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Mothers of Mid-century Spanish Families: Agents of Social Change in the Context of Dictatorship and Patriarchy

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This article focuses on how middle-class families created during the second half of the Francoist dictatorship in Spain decisively contributed to improving the educational level of the biggest generation in Spanish society, born between the late 1950s and the mid-1970s. Mothers played a particularly important role in this ‘educational shift’. Even though under Francoism legislation and moral habits implied female subordination in virtually all spheres of life, many of those mothers were willing and able to promote their children’s education irrespective of their gender. Making use of oral history, the article offers an account of how mothers of the Spanish baby boom generation entered into marriage, organised their daily lives at home and took decisions regarding their children’s welfare and education. Today in their old age, these women deserve to be considered important agents of the remarkable social change Spain has experienced during the last decades.

‘If in history there were no more than battles,
if its sole actors were personal celebrities,
how small it would be!
It is in the slow and almost always painful living of society,
in what all do and in what each does.
In it nothing is worthless telling . . .’ (Benito Pérez Galdós, 1875)¹

Spain’s society has experienced impressive structural and cultural changes in the last half century.² One is tempted to link these changes with the advent of democracy since the mid-1970s, after nearly four decades of dictatorship headed by General Francisco Franco and preceded by a bloody civil war (1936–9) which caused more than half a million deaths (of an estimated population of 24.5 million in 1935). But although social change was undoubtedly accelerated by the establishment of a system of democratic rights and freedoms as of 1978, its original drivers, as this article argues, began to operate many years before.³

¹ Benito Pérez Galdós, *Episodios Nacionales. El equipaje del Rey José* (Madrid: Alianza, 1999 [1875]), 45 (own translation).

² See, for instance, Pamela Beth Radcliff, *Modern Spain. 1808 to the Present* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 266–80, and Miguel Requena, ‘Economic and Social Changes since the Restoration of Democracy’, in Diego Muro and Ignacio Lago, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Spanish Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 100–14.

³ Outstanding in the initial formulation of this argument has been Victor Pérez-Díaz, *The Return of Civil Society. The Emergence of Democratic Spain* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). In the same vein, Pamela Beth Radcliff, *Making Democratic Citizens in Spain: Civil Society and the Popular Origins of the Transition, 1960–1978* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Among them, one has been often overlooked in the academic literature providing sociohistorical analysis of Spain's transition and democratic consolidation: families.⁴ Actually, as stated at the end of the last century by one of the best known scholars on Spanish family history, the study of the role of the family in Spain's modernisation represents 'perhaps the most important' of family history omissions, adding that 'relatively few family historians have dealt explicitly with the issue of change, either in family patterns or in the links between the family as an institution and the entire process of historical change'.⁵ This assertion still holds true today. Certainly, the Spanish family has been the object of wide research from a demographic and a sociological perspective, but attention has been mostly paid to its structure and composition, as well as its ample involvement in welfare functions and intergenerational solidarity.⁶ Yet, its leverage on social transformation through family socialisation and household interactions has not been adequately treated.

The current article attempts to partially address this persisting neglect by specifically focusing on those families formed during the second half of the Francoist regime by women and men of lower middle-class and working-class origins who had lived since their childhood under conditions of economic deprivation, political and religious indoctrination and little schooling. These families and their strategies are central to understanding Spanish contemporary society for various reasons. Firstly, they became fully aware of the importance of education as a vehicle of upward social mobility and improvement of quality of life. Consequently, they decided to take advantage of the slowly growing educational services provided or allowed by the dictatorial regime. Secondly, deviating from the prevailing discourse of the regime and the Catholic Church that praised women as housewives and mothers in a subordinated position to males, these families decided to offer their daughters educational opportunities, 'circumventing' deep-seated social norms of prioritising males' over females' schooling.

This article focuses on Spanish families created during the period often called 'Francoist developmentalism' (*desarrollismo franquista*). It claims that these families decisively contributed to changing the lives of today's adult women by supporting their formal education as much as possible and hence increasing their resources for living a different kind of life than their mothers. It further maintains that mothers played a particularly important role in these family strategies. This is not only because they assumed the function of taking care and organising children's everyday lives, including their education, but also because encouraging their daughters' education meant for them foregoing a considerable amount of home help that girls were usually expected to provide. Mothers, it argues, were therefore crucial actors in the advancement of women's presence and leveraging in today's Spanish society and economy as well as politics and culture.

Thus far, mothers have not attracted much research attention in Spanish historiography. Whilst researchers have paid increasing attention to women and gender issues, mothers themselves have remained at the margins of these studies. Indeed, works on women and gender during Francoism have flourished since the end of the last century.⁷ However, women have been primarily depicted

⁴ Focus has been put primarily on factors like (illegal or a-legal) workers' and students' unions, neighbourhood and professional associations, religious groupings, etc.; i.e. on formal civil society organisations. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 8, noted that 'we should not forget another part of society: ordinary citizens who are not a part of any organizations'. However, the authors emphasised the explicit political activity of these citizens in purely individual terms, thus disregarding the importance of socialisation in non-political communities, like families.

