Bonifacio was killed when he was assigned the dangerous job of deactivating explosives that had failed to detonate in the mine. Though Bonifacio had been one of the most productive workers in his crew, a piece of Spanish legislature decreed that, due to his failure to reach the age of nineteen, his family was not eligible for death benefits.⁸ Through this story Ibarri further illustrates a few of her main points: the mining companies' exploitation of their workers, the Spanish government's complicity in this exploitation, and the hardworking and decent nature of the Basque people.

Ibarri then depicts the challenges of her own early life. She weaves her personal journey through that of her community, never focusing exclusively on her own interests, but always considering the implications of her experiences in a broader context. She was born in December of 1895 in Gallarta—the family later relocated to another town in the province of Biscay—the eighth of eleven children born of a miner and his wife. Early on in her narrative, Ibarri establishes her personal connection to the mining world: “I come, then, from a mining stock, the granddaughter, daughter, wife and sister of miners. Nothing in the life of mining people is strange to me, neither their sorrows nor their desires nor their language nor their roughness.”⁹ She thereby claims the condition of the miners as her own; she may not be a miner herself, but she is an intimate part of their community and understands their plight. Ibarri asserts that the mothers within the community sought to provide their children with the security of a basic education—for if a deadly accident should occur within the family, as they frequently did in the mines, then the children would be forced to leave school in order to help support their relatives. Ibarri's schooling experience was a violent affair, as her teachers approached their

⁸ Ibarri 58.

⁹ Ibarri 42.

task with “apostolic zeal—between slaps and pinches—to combat our ignorance and polish up our intelligence.”¹⁰ From an early age, the education she received was infused with Catholicism—as was proscribed by the Spanish government—but she and her peers, young as they were, subverted this indoctrination: “At school we studied, sang and prayed. But we were the children of miners, of those miners who shook [Biscay] with their strikes and protests, and although they forced us to sing at school of our love of God, in the streets we sang the songs from the union hall.”¹¹ At an early age, Ibarriuri and her peers demonstrated the rebellious tendency that would come to define her life’s mission.

Through the narrative of her own life as well as through the details she provides about other members of the community, Ibarriuri depicts the increasing popularity and influence of socialist and communist ideas within the Basque country. Marxist ideology offered the oppressed community in which Ibarriuri was raised hope for an alternative to their bleak existence. Men, both young and old, were forced to endure the brutal labor that mining required, with their only real alternative to that trade being begging, a degrading occupation that the prideful Basque people were more than reluctant to hold.¹² Though the condition of the miners within her community had a profound impact on the development of Ibarriuri’s political ideals, “the transformation of an ordinary small-town woman into a revolutionary fighter, into a Communist, did not occur in a simple fashion and merely as a natural result against the subhuman conditions in which the mining families lived.”¹³ She and her peers may have demonstrated an intellectual resistance to the religious education they were provided, but Ibarriuri

¹⁰ Ibarriuri 45.

¹¹ Ibarriuri 46.

¹² Ibarriuri 43.

¹³ Ibarriuri 43.

attests that those Catholic lessons, which she had received in school, church, and at home, acted as a brake in her journey as a political dissenter.

Yet, even as an adolescent, her abject surroundings and the particularities of her character resulted in a disposition that would later lend itself well to anarchy: “I was filled with a bitter, instinctive resentment which made me lash out against everything and everybody...a feeling of rebellion which later became a conscious indignation.”¹⁴ This early sentiment of discontent was felt throughout her community; miners of all ages absorbed and discussed the radical books circulated at the *Centro Obrero*, a practice that the devout Catholic members of the community denounced. Yet, the appeal of an ideology that could provide the miners reprieve from the misery of their profession proved difficult to eliminate.

Ibarruri’s early disillusionment with the Spanish social order grew out of her experiences with religion. When young Ibarruri saw two nuns treating a religious manikin with little care—“My Virgin was like one of those scarecrows the peasants put in the wheat fields to frighten off the sparrows!”—her faith suffered “a deep shock.”¹⁵ The nuns’ disrespectful treatment of the manikin had a profound impact on the author’s blind faith in the Catholic church. On an ideological level, Ibarruri found the reality of her surroundings to be in conflict with the religious truths she was taught. If all of the members of the community were the children of God, and thereby brothers, she would ask her mother, then “why does our father have to go to work every day even if it rains, and their father doesn’t do any work at all, and yet they live better than we

¹⁴ Ibarruri 43.

¹⁵ Ibarruri 48.

do?”¹⁶ Ibaruri’s mother could not answer this question in a way that would alleviate her daughter’s discontentment, and this curiosity persisted.

Ibaruri finished school at age fifteen, and due to her poor health—which made her a less desirable candidate to work in the mines—and above average grades, went on to a school for teachers. Yet the necessities of an advanced education were non congruent with the economic reality of her family, and Ibaruri’s “adolescent dreams faded,” as she went on to dressmaking academy and then worked as domestic helper for local businessmen.¹⁷ Ibaruri was a promising student, but the limitations of money prevented her from achieving her full academic potential. In her twentieth year, Ibaruri “[sought] liberation from drudgery in other people’s homes,” by marrying a miner she met through her work.¹⁸ Yet, Ibaruri’s life remained difficult; her husband’s wages were not enough to provide food and shelter for their growing family. Her family’s situation, however, was no more desperate than that of the majority of their community, a realization that pushed Ibaruri farther away from her faith: “The intimate contact with harsh reality began to fray the fabric of my religious convictions...the source of our misery was not in heaven but on earth. It arose from institutions established by men which could be altered or destroyed by other men.”¹⁹ As her faith in the most powerful institution in Spain began to dissipate, Ibaruri turned to the writings of Marx for guidance.

As Spain’s and much of Europe’s political climate became increasingly unstable, Ibaruri’s interest in the Communist party grew. She cites the many issues she perceives in the central government, as well as the then recent Russian Revolution, as reasons for the Spanish

¹⁶ Ibaruri 49.

¹⁷ Ibaruri 59.

¹⁸ Ibaruri 59.

¹⁹ Ibaruri 61.

monarchy's decreasing influence. Ibarri gives the Spanish workers and peasants credit for the political reality, as it was their struggle that "impelled the bourgeois democratic forces to take a stand."²⁰ Thus, widespread insubordination against the central government occurred across the country, including an episode in the Catalan independence movement, and in Morocco, which was then a Spanish colony.

During this extended period of political unrest, Ibarri began to further educate herself on the ideals of Communism as an alternative to capitalism. She criticized the socialist literature which she had attempted to pursue as dry—a slight that is indicative of the tensions between the two Spanish parties in later years—and goes on to praise the writings of her preferred ideology as both fascinating and inspirational. Her commitment to Communism, she attests, easily surpassed her now depleted religious faith, as her belief in the power of the people convinced her of the possibility of an utopian future: "I was not willing to leave the world as we had inherited it. I would struggle to change it, to make it a better world, to open a path for our children that would lead to a society without oppression and without poverty."²¹ The dream of this alternative reality would have a profound impact on the trajectory of Ibarri's life.

Inspired by Communist ideology, Ibarri began to participate in party activities with increasing regularity. Her husband was already committed to the party and was spending a significant portion of his time in jail for crimes associated with his Communist activity, making Ibarri's struggle to feed their growing family all the more difficult. Yet she indicates little resentment for her husband's decision to engage in illegal activity, as she had become dedicated to the cause, as well. Both she and her husband went to meetings, organized strikes, protests, and

²⁰ Ibarri 63

²¹ Ibarri 62.

other events meant to further the Communist party and its ideals. Ibarriuri's commitment to the cause was unbridled—"we went without sleep, waiting for the call to action at any moment,"—and impatient.²² She and her comrades were anxious for progress, which often led them to hasty plans that resulted in brief but frequent periods of imprisonment.

With her husband and many of their allies and friends in jail, Ibarriuri was left to fend for herself. Her commitment to Communism, as a result of the ideology's political and social stigma, led her family and many of her neighbors to ostracize her: "I was a Communist and they were literally afraid to acknowledge me as a member of their family."²³ Members of the community who had known Ibarriuri all of her life now ignored her, including the local priest, who took every opportunity to indicate his disdain for her beliefs, and thereby, her family.²⁴ Only the bravest members of the community helped Ibarriuri, at the risk of their own social isolation and retribution from the government for associating with a known communist. However, she never expresses remorse for her beliefs, only regret for the response they elicited from the government and her community.

