

THE HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK: WOMEN IN SPAIN IN THE 20th CENTURY

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Twentieth Spain underwent a series of dramatic social and political changes. The constitutional monarchy was followed by military dictatorship (1923- 1930), a brief attempt by the Crown to restore constitutional monarchy (1930), the Second Republic (1931- 1936), the Civil War (1936-39), and Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975). The Transition to democracy began with the death of Franco. The monarchy was restored in the figure of Juan Carlos I. The Constitution was established in 1978 and represented an important milestone in the consolidation of modern democracy despite the military attempt coup in 1981. In 1986, Spain joined the European Union.

On March 8, 2010, Spain celebrated the centenary of the right of Spanish women to earn a university degree. Between 1872 and 1910, 79 pioneers were required to apply for special permission to follow graduate and doctoral studies. From the early days of university education, women had been formally excluded although some did attend as auditors or even managed to access the classroom dressed as men. The first women who enrolled in Spanish universities found a path strewn with obstacles. It took several decades until women's right to upper education was accepted. From 1910 onwards, a new stage began in which there were at least no legal obstacles to university studies. However, women's illiteracy rates continued to be high: 70% of women could not read and write at the turn of the century.

Spanish feminism had less impact as a social movement than in other European countries. In 1918 the National Association of Spanish Women was born from a group of middle-class women including teachers, writers, university students and wives of professionals headed by Maria Espinosa, Clara Campoamor and Victoria Kent among others. Another association, The Crusade of Spanish Women, led by the journalist Carmen de Burgos, held the first pro-suffrage street demonstration in Madrid in 1921.

The concession of women's vote in Spain in 1931, cannot be attributed, to any great extent, to the pressure of this suffragist/(suffragette) movements. Among the reforms introduced by the new political regime, the Spanish Second Republic (1931-1936), were the repeal of discriminatory laws and the enfranchisement of women. However, the process had a paradoxical side; some important feminists such as Margarita Nelken and Victoria Kent rejected it because they suspected that the influence of the Catholic Church on most women made them deeply conservative and their participation in elections would inevitably lead to the strengthening of right wing political parties.

The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), put an end to this evolution. The division of Spain into two opposing and belligerent societies had an immediate effect on women's conditions. The changes which occurred under the new political regime represented a ~~true~~ reaction against all the reforms and advances of the Republican period. With respect to women, Franco's ideology was absolutely shaped by the perspectives of the Catholic Church. The role of woman-wife-mother became one of the main elements of ~~the~~ National Catholicism. A policy of raising birth rates was implemented by means of the granting of family benefits and advantages, even prizes, for large families. Among other measures, the new regime suppressed co-education (in order to restore Catholic morality) and abolished the civil marriage and divorce laws.

Just as other foreign fascist movements, the Female Section of Falange Española, sought the "ideal woman" through a series of specifically "feminine" values against those of subversive "feminism".

The end of the dictatorship and the beginning of democracy meant the rapid realisation of legal developments that restored Spanish women to a level similar to that in the other Western democracies. The Spanish Constitution of 1978, article 14, states: "Spaniards are equal before the law and may not in any way be discriminated against on account of birth, race, sex, religion, opinion or any other personal or social condition or circumstance."¹ A series of legal reforms was implemented: the Marital License by which a woman needed her husband's permission to exercise rights such as

¹ this is 'official translation':

<http://www.tribunalconstitucional.es/es/constitucion/Paginas/ConstitucionIngles.aspx#19>

signing an employment contract, applying for a passport or opening a bank account was abolished and contraception and adultery were decriminalised.

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