Ibarriuri's dedication to Communism eventually led her and her family to relocate to Madrid. Her life as a Communist was unpredictable, with different challenges and dangers each day that allowed little time for childrearing. Ibarriuri portrays herself, as well as many of her fellow Communists, as unequivocally dedicated to the cause despite its dangers and sacrifices. Ibarriuri and her associates regularly placed their lives in direct danger in the name of Communism or, in this instance, to make a statement about the police's treatment of wrongfully imprisoned Communists: "We planned to lie down on the streetcar tracks, in order to bring our

²² Ibarriuri 64.

²³ Ibarriuri 76.

²⁴ Ibarriuri 77.

plight to the attention of the public and apprise them of the legal abuses to which our husbands were subjected.”²⁵ Though Ibarurri and her collaborators were hoping to impede the progress of the trains, not commit suicide on the tracks, their actions were, in any case, potentially fatal. As Ibarurri was protesting the wrongful treatment of her jailed husband, her death would have resulted in her children having no parental guardian. Yet, it happens that she and the other mothers had decided to include their children in the demonstration, who, Ibarurri attests, were “resolved to imitate [their parents] actions, even though—as they confessed to [their parents] later—they were terrified at the thought of being run down by the streetcar.”²⁶ Ibarurri’s inclusion of her children in the protest speaks to her priorities; clearly making a political statement merited placing her children’s lives in danger.

Ibarurri’s status as a female and mother may not have been her first priority, but continually affected her political career and actions in a way that her husband’s status as a male and father did not. Though Ibarurri does not indicate that her husband’s belief in Communism is any more fervent than her own—though it is certainly predates hers—he is the one who is able to express his beliefs through frequent political action and dissent, while she bears the responsibility of caring for their growing family.²⁷ Though her husband’s constant imprisonment is hardly a desirable situation, that imprisonment is a consequence of his ability to express the opinions he is regularly ready to risk his life for. As a woman, Ibarurri is expected to prove her dedication to the cause, not through participation in the most exciting events, but through a supporting role—the dutiful wife who takes care of the kids. Typically, only when the male

²⁵ Ibarurri 81.

²⁶ Ibarurri 81.

²⁷ Ibarurri 81.

communists were indisposed would their female counterparts have the opportunity to embrace leading roles.

Yet, Ibarrruri depicts her fellow female Communists, as well as herself, as strong and independent women who had been inspired by the party's progressive doctrine. Though often relegated to subordinate roles, these women took every opportunity to prove themselves as fierce representatives of Communism, as evidenced by the reaction of a local governor they visited after finding his administration offensive: "Heaven protect me!...Those minors wives came to see me yesterday and they were terrifying. If the wives are so fierce, imagine what their husbands are like!"²⁸ Ibarrruri and her cohorts were unfortunate enemies to make and skilled politicians in their own right. As women they were criticized for their political beliefs in the context of their motherhood, for as one critic of a mother who had allowed her son to read communist literature insisted, "You answer to God not only for your own conscience; you answer to him for your children's conscience too."²⁹ Yet Ibarrruri depicts the women around her, as well as herself, as responding to such accusations with intelligent and logical retorts, evidence of their advanced understanding of Communism. In this way, Ibarrruri sought to establish the often underutilized capability and potential of female communists.

While seeking to inspire independence in other Communist women, Ibarrruri personally rebelled by frequently attending to her political commitments instead of the duties imposed upon her by gender norms. Though she makes clear her love for her children, and the importance of their wellbeing, by the time the family moved to Madrid, they no longer appeared to be her main priority. The nature of Ibarrruri's life was no longer conducive to motherhood; as her notoriety as

²⁸ Ibarrruri 83.

²⁹ Ibarrruri 56.

a prominent communist increased, she was forced into an existence of temporary residence in order to evade the authorities, an effort that ultimately proved unsuccessful.

With both she and her husband in jail, her son “had been left practically to his own resources...he was lonely, living in an unfriendly house where nobody ever had a kind word for him. He came and stood under the shadow of the prison walls, trying somehow to see his mother.”³⁰ Ibarurri’s only recourse to ensure the safety of her son was to send him far away from Madrid, where friends would care for him. Yet everyday before her son left Madrid, he waited outside the prison, hoping to see his mother. While her son’s visible pain and loneliness was difficult for Ibarurri—“This grieved me enormously, because I felt impotent to protect my son and give him my love and affection. Again I see how difficult it is for a mother to devote herself to a revolutionary struggle,”—her commitment to the cause was unwavering. She describes the sacrifices she made as a mother one of the most challenging aspects of her life as a communist, but asserts that “the best way to teach is by example, even if I had to shed tears of blood.”³¹ Though her separation from her children pained all parties involved, by remaining true to her faith in Communism, she believed she was the best mother she could possibly be.

Ibarurri goes to great lengths to demonstrate the injustices suffered by Spanish women. Though she sympathizes with the plight of all workers and peasants, she pays particular attention to the situation of her female compatriots. Upon her arrival in a particular Spanish prison, Ibarurri inspires insubordination amongst her fellow prisoners, encouraging them to demand better treatment and respect for their rights as Spanish citizens. Ibarurri portrays the prison employees as dismayed by her disruption of the repressive peace that existed prior to her arrival,

³⁰ Ibarurri 108.

³¹ Ibarurri 108.

and she eventually pushes the director beyond the limitations of his anger: “You have brought insubordination, disorder, and subversion to the prison and I won’t tolerate it any longer. Before you came the prison was calm; the women were weak and disciplined. Now it’s a hornet’s nest of protest and rebellion.”³² As a revolutionary, Ibarriuri relished the chaos her influence had reaped, and rejoiced in the fact that she inspired rebellion in women who had previously been coerced into submission.

She provides another example of women mistreated by the Spanish establishment with the story of two pregnant women banished from the maternity home in which had been staying, as a result of their refusal to pray. This event took place during the Second Republic, a government that did not require the same religious practices as previous regimes, and therefore the women were well within their rights to refuse prayer. Despite one woman’s imminent labor, and Ibarriuri’s logical pleas, the director of the home refused to readmit the women as a result of their perceived disrespect of the Catholic church. In this way Ibarriuri criticizes the Second Republic, for while it promised progressive change in Spain, she believed it not radical enough, nor effective in its administration. For Ibarriuri, only Communist revolution would bring the change Spain, she believed, desperately needed.

Pilar Primo de Rivera’s autobiography begins with a testament to her character, in the form of a prologue, written by Eugenio d’Ors, the Catalan philosopher and essayist of conservative thought. He speaks to her poignancy, as well as to her consistency, because, while life is filled with challenges and necessary modifications, Primo de Rivera is, “indemne siempre. Indemne y tranquila. Indemne y sencilla. Indemne y alta...Y, si en la confusión llega la noche, darnos todavía un poco de consoladora claridad.” [She is always unharmed. Unharmed and calm.

³² Ibarriuri 111.

Unharméd and unassuming. Unharméd and superior. And, in the confusion that arrives at night, she still gives us a little bit of comforting clarity.]³³ D'Ors's complimentary assessment of Primo de Rivera's character speaks to her esteemed reputation among Spain's most prominent conservative politicians and thinkers, who were vocal in their praise of her, one of the Franco regime's most prominent figures, even when it was no longer entirely politically advantageous to be associated with that government. This admiration speaks, not only to the political influence of Pilar Primo de Rivera, but also to the legacy of her father and her brother, as well as to that of the Falange and its ideology.

Primo de Rivera begins her autobiography by asserting that it is an unbiased and dispassionate effort to share the experiences of her privileged perspective on three generations' worth of Spanish politics. She expresses her wish, not to delineate and force her opinions on the audience, but to simply share her memories of the events that shaped Spanish politics during the twentieth century.³⁴ She seeks to share these recollections, not through inconsequential anecdotes, but through "el relato veraz en el que se entrelazan personas y sucesos según han ido apareciendo en la escena nacional y en mi vida." [The true account in which people and events are interwoven as they have appeared on the national stage and in my life.]³⁵ Though her tone and omission of certain pertinent details implies that she expects her reader to be familiar with her family and its many accomplishments, she goes on to list some of those accolades. She also addresses the tragedies her family experienced—the assassinations of her brothers Jose Antonio

³³ Pilar Primo de Rivera, *Recuerdos de una vida* (Madrid: Dyrsa, 1983), 10.

³⁴ Primo de Rivera 11.

³⁵ Primo de Rivera 12.

and Fernando, in particular—in an effort, that she pursues throughout the text, to assert that her relatives, while influential, have experienced many of the same hardships as the rest of Spain.³⁶

Primo de Rivera criticizes Spain's passivity, identifying the country's political self involvement as a crucial issue of the day. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, she asserts, were a time “sin torturas mentales, pero también sin ambiciones” [Without mental tortures, but also without ambitions.]³⁷ She finds proof of this simple Spanish existence in the lives of “las clases acomodadas” [the comfortable classes,] who frequented social clubs, went on long summer holidays, and were fascinated by petty social gossip, all the while demonstrating complete “desinterés con respecto a los problemas del mundo” [disinterest with respect to the problems of the world.]³⁸ While she does condemn the political ignorance of her wealthy peers, Ibarri, so concerned with the plight of the working class, would take great issue with Primo de Rivera's simple depiction of the time. For though life may have been relatively uncomplicated for the wealthy, Ibarri and a large portion of the Spanish population were living very different, and difficult, lives.

Yet, Primo de Rivera's autobiography does not ignore the social inequalities of her time. She addresses the struggles of the lower classes—their abject working and living conditions—but asserts that they are primarily resigned to the misfortunes of their existence, and thereby not concerned with, or unable to, fight for a better life. She does, however, indicate her respect for the Spanish socialists, and their fight to provide workers with their “justos derechos” [just rights].³⁹ Though the Socialist Party in Spain would fight for the Republicans during the Spanish

³⁶ Primo de Rivera 11.

³⁷ Primo de Rivera 16.

³⁸ Primo de Rivera 15.

³⁹ Primo de Rivera 15.

Civil War, it took a more conservative political stance than the Communist Party, which, in conjunction with the anarchists, Primo de Rivera condemns as the as the instigators of tragic and unnecessary conflict across the country.⁴⁰ The struggles of the working class may have been Ibarri's main concern, but, as a result of her upbringing, Primo de Rivera's priorities lay elsewhere.

Primo de Rivera modestly depicts her family's social standing and the nature of her childhood. She was born in Madrid on November 7, 1907, one of six children in the family of Miguel Primo de Rivera and Casilda Sáenz de Heredia. She introduces her parents individually and the beginning of their marriage without fanfare, simply detailing their respective ages and cities of origin. Though she acknowledges her father's service in the military, she does so in order to depict the transitory nature of her youth: "Mi padre, como militar, ocupaba distintos destinos, y ellos obligaban a la familia a cambiar con frecuencia de residencia, pero mi madre acudía siempre a Madrid...cuando iban a tener un hijo" [My father, as a member of the military, was assigned to various locations, and the they required the family to frequently change residences, but my mother always stayed in Madrid...when she was going to have a baby.]⁴¹ In this way she depicts her family as similar to that of any other officer, traveling at the changing whim of the military. Similarly, Primo de Rivera asserts that, like any other military family, she and her siblings did not play with expensive toys, nor were unnecessary expenditures typical—despite her father's high rank, his children were not spoiled.⁴²

⁴⁰ Primo de Rivera 15.

⁴¹ Primo de Rivera 16.

⁴² Primo de Rivera 22.

As was common for the time, Primo de Rivera's mother died soon after the birth of her last boy, Fernando.⁴³ In this way, Primo de Rivera suffered a devastating loss that men and women across the country could relate to—as a mother's death was common during or after giving birth—, making her and her powerful family more accessible to the public. She depicts her mother's death as a devastating loss for her father, as their marriage was a happy one, and he was left with six small children and a demanding career. Though Primo de Rivera expresses deep sympathy for her father's grief, and indicates her own sadness over the loss, she considers her mother's death to be a Christian sacrifice: “Fue un muerte cristiana, como siempre había vivido, y, además, heroica. Ella sabía, posiblemente, desde su primer momento, que podía morir al tener un hijo, y, sin embargo, cumplió con su deber casada, porque así se lo pedía su consciencia cristiana” [It was a Christian death, as she had always lived, and also heroic. She knew, possibly, from her first moment, that she could die in the process of having a child, however, she fulfilled her matrimonial duty, because her Christian conscience told her to do so.]⁴⁴In Primo de Rivera's traditional view of the role of women in society, her mother bravely lost her life serving her husband, country, and God.

Primo de Rivera holds her father in similarly high regard, both as a parent and a politician. Though the demands of his career as a distinguished general, as well as gender norms, prevented him from acting as the children's primary care giver, he visited and spent as much time with Primo de Rivera and her siblings as he could, and was an affectionate, if distant, father.⁴⁵ Her father rose steadily in rank, and though the children sometimes traveled to visit him, they always returned to Madrid, where they stayed with various relatives and lived “muy unidos,

⁴³ Primo de Rivera 17.

⁴⁴ Primo de Rivera 17.

⁴⁵ Primo de Rivera 18.

y la vida familiar feliz continuaba” [very united, and the happy and familiar life continued.]⁴⁶

Primo de Rivera, in this way, asserts that she and her siblings did not suffer as a result of her father’s successful political career, but lived happily with their extended family. Even when her father became the dictator of Spain, a transition which she gives very little description of or political context for, she attests that politics did not become a crucial aspect of her life, as she and her siblings experienced normal childhoods while living with their extended relatives.⁴⁷

Primo de Rivera further emphasizes her detachment from her father’s political career, as “mi padre no mezcló nunca la vida oficial con la privada” [my father never mixed his public life with his private life].⁴⁸ Her father, she attests, was far too principled a man to involve his innocent children in the dangerous world of politics.

Though Primo de Rivera describes herself as innocent to the particularities of her father’s government as child, she reveals a deep seated patriotism that finds its origins in her childhood. Her father’s service in the military, and governance of the country, naturally led Primo de Rivera to be invested in the wellbeing of the nation, as it was inherently attached to that of her family. As a result, “desde pequeños iba procurando que naciera en nosotros el amor a la Patria” [from a young age it was ensured that a love for the country would be born in us].⁴⁹ Primo de Rivera speaks reverently of Spain’s many cities, describing each area as beautiful and charming in its own right, and demonstrating an appreciation for all of the nation, regardless of traditional political allegiances. While Ibarri’s autobiography remembers the memories of her childhood that informed her decision to embrace Communism and reject the traditional Spanish political

⁴⁶ Primo de Rivera 22.

⁴⁷ Primo de Rivera 29.

⁴⁸ Primo de Rivera 29.

⁴⁹ Primo de Rivera 18.

structure, Primo de Rivera's recollections speak to moments of her childhood that resulted in her patriotism and conservatism. Each time that Primo de Rivera passed by Madrid's royal palace, she was reminded by her elders to salute the flag that hung there, and as that act of respect became natural to her and her siblings, "poco a poco, iba despertando en su prole ese amor y respecto a España que debía influenciar todas nuestras vidas" [little by little, it was an awakening of this love and respect for Spain for that would influence the rest of our lives.]⁵⁰

In all of the ways that Ibarri was excluded from the traditional Spanish structures, Primo de Rivera was included. Though her autobiography depicts her childhood as typical of that of a Spanish military family, she was afforded opportunities that a woman in Ibarri's position could never have dreamed of. She lived in a variety of apartments located centrally in Madrid, the country's political and cultural center, where she benefited from an education that went beyond the rudimentary one Ibarri depicts herself as receiving. Primo de Rivera's family was at the forefront of Spanish politics and high society, and "descended from an illustrious military family,"⁵¹ while Ibarri and her family struggled to feed, cloth, and house themselves. Primo de Rivera was born into the privilege traditional Spanish society afforded her, and raised, as well as educated, to believe in the conservative forces that served her family well. As her autobiography demonstrates, her faith in the beliefs of her father and brother was absolute.

Primo de Rivera outlines the many successes she perceives her father's dictatorship to have achieved, demonstrating her admiration for him, despite his political shortcomings and failures. She primarily speaks of her father's government as it relates to her daily life, but asserts that she must take a moment, however brief, to discuss the work of her father, which she believes

⁵⁰ Primo de Rivera 18.

⁵¹ Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain: 1923-1977* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 24.

has “no siempre se ha hecho justicia” [has not always been done justice.]⁵² She speaks of his accomplishments broadly, rightly giving him credit for some, while severely simplifying others; like her assertion that her father “puso orden en España, se acabaron las huelgas y el terrorismo” [imposed order on Spain; he ended the strikes and terrorism.]⁵³ This sweeping summation of her father’s heroic end to the social instability that plagued the country does not speak to the activities and beliefs of Ibarri and her colleagues, nor to the simple fact that Spain was wrought by tension and conflict throughout the Second Republic and the subsequent Spanish Civil War. She attests to her father’s beloved status throughout Spain, asserting that only select groups, some of which later realized their error, did not support his government.

In reality, the policies of Primo de Rivera’s father were not always congruent with the tenets of fascism, the ideology to which she committed her life. Miguel Primo de Rivera was elevated to power on a ninety day, temporary basis, in order to combat Spain’s many political problems in 1923. He became dictator with “no evidence of any explicit theory or plan”, in fact, his only professed loyalty was to constitutional liberalism.⁵⁴ He was moderately popular with the public and his government was initially well received. He was successful in ending the long standing conflict with the Spanish colony of Morocco, yet struggled to distinguish his domestic policies. He expressed admiration for Benito Mussolini and his fascist politics and a hope that Spain’s political trajectory might follow that of Italy. Yet, his plans to achieve that goal were vague, and his dictatorship consistently struggled to define itself, as well as its relationship to the people.

⁵² Primo de Rivera 30.

⁵³ Primo de Rivera 30.

⁵⁴ Payne 25.

Primo de Rivera's government frequently returned to the idea of fascism as a longterm possibility, but he was never as committed to that ideology, or any other, unlike his children. The regime was never a resounding success in its own right, but rode a several year long wave of economic prosperity that it had done little to bring about.⁵⁵ Yet, Spain's decreasing economic stability in 1929 and the omnipresent issue of the constitutional legitimacy of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship resulted in its decreasing popularity.

By 1930, Primo de Rivera had lost the support of the monarchy, military, and public and had "ended in complete failure due to its inability to legitimize itself or create any political alternative," bringing down the Spanish monarchy with it, soon after.⁵⁶ The dictatorship would be remembered as one of the most moderate authoritarian governments of the twentieth century; Primo de Rivera had infringed upon few civil liberties and, as historian Stanley Payne notes, "even his enemies spoke well of [him] when he was gone."⁵⁷ Pilar Primo de Rivera was evidently proud of her father's popularity, but the policies of his regime were not in accordance with the ideals of fascism, as he "never fully escaped the mental boundaries of liberalism."⁵⁸ Nonetheless, the dictatorship served as an example of an authoritarian government for General Francisco Franco, as both its successes and failures informed his consolidation and execution of political influence and power.

Though their father's dictatorship was fraught by ideological contradictions and eventually ended in failure, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, and subsequently Pilar Primo de Rivera, found political inspiration in the defense of his policies. Primo de Rivera depicts her

⁵⁵ Payne 31.

⁵⁶ Payne 37.

⁵⁷ Payne 38.

⁵⁸ Payne 38.

father's fall from power as the product of "viejos políticos, la envidia, la incomprensión y los altos poderes" [old politicians, envy, misunderstanding, and the high powers,] freeing her father of culpability in the collapse of his regime.⁵⁹ Miguel Primo de Rivera fled to Paris after being overthrown, where he died of natural causes soon after. Primo de Rivera attests that her father remained actively engaged in Spanish politics while in exile, for he loved his country deeply and was invested in its well being. The Spaniards who had contributed to the fall of the dictatorship, Primo de Rivera asserts, "se dedicaron a ultrajar la memoria de mi padre" [were dedicated to insulting the memory of my father.]⁶⁰

All of the politicians, members of the military, and citizens who remembered Miguel Primo de Rivera fondly sought to protect his memory, most of all Primo de Rivera and her brother. José Antonio Primo de Rivera would commit himself, and lose his life in the process, "to the vindication of his father's work, which he was now trying to conceptualize in a radical, authoritarian, nationalist form."⁶¹ In the form of honoring their father's memory, albeit in a manner that did not accurately represent his politics, Primo de Rivera's brother had found his purpose in life. Primo de Rivera's love for both her father and brother, as well as her enthusiasm for the latter's politics, led her to follow her sibling into the political fray.

Ibarruri remembers the fall of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship and exile of the monarchy as occasions to be celebrated, and to which the people contributed. She attests that opposition to the regime formed in various sectors of society: the military, political organizations, and among students and intellectuals.⁶² The end of the dictatorship was the work not only of political and

⁵⁹ Primo de Rivera 32.

⁶⁰ Primo de Rivera 32.

⁶¹ Payne 43.

⁶² Ibarruri 83.

military elites, but the result, Ibarrruri argues, of a national collaboration. The Communist Party sought to contribute to this movement by encouraging workers to strike across the country. Despite the police's attempts to stop Ibarrruri and her comrades' efforts, these strikes were often successful, and, in some small part, contributed to the regime's downfall.⁶³

As the Communist Party prepared for the subsequent democratic elections of 1931, Ibarrruri grappled with, and overcame, her fear of public speaking as she became an increasingly prominent member of the organization.⁶⁴ This important step in her journey towards public fame occurred in conjunction with sweeping national political change, as "municipal elections were eventually held in April 1931, the victory of republican candidates in the larger cities was accepted by much of Spanish opinion as a valid plebiscite. Without formally abdicating, Alonso XII quickly departed and the Second Republic was inaugurated."⁶⁵ Ibarrruri describes the monarchy's exile from Spain as the end of a long political era in Spain: "Its downfall pried loose the hold of an oligarchy composed of aristocracy and finance capital on the political leader of the nation."⁶⁶ The elections of 1931 brought about the type of progress Ibarrruri had been waiting for.

The Second Republic, however, did not enact the radical and widespread change Ibarrruri had dreamed of. She describes the election of the liberal regime as a time of great hope for the working classes. Never before, she argues, had there been a more perfect moment in Spain's history for the country to gain ground on the more advanced countries it had long been chasing. What is more, the long oppressed working classes of Spain were ready to achieve the progress that had been withheld from them: "Never had the popular consciousness known such vitality.

⁶³ Ibarrruri 84.

⁶⁴ Ibarrruri 84.

⁶⁵ Payne 42.

⁶⁶ Ibarrruri 85.

Never had the determination to liquidate the subjugation of the past surged with such elan in the masses. Their will was like a live coal, burning with desire to end poverty, backwardness, ignorance.”⁶⁷ According to Ibarri, the Second Republic had offered the people hope of a cure for all the injustices that existed within their society.

Yet, to Ibarri’s disappointment, the leaders of the Second Republic had little more concern for the needs of the working classes than did their predecessors. Though those politicians had been “carried to power by the unanimous decision of the populace, [they] turned their backs on it and governed for the benefit of the privileged classes.”⁶⁸ The Second Republic found its political origins in the same roots as the old regime had, and thus did not serve Ibarri’s radical interest in completely changing the country’s social and power structures.

Ibarri took particular issue with the Second Republic’s lack of concern with Spain’s antiquated agrarian system. She presents a compelling case for the outdated and oppressive nature of the Spanish system of agriculture, which relied on the feudal system of latifundium, in which Spaniards were tied to the land and its owner as virtual slaves—particularly common in the region of Andalusia and the southern portion of Spain in general. The peasants tied to this system survived in abject states of poverty, and “lived, even before and after the Republic was proclaimed, in precisely the same conditions as serfs in the Middle Ages.”⁶⁹ The plight of the peasants found its origins in a different occupation, region, and system of labor than did that of the mining stock from which Ibarri hailed, but the nature of their struggles was the same. Ibarri sought to help all of the exploited peoples of her country, and the Spanish peasantry was an excellent example of a demographic in need: “A handful of rich landowners, owning tens of

⁶⁷ Ibarri 86.

⁶⁸ Ibarri 86.

⁶⁹ Ibarri 87.

thousands of acres of land—only part of it in cultivation; millions of peasants, victims of centuries of hunger and destitution, some of them landless, others owning a parcel so tiny that its cultivation could not so much as provide food for its owners.”⁷⁰ The condition of the Spanish peasants was dire, and according to Ibarrruri, its reform constituted “the very essence of democratic revolution.”⁷¹

The Second Republic, however, had priorities very different from the those of Ibarrruri. During the early months of the new regime, according to her, the government proposed a limited plan for agrarian reform that was rejected as being too radical. Though the Second Republic made a few other attempts to improve this problem within Spanish society, Ibarrruri asserts that the government’s intentions were never genuine: “Instead of radically changing existing land ownership patterns, they endeavored to divert the attention of the peasants from such fundamental questions.”⁷² Ibarrruri argues that the Second Republic was not interested in addressing and reforming serious Spanish issues like that of the agrarian system, but in maintaining the status quo. In Ibarrruri’s interpretation of Manuel Azaña’s, the first prime minister of the Second Republic and the president of the Republic during the Spanish Civil War, words, the policies of his government were not at all threatening to the established political and social orders: “He advised the landless peasants not to entertain the illusion that they would be granted land. He declared this to be an impossibility...just as it was impossible to provide work or to put an end to the hunger and misery which was their only heritage.”⁷³ In this way, Ibarrruri

⁷⁰ Ibarrruri 87.

⁷¹ Ibarrruri 89.

⁷² Ibarrruri 89.

⁷³ Ibarrruri 89.

asserts, the Second Republic informed the Spanish working classes that it could not be counted upon to implement the change they needed.

Ibarruri's role as a mother continued to affect her life as a politician. As she became increasingly involved in Communist activities, Ibarruri had little time to devote to her children, who were once again living with her in Madrid. Though Ibarruri's husband disappears from her narrative with little explanation, she is cognizant of informing her reader of the status and wellbeing of her children. Ibarruri rebelled against the idea that, "Women's goal, her only aspiration, had to be matrimony and the continuation of the joyless, dismal, pain-ridden thralldom that was our mothers' lot; we were supposed to dedicate ourselves wholly to giving birth, to raising our children and to serving our husbands, who, for the most part, treated us with complete disregard."⁷⁴ Ibarruri would not allow her life to be defined by her duties as a wife, and her role as a mother was often relegated to a secondary role, but she demonstrated real love and care for her children.

Ibarruri was aware that Madrid was neither the safest nor healthiest environment in which her children could be raised, and she requested that she be transferred back to the Basque country, where they might have a traditional childhood and she could spend more time with them. The party, however, refused her request, asserting that she was needed to work amongst the women in Madrid. As a prominent female Communist leader, she was valuable to the Party in unique ways—she could recruit other women to the cause more easily than any man could. Yet, Ibarruri realized that her children were not happy in Madrid and relayed this information to the Party—as a member she forfeited her right to make all important decisions for herself. Ultimately, the Party leaders made a decision about her children's future that Ibarruri had little choice but to

⁷⁴ Ibarruri 59.

accept: “The party leaders thought the matter over and proposed to send my children to the Soviet Union, where they could lead a normal life together with the children of the Soviet workers, even though they would not have the presence and comfort of their mother.”⁷⁵ Ibarri expresses sadness over the physical separation she and her children would have to endure, but justifies it as a way to ensure her kids’ well being. Though Ibarri attempts secure the best lives possible for her children, she ultimately chooses her commitment to the Communist Party over her role as a mother.

As an active and high profile member of the Communist Party, Ibarri was chased after by the police regardless of the political regime in power. Communism was never a mainstream political option in Spain, and even and especially during the more liberal Second Republic, when, according to historian Stanley Payne, “the level of political violence...was very high; the journal of *Historia Contemporánea* has referred to ‘the militarization of politics during the Second Republic.’”⁷⁶ This violence, Payne asserts, was initiated by the Communists and anarchists in 1931, and perpetuated by that group throughout the Second Republic. Though other political groups, including the fascists, were implicated in this violence as well, the provocative and already politically stigmatized Communist Party was often blamed. Though Ibarri downplays the radical nature of the Communist Party’s activities—in her narrative she and her compatriots are often the victims of police brutality—she is forced into constant hiding and depicts frequent close encounters with the authorities. Most prominent members of the Communist Party would have had similar experiences, but Ibarri appears to have been an especially popular target of ridicule and suspect for her beliefs.

⁷⁵ Ibarri 151.

⁷⁶ Payne 102.

As a woman, Ibarri's notoriety as a Communist took on a distinctly gendered form. She was known, among both enemies and friends, as *la pasionaria*—the passion flower—for her fervent belief in the ideals of Communism, which, according to Professor of Spanish Kristine Byron, suggests “natural delicacy and femininity, but also suggests resilience, strength, and passion (i.e. pathos). Interestingly, in spite of her professed atheism, she chooses an alias that alludes to the religious celebration of Christ’s suffering...she creates a trope of suffering...appropriat[ing] religious symbolism to explain the plight of the Spanish proletariat, a technique she often uses in her autobiography as well.”⁷⁷ Her nickname is gendered by the feminine connotations of the flower, as well as by the feminine gender of the word *la pasionaria* in the Spanish language. Her status as a female is unequivocally implied by her nickname; she is both a woman and an ardent believer in Communism. She refused to accept that her ability to make a political difference could be limited by her gender, as evidenced by her participation in protests and demonstrations of all kind, as well as by her focus on her role as a politician rather than that of a mother or a wife. Ibarri unabashedly claimed the political sphere of Spanish society as her own, while Primo de Rivera was not allowed to become a full member of the Falange, due to her gender, and was thereby not granted acceptance into that same space.⁷⁸

Yet, attacks from the authorities and opposing political groups against Ibarri were often gendered. Her status as a female did not impact the severity of the stories told by those who feared her, as her gender was not perceived as a limitation on her ability to be cruel. As Ibarri writes of her public image on the right, “They spoke of La Pasionaria with horror, of the crimes she had committed, of her cruelty with prisoners, especially monks and nuns, of the songs

⁷⁷ Kristine Byron, “Writing the Female Revolutionary Self: Dolores Ibarri and the Spanish Civil War,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 28.1 (2004): 141.

⁷⁸ Primo de Rivera 60.

heard about her on Radio Saragossa.”⁷⁹ Though it is impossible to know the validity of all the accusations against Ibarri, her autobiography does not admit to many of the crimes she is accused of. However, both the left and the right were guilty of violence during this tumultuous time in Spanish politics, including and especially the Communist Party. While it is unclear if Ibarri herself participated in such acts, many of her political associates certainly did.

Regardless, Ibarri’s recollection of insults directed against her often portrayed her as subhuman. Not only was she thought to be more of a man than a woman, but she was stripped of her nationality, as well: “...They say she’s more like a beast than a woman...They say *La Pasionaria* isn’t Spanish, that she looks like a man.”⁸⁰ These attacks on Ibarri had little to do with her beliefs or actual intelligence, but instead focused on devaluing her as a woman and a Spaniard. By questioning her gender they negated the threat she posed to society as a powerful woman and Communist. Similarly, by placing into doubt her nationality, they refuted the claim that their country could produce such a menace to society. As a female Communist, Ibarri was not only attacked for her beliefs, but for her identity as a woman in the Spanish political sphere threatening traditional societal gender norms.

Yet, Ibarri depicts many common Spaniards as more than willing to assist her and the Communist cause. As she constantly attempted to evade the authorities, Ibarri was often forced to rely on the generosity of, not only her friends, but the many random civilians who were not actively engaged in the Communist Party and its activities, but supported its efforts. In her recollections, and despite the social and political stigma attached to the Party, there was no shortage of Spaniards willing to protect her and her friends, like the shopkeeper in 1935 who

⁷⁹ Ibarri 298.

⁸⁰ Ibarri 298.

greeted Ibarri in this way: "Pardon me, but I know who you are. I would like to express my sympathy for the cause of the Communist Party and also my indignation for the conduct of the other parties. I'm an old Republican and I'm ashamed and outraged at the situation that our governments have put the Republic in."⁸¹ Ibarri writes of many Spaniards who placed their lives and those of their families in danger in order to express support, through both word and action, for Ibarri and the Communist Party.

Other political parties and politicians were, according to her, ever suspicious of Ibarri and her comrades, like the Socialist Party leader Francisco Largo Caballero: "We [the Communist Party] offered this help unconditionally, without any ulterior motives. Unfortunately, he didn't see it this way; he considered every Communist proposal an invasion of his territory, an infringement of his rights, or a maneuver to gain underhanded objectives."⁸² While this example speaks specifically to the rivalry between the Communist and Socialist Parties in Spain, Ibarri's autobiography illustrates the willingness of ordinary citizens to accept the Communists, and, conversely, the refusal of other politicians and political parties to do the same.

During the years of the Second Republic, Ibarri and her female Communist comrades began collaborating with other women's groups in Spain to create the National Committee of Women against War and Fascism, an organization with political goals in direct opposition to those of the Falange and Pilar Primo de Rivera. According to Ibarri, a delegate from the World Committee of Women against War and Fascism traveled to Spain in order to gauge the interest among women's political groups in creating a similar organization there. Ibarri and the other

⁸¹ Ibarri 150.

⁸² Ibarri 130.

Communists indicated their definite interest, and agreed to speak some of the other prominent left-wing women's groups, as the delegate did not have time to do so.⁸³

Though communication between the Communists and Socialists was, as always, fraught with tension, various women and organizations worked together to create the National Committee of Women against War and Fascism. In her interactions with the women of the Republican Party, Ibarrruri was pleasantly surprised: "We found dozens of humble women who could have put some of their party leaders to shame with their excellent political capabilities, their understanding of Spain's vital problems and their determination to fight against fascism."⁸⁴ In these Republican women, Ibarrruri saw a competency and political awareness that she could not identify in their male counterparts. So threatened were the Republican men by the friendly alliance between the two groups of women that they attempted to use police to stop the meetings. This plan, however, backfired, and the most politically active and passionate of the Republican women left the organization to pursue their beliefs through other outlets—including the Communist Party.⁸⁵ In this way, Ibarrruri portrays the Party as a space in which the most politically passionate and intelligent women could freely express themselves.

Ultimately, the National Committee of Women against War and Fascism was a collaborative effort that Ibarrruri proudly remembers for its attempts to achieve peace and combat conservative ideology in Spain. Ibarrruri, who served as the group's acting president, and her comrades focused their attention on the Women against War Committee, which was committed to preventing the type of conservative insurrection that eventually instigated the Spanish Civil War. The group also protested Spain's involvement in conflict abroad, specifically in Morocco,

⁸³ Ibarrruri 133.

⁸⁴ Ibarrruri 134.

⁸⁵ Ibarrruri 134.

supported the efforts of workers to strike peacefully, and, according to Ibarriuri “passed its baptism of fire with honors during the repression of the insurrectionary movement of 1934. Many women became outstanding political activists of the organization.”⁸⁶

As the Falange struggled to gain political traction in Spain after José Antonio Primo de Rivera founded the organization in 1933, political violence related to the rise of fascism and the generally contentious political environment took place across Spain.⁸⁷ The Women Against War Committee consisted of politically informed and active women dedicated to the prevention of violence and the elimination of fascism. Its members were fierce advocates for the cause and active participants in the public sphere unafraid to place themselves in physical and political danger.⁸⁸ The organization was an exemplary effort in bipartisanship, and its accomplishments offered Ibarriuri, writing from exile during the Franco regime, hope for Spain’s future: “The common struggle, although waged for different reasons, was the great melting pot of opinions. And we can say with all certainty that what was done yesterday in defense of the Republic and of democracy can also be done tomorrow in the reconstruction of a democratic and peaceful Spain.”⁸⁹ If a large group of opinionated Spaniards could work together before the Spanish Civil War, then perhaps there was hope of successful collaboration against Franco.

In 1936, Ibarriuri was elected to represent Asturias as a deputy in the national government along with many other representatives of the liberal coalition known as the Popular Front. Though she and the other Communist elected ran in conjunction with the Republicans and Socialists, her platform was loyal to the ideals of the Communist Party. While the other parties

⁸⁶ Ibarriuri 135.

⁸⁷ Payne 110.

⁸⁸ Ibarriuri 139.

⁸⁹ Ibarriuri 138.

gave the Communists the least priority by forcing them to speak first at antifascist coalitions and Popular Front rallies, the exciting and inventive ideas of Ibarriuri's party garnered the most attention from the crowds: "Since the Republicans and Socialists always spoke of legal, constitutional and other irrelevant issues, of which everyone was sick and tired, many people would leave as soon as the Communists had finished speaking."⁹⁰ Ibarriuri attests that this trend resulted in the Communists receiving a more preferable time to speak, however her own acclaimed reputation as a public speaker must be considered, as well.

By this time Ibarriuri was one of the most famous, or infamous, Communists in the country. Though Ibarriuri expresses envy for the speaking prowess of many of the prominent Spanish Socialists, her own persuasive eloquence was well known.⁹¹ She honed her speaking abilities during the campaign, when she gave many speeches in favor of the Communist Party platform. She portrays her audiences as curious and enthusiastic about the idea of a Communist society—"Exclamations and applause broke out through the audience, showing the interest that the people had in hearing a first-hand account of a fisherman's life in a Socialist country...everyone had questions and wanted to hear more,"—and though her perception of the crowd is likely influenced by her own biases, her ideas were popular enough in Asturias to result in her election to the national government.⁹² Ibarriuri was therefore a part of the Popular Front government that the military and conservative Spanish forces sought to overthrow in July of 1936.

Ibarriuri reacted to that insurrection and the events that preceded it with practical determination. She criticizes the Socialists and Republicans for their refusal to react to the

⁹⁰ Ibarriuri 163.

⁹¹ Ibarriuri 163.

⁹² Ibarriuri 164.

warning signs of an impending conservative reaction to the Popular Front's election: "The optimism of many Republican and Socialist leaders was absurd. Stubbornly closing their eyes to the danger, they called the Communists alarmists because we insisted on taking precautions against a possible coup."⁹³ Though she believed strongly in the legitimacy and cause of the regime, she depicts herself, and the Communist Party, as practical enough to realize the danger of the conservative threat. The military coup on July 18, 1936 was therefore not a surprise to Ibarriuri or her comrades, but a simple reality to which the government needed to respond, but was not organized or reactive enough to handle.⁹⁴ Within days of the coup the Republican government reorganized, and the new Republican president, José Giral, and his government, for the moment, "had the confidence of the people, and its first communiqués brought renewed determination to those who were ready to make any sacrifice to prevent the triumph of reaction."⁹⁵

Yet, despite this endorsement of the early Republican defense, Ibarriuri finds many faults with the government's, and the many factions within it, effort to end the Nationalist threat. The Republic did not receive help, according to Ibarriuri, from France or Britain, as "The French bourgeois and the British capitalists did not want the Republic to triumph for various reasons, among them the fact that they needed Spain as a backward neighbor on whom they could impose onerous and extortionist treaties."⁹⁶ Though the Republic, a legitimate government, did not receive help from their supposed democratic allies, as a result of those countries' capitalistic and self-preserving tendencies, the Nationalist forces received a great deal of assistance from

⁹³ Ibarriuri 191.

⁹⁴ Ibarriuri 195.

⁹⁵ Ibarriuri 196.

⁹⁶ Ibarriuri 202.

Germany and Italy.⁹⁷ The Republic's problems, however, went beyond the lack of international support it received. Ibarri asserts that only the Communists understood the severity of the situation and the need for revolutionary action, as the Republican leaders and Spanish bureaucrats were "stultified by dogmatic legalism and incapable of understanding the changes operating in the world and the new forces lining up on both the national and international stage."⁹⁸ In Ibarri's opinion, the other defenders of the Republic were too ignorant of the changing world to enact the proper response to the Nationalist threat. Further, tensions between the Communists, Socialists, and other members of the Republican forces hindered their ability to defend the government. The various factions had different visions of the proper way to conduct the defense, and Spain's Republican strongholds fell one by one to the Nationalist forces.

Yet, in the face of the chaotic years of the Second Republic and Spanish Civil War, Ibarri's faith in the Communist Party and its ideals never wavered. She believed fervently in the ideology's practicality and ability to change the lives of the millions of oppressed peoples across the world, but specifically in Spain. Communism allowed Ibarri the luxury to imagine that a society could exist in which people like her—the children of miners—could be afforded the same opportunities that the children of families like the Primo de Riveras benefited from in twentieth century Spain. Ibarri was willing to sacrifice everything for this cause—though she did the best she could to ensure the safety of her children—and dedicated her life to the Party, both before and after the Spanish Civil War and subsequent Franco regime. In 1939, as Franco's victory loomed imminent, Ibarri fled Spain, and resettled in the Soviet Union, where she became a citizen. Yet, her heart would always remain in Spain, where, at the time of her

⁹⁷ Ibarri 202.

⁹⁸ Ibarri 207.

autobiography's publication, she still wished to see Marxist ideals implemented into governmental reality: "Only Socialism can release the immense stores of energy, vitality, and capacity now lying dormant in Spain's people. Only Socialism can wipe out the centuries-old backwardness of our country. Only Socialism can put an end to sterile centralism, regionalism and backward provincialism. Only Socialism can eliminate social inequalities and reorganize the structure of the Spanish state on new economic and political bases. Only Socialism can bring about a renaissance, inconceivable and impossible to achieve under the present system or any similar one."⁹⁹

Unlike Ibarri, Pilar Primo de Rivera did not celebrate the democratic election of the Spanish Second Republic in 1931. Rather, she describes that government's proclamation as a moment when Spain's already poor political situation—in light of her father's recent demotion and exile—became even worse.¹⁰⁰ Primo de Rivera reasserts her admiration for her father's intelligence and political acumen by claiming that he, during the few months he spent exiled in France before his death, had anticipated the Second Republic's election: "Veía avanzar inexorable y que llegó un año y un mes después de su muerte" [He saw the Republic's inexorable approach, and it arrived a year and a month after his death.]¹⁰¹ She attests that, as her father found himself deposed and exiled, despite his most valiant and honest attempts to govern, he could see the dark trend of Spanish politics drawing the country closer to an unfortunate election like that of the Second Republic. Further, Primo de Rivera attests that Queen Victoria, as she and King Alonso XIII followed Miguel Primo de Rivera into exile, asserted that, "Si vuestra padre hubiera vivido no hubiera pasado esto" [Had {Primo de Rivera's} father still been alive,

⁹⁹ Ibarri 349.

¹⁰⁰ Primo de Rivera 53.

¹⁰¹ Primo de Rivera 53.

this would not have happened.]¹⁰² Primo de Rivera thereby asserts that her father was wise enough to predict the Second Republic's coming, and implies, through this memory, that he could have prevented it had he not been removed from power.

Though Primo de Rivera was not pleased with the Second Republic's election, she acknowledges that the public's reaction to it was varied: "La República, justo es decirlo, fue recibida con esperanza, sobre todo por la juventud" [The Republic, it is fair to say, was received with hope, especially by the youth.]¹⁰³ She recognizes that a portion of the Spanish population, influenced by the writings of notable Spanish intellectuals like Gregorio Marañón and José Ortega y Gasset, had lost faith in the Spanish monarchy and its ability to lead the country. Though she sympathized with the supporters of the royal family, and understood their nostalgic attachment to the institution, she did not support the movement to reinstate it—she and her family had begun to commit themselves to an alternative, fascist vision of Spain's future.

Further, as the Republic "pursued a policy of vengeance against the monarchy, the Dictatorship, and the principal figures of the latter," José Antonio Primo de Rivera took offense to this criticism and began to publicly defend his father's regime, demonstrating the family's pride in the patriarch's legacy and its increasing disagreement with the ideology, policy, and actions of the Republic.¹⁰⁴ Primo de Rivera speaks to the Republic's offense of her family, as she asserts that "Pero la República, tan bien recibida, perdió su oportunidad al dedicarse a herir sentimientos, en vez de hacer obra constructiva...las grandes manifestaciones comunistas...las persecuciones injustificadas provocaron reacciones contrarias sobre todo entre la juventud" [But the Republic, so well received, lost its opportunity in its dedication to hurt feelings, instead of

¹⁰² Primo de Rivera 53.

¹⁰³ Primo de Rivera 54.

¹⁰⁴ Payne 75.

constructive work...the large Communist demonstrations...the unjustified persecutions provoked contrary reactions especially with the youth.]¹⁰⁵ In Primo de Rivera's perception of the Republic's refusal to enact constructive change in favor of political oppression and violence, she cites the origins of the Falange's founding.¹⁰⁶

In the wake of the Second Republic's election and inadequacies, Primo de Rivera asserts that the Falange was founded around her brother and his political ideas. Early on in the development of José Antonio Primo de Rivera's political ideology, and therefore that of the Falange, he asserted that, "his intention was not to oppose the Republic itself and admitted candidly, 'My own convictions are not formed. I do not consider myself adequately informed in many areas to define myself politically.'¹⁰⁷ Yet, neither Pilar Primo de Rivera nor her brother were content with the Republic's governance, and the Falangist doctrine that emerged was ideologically opposed to that of the then current regime. Pilar Primo de Rivera saw the Falange as the force that would end the "pesimismo histórico" [historical pessimism,] and "la injusticia social" [social injustice,] that plagued Spain, and as an ideology that offered a fresh and inspiring vision of the country's future: "Venía el movimiento limpio de contornos, sin compromisos anteriores, ofreciendo, además de un pensamiento nuevo, una ética para las conductas" [The movement came clean of edges, without the previous compromises, offering, more than a new thought, an ethics of conduct.]¹⁰⁸ Though Primo de Rivera and some of her female cousins were eager to join the Falange, and support a cause they strongly believed in, but they were not allowed to become full members due to their gender, and were instead incorporated into the

¹⁰⁵ Primo de Rivera 55.

¹⁰⁶ Primo de Rivera 55.

¹⁰⁷ Payne 75.

¹⁰⁸ Primo de Rivera 55.

Sindicato Español Universitario (SEU), the fascist student organization also founded by José Antonio Primo de Rivera.¹⁰⁹ José Antonio Primo de Rivera was, according to historian Inbal Ofer, reluctant to include women in the Falange because he “could not accept female membership in what he envisioned would be the spearhead of the National Syndicalist revolution won by the blood and sacrifice of a chosen few.”¹¹⁰ Pilar Primo de Rivera’s political aspirations were not included in her brother’s early vision of his party’s future, but she would not be excluded for long.

Primo de Rivera’s tenacity and devotion to the cause earned her a unique and enduring role within the Falange’s organizational hierarchy, as the founder and leader of the Women’s Section. According to Primo de Rivera, it was “La tremenda persecución de la Falange por los partidos políticos y desde el mismo seno del Gobierno...se había declarado beligerante contra nosotros—será lo que provoque al fin el nacimiento de la de la sección femenina como tal, en el mes de junio de 1934” [The tremendous persecution of the Falange by the political parties and from the same breast of the government...which had declared itself belligerent against us—was what provoked, in the end, the birth of the Women’s Section as such, in the month of June in 1934.]¹¹¹ Ofer provides a slightly different interpretation of the organization’s founding: “Following the arrest of many senior Falangists and the death and wounding of several others in street fights, the new movement needed all the help it could get. In June that same year, therefore, the Falange’s leadership decided to found a separate Women’s Section under the

¹⁰⁹ Primo de Rivera 60.

¹¹⁰ Inbal Ofer, *Señoritas in Blue: The Making of a Female Political Elite in Franco’s Spain* (Eastbourne, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2010) 15.

¹¹¹ Primo de Rivera 65.

supervision of the male leadership.”¹¹² Ofer does not specifically implicate governmental persecution of the Falange, as she does not cite a reason—legitimate or not—for the members’ arrest, but both sources attribute the group’s founding to the Falange’s need for more organizational support.

The Women’s Section occupied a supporting role in the Falange’s hierarchy prior to the Franco regime. Primo de Rivera and her female comrades were enthusiastic participants in her brother’s movement, but she and the Women’s Section were far less influential than they would be during the Franco regime. The organization’s early activities, according to Primo de Rivera, included: “ocuparse de los camaradas presos, atender y acompañar a sus familias y a las familias de los caídos, que iban ya siendo muchos, recoger dinero para ayudarles y también para ocuparse de la propaganda” (dealing with imprisoned comrades, attending and accompanying their families and those of the fallen, of which there were already many, and collecting money to help them as well as to handle propaganda.)¹¹³ Though they were afforded a fair amount of responsibility, the Women’s Section was left to clean up after the Falange by helping the imprisoned members and caring for their families—as well as those of the dead—, the collateral damage of the party’s political activities.

Like Ibaruri and her depiction of the Communist political experience, Primo de Rivera portrays the Falange and its members as victims of political oppression and violence. Prominent members of the Falange, like those of the Communist Party, were frequently jailed for their political activities. Even members of the Women’s Section spent time in jail, though the

¹¹² Ofer 15.

¹¹³ Primo de Rivera 65.

government was never able to imprison Primo de Rivera, herself.¹¹⁴ While Primo de Rivera depicts Falangist members' imprisonments as unjust, and does not often acknowledge the action or event that caused them, Payne asserts that, "Falangists were constantly taking the initiative in acts of provocation."¹¹⁵ Neither the Communists nor the Fascists were innocent victims during this turbulent period in Spanish history; both sides were perpetrators and victims of political violence.

As the political tension intensified and Spain neared civil war, Primo de Rivera attests that the government's surveillance of the party intensified: "El tiempo pasaba y llegamos a 1936. La situación era cada vez más difícil e insostenible; ya no teníamos centros para reunirnos y nos transmitíamos las consignas recibidas en el Museo de Prado" [Time passed and we arrive at 1936. The situation was increasingly difficult and unsustainable; already we did not have places to meet and we transmitted the instructions we received at the Prado Museum.]¹¹⁶ The Falange and Primo de Rivera resorted to passing secret messages in public places in order to avoid the government's surveillance. The impending Spanish Civil War would eliminate this need, and bring both great success and devastation to Primo de Rivera and her beloved Falange.

Primo de Rivera viewed the coup in July of 1936 optimistically, and hoped for a quick end, and a conservative victory, to the conflict. She attests that early on in the war, among the Falange there was "un gran optimismo, en la certeza de que todo terminaría rápidamente y que Franco entraría en Madrid como Santiago, en un caballo blanco, que era su fiesta" [a great optimism, in the certainty that all would end quickly and that Franco would enter Madrid like

¹¹⁴ Primo de Rivera 66.

¹¹⁵ Payne 169.

¹¹⁶ Primo de Rivera 69.

Saint James, on a white horse, where his party would be being held.]¹¹⁷ Yet Primo de Rivera quickly came to the realization that the conflict would not be brief, and committed herself, as well as the Women's Section, to assisting the Nationalist cause in every possible way. Which meant, according to Payne, "organiz[ing] volunteer female labor for the war effort, particularly in military hospitals and laundries, counting 1,250 local centers by the beginning of 1938 and nearly 3,000 by 1939. This became the largest single welfare and assistance network in Spanish history to that date."¹¹⁸ Primo de Rivera and the Women's Section made significant contributions in the battle to secure victory for Nationalists, in the hopes that it would result in the creation of a fascist regime in Spain.

The death of José Primo de Rivera, in a Republican prison, however, was a devastating blow to both Pilar Primo de Rivera and the Falange. Though Primo de Rivera writes of her brother's death many decades after the fact, and therefore does not express the same emotion she may have earlier in her life, the impact of that loss is still evident in her autobiography. She and her family had hoped he might escape the fate of so many other prisoners of war during the conflict—as the Spanish Civil War was marked by the atrocities committed by both sides—but José Antonio was put on formal trial by the terms of the Code of Military Justice before a jury of the Popular Tribunal of Alicante on charges that he had attempted to overthrow the Republic, and was convicted and executed in November 1936.¹¹⁹

Primo de Rivera remembers her brother's death, through details provided by the director of the prison in which he was held, as dignified.¹²⁰ His death was confirmed almost two years

¹¹⁷ Primo de Rivera 75.

¹¹⁸ Payne 257.

¹¹⁹ Payne 231.

¹²⁰ Primo de Rivera 141.

after the fact, and he would become the most idolized Nationalist victim and conservative figures of the Civil War—only Franco was the subject of more adulation.¹²¹ Payne asserts that José Antonio Primo de Rivera’s political life was “strongly shaped by his family background, and his infatuation with authoritarian rule stemmed from the model of his own father, the Dictator,” and the same can be argued of his sister.¹²² Primo de Rivera struggled to accept her brother’s death, but the loss and his political vision inspired the rest of her long political career; through her work, she honored him.

Franco’s victory in the Spanish Civil War solidified the Falange’s, and therefore the Women’s Section’s, incorporation into his government, a process which had been initiated by the Decree of Unification in 1937. In the wake of the Spanish Civil War’s conclusion, Primo de Rivera testifies that “para conmemorar la victoria, pensamos en organizar una gran concentración de la sección femenina...esta concentración sería un homenaje al Caudillo y al Ejército” [in order to commemorate the victory, we thought to organize a large concentration of the Women’s Section...this concentration would be an homage to el Caudillo [Franco] and the military.]¹²³ Yet, despite this public demonstration of good faith, Ofer asserts that Primo de Rivera was reluctant to accept the Falange’s integration into Franco’s coalition, and that she sought to “establish her position as her brother’s ideological successor within Nationalist Spain...in the absence of the founder, Pilar acted in order to consolidate her position as the only legitimate interpreter of José Antonio’s doctrine and as a focal point for sentimental identification of the missing leader.”¹²⁴ Though Primo de Rivera was forced to submit to Franco’s consolidation of

¹²¹ Payne 233.

¹²² Payne 234.

¹²³ Primo de Rivera 145.

¹²⁴ Ofer 17.

conservative power by the time of the war's end, she would never relinquish her claim to be her brother's heir and the standard-bearer of Falangist ideology during the dictatorship.

Yet, the Women's Section would survive, and indeed at times thrive, under the Franco regime, as did the politically skilled Primo de Rivera. Though Primo de Rivera did not believe the regime fully embodied the ideals of the Falange, the Women's Section gained a great deal from becoming the official women's organization of the regime, as it "was to deal with every major aspect relating to women's standing, including education and professional training; health and welfare; and even political and professional representation."¹²⁵ The Women's Section came to wield a fair amount of influence in Franco's Spain, and functioned as "the transmission-belt for the moral and political values of the regime," while remaining dedicated to "a return to patriarchal society and restoration of traditional gender roles."¹²⁶ Yet, the Women's Section came to serve as "the champion of women's rights within the Francoist political system," and became adept at tempering progress with adherence to the conservative values of the Fascist doctrine to which it ascribed.¹²⁷

Though her political agenda evolved over time, Primo de Rivera was a faithful servant to the legacies of her father and, especially, her brother. Though she is carefully positive about Franco and his government throughout her autobiography, she does assert that "el régimen no era un régimen falangista, como habíamos soñado" [the regime was not a falangist regime, as we had dreamed.]¹²⁸ She does not blame Franco for this disconnect between her brother's ideology and the policies of the regime, but implicates other influential members of the government with

¹²⁵ Ofer 18.

¹²⁶ Richmond 4.

¹²⁷ Ofer 18.

¹²⁸ Primo de Rivera 185.

particular, yet according to Primo de Rivera, misguided ideas for Spain's future.¹²⁹ Though she and her brother, Miguel Primo de Rivera, once threatened to resign from the regime due to its lack of accordance with the doctrine of the Falange, Pilar Primo de Rivera consistently reaffirmed her loyalty to Franco and used her high political intelligence and position of power within the Women's Section to forward her fascist ideals.¹³⁰ Primo de Rivera and the Women's Section were politically active until Franco's death, as it no longer had a political space to fill in democratic Spain.¹³¹

Though Primo de Rivera advocated that women fill traditional roles within Spanish society, she herself did not conform to those gendered standards. In the wake of her brother's death, Primo de Rivera became a highly capable and prominent politician, asserting herself within the public political sphere that conservative ideology dictated women should not be apart of. The Women's Section taught females throughout Spain that "family and children were their 'only goal to achieve in life,' and that 'woman forms man' to whom she must remain absolutely subordinated."¹³² Yet, Primo de Rivera never married, nor had children, but instead dedicated her life to the political ideology propagated by her brother.

Primo de Rivera was loyal to the tenets of her brother's party but she was also unafraid to create her own political and social agenda for the Women's Section, separate from that of the Falange or Franco's government, despite her assertion that "Women never discover anything. They lack creative talent, reserved by God for virile intellects; we can do no more than interpret

¹²⁹ Primo de Rivera 186.

¹³⁰ Payne 357.

¹³¹ Ofer 134.

¹³² Payne 324.

what men present to us.”¹³³ Primo de Rivera knew that, in order to be allowed to function in the public sphere and accomplish her goals, she had to appear nonthreatening to men and the existing political order.¹³⁴ She was willing to contest the decisions and policies of male authorities—including the Church, local Falangist leaders, and Franco himself—but did so in a way that “did not make an SF member less of a Catholic,” and “did not lessen the members’ loyalty to either General Franco or to the legacy of José Antonio.”¹³⁵ In this way, Primo de Rivera was a consummate politician and an expert manipulator of the many men she allowed to perceive themselves as her superiors.

Ibarruri and Primo de Rivera led very different lives, and had contradictory beliefs and aspirations, but both were strong and independent females in the public sphere. Each woman was influenced by the ideas of men, but both exerted control over their own lives at a time when women were relegated to domestic and supporting roles. Ibarruri was unapologetic in her refusal to conform to gender norms, she was proud to be a female Communist fighting for a cause she believed would liberate Spain from the many forms of its traditional oppression. Primo de Rivera was more covert in her defiance; she encouraged women to submit to the demands of a patriarchal society, but used the facade of that submission to make, though slow and subtle, significant improvements to the lives of Spanish women. Ibarruri and Primo de Rivera were products of their upbringings, their families, and their surroundings. Each saw that Spain was troubled, lagging behind the rest of Europe, fraught by political discord, and pursued ideologies they believed would solve those problems. The nature of those ideologies placed them on opposite ends of the political spectrum, and neither would have respected the other’s political

¹³³ Ofer vii and Payne 324.

¹³⁴ Ofer 24.

¹³⁵ Ofer 130.

style or tactics. Yet both Ibarri and Primo de Rivera stand as two of the twentieth century Spain's most prominent female figures, largely as a consequence of their refusal to be told that, as women, they could not pursue the political ideologies they fervently believed in. They may not have liked each other, but surely the two women would have respected one another for their shared tenacious character and ideological commitment.

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