⁵ David Reher, 'The History of the Family in Spain: Past Development, Present Realities, and Future Challenges', *The History of the Family. An International Quarterly*, 3, 2 (1998), 128.

⁶ Among others, Víctor Pérez-Díaz, Elisa Chuliá and Celia Valiente, *La familia española en el año 2000* (Madrid: Argenteria, 1999); Gerardo Meil Landwerlin, *Individualización y solidaridad familiar* (Barcelona: La Caixa, 2011); Manuela Naldini, *The Family in the Mediterranean Welfare States* (London: Frank Cass, 2003) and Almudena Moreno Mínguez, ed., *Family Well-Being. European Perspectives* (New York: Springer, 2013).

⁷ After the pioneering work of M. Teresa Gallego, *Mujer, Falange y Franquismo* (Madrid: Taurus, 1983), key texts in this field have been published by Aurora Morcillo, *True Catholic Womanhood. Gender Ideology in Franco's Spain* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000), Ángela Cenarro, *La sonrisa de Falange. Auxilio Social en la guerra civil y la*

either as targets of Francoist ideology and subjects of patriarchal authority or as more or less circum-spect opponents of the system and advocates for extending women's entitlements. Yet, their role as mothers has been noticeably disregarded in these studies. Indeed, with only few exceptions among sociologists and communication scholars, mothers are underrepresented in Spanish human and social sciences research.⁸ This article aims to overcome this gap in the literature by bringing mothers to the centre of historical change.

The oral sources specifically obtained for this research illustrate how families located at different levels and enclaves of the expanding middle class during the second half of Francoism understood the importance of learning and instruction and tried to ingrain this normative priority in their offspring. Voice is given to fourteen women who have related how they viewed and experienced, as young mothers and young daughters, respectively, their family roles and responsibilities and the place that school and education had in their minds and lives. The option for oral sources, and specifically for the life-story method, to gain understanding of women's ideas, opinions and feelings during Francoism is not new: Eider de Dios-Fernández, Raúl Mínguez-Blasco and Aurora G. Morcillo are amongst the scholars who have most recently used oral histories of women in twentieth-century Spain.⁹ Nevertheless, its use here shows two specificities. On the one hand, the interviewees have been asked to recall and speak about their daily life at an earlier stage of their biographies, not about events, affiliations or circumstances that single them out and are therefore particularly susceptible to magnification or idealisation. Second, interviews were initially planned and conducted with mothers, and only later were their daughters added to the sample. These seven mother-daughter dyads have allowed us to contrast perspectives of both family members on the same topics, to prove the consistency of their narratives, but also to credit the importance of subjectivities in family history. This article is organised in two main parts. The first part is divided into three sections which present relevant aspects of the context in which these families were created, including, first, the booming of marriages and childbirths between the late 1950s and mid-1970s; second, the restrictive legal, political and social norms that framed women's behaviour during this period; and third, the strong tradition of gendered education in Spain. The second part contains the narration and analysis of selected testimonies collected through semi-structured interviews with mothers and daughters who were part of those Spanish families.

Marriage Boom and Baby Boom since the Late 1950s

Like other European countries, Spain witnessed in the first decades of the twentieth century a decline in birthrates alongside with a small but progressive decrease in newborns' death rates.¹⁰ This relationship between falling infant mortality and subsiding fertility continued despite the dramatic political

posguerra (Barcelona: Crítica, 2006) and Rosario Ruiz, *¿Eternas menores? Las mujeres en el franquismo* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2007).

⁸ Among sociologists, see Constanza Tobío Soler, 'Conciliación o contradicción. Cómo hacen las madres trabajadoras', *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, 97 (2002), 155–88, and Isabel Aler Gay, *La transformación de la maternidad en la sociedad española 1975–2005. Otra visión sociológica* (Sevilla: Fundación Centro de Estudios Andaluces, 2006). Among communication researchers, see María José Gámez Fuentes, *Cinematografía: la madre en el cine y la literatura de la democracia* (Castellón: Universitat Jaume I, 2004) and Pilar Medina, Mònica Figueras and Lorena Gómez, 'El ideal de madre en el siglo XXI. La representación de la maternidad en las revistas de familia', *Estudios sobre el Mensaje Periodístico*, 20, 1 (2014), 487–504.

⁹ Eider de Dios-Fernández and Raúl Mínguez-Blasco, 'Catholic Housewives in Transition: The Centres for the Promotion of Women between the Franco Dictatorship and Democracy in Spain (1960–1980)', *Journal of Religious History*, 45, 4 (2021) and Aurora G. Morcillo, *(In)visible Acts of Resistance in the Twilight of the Franco Regime. A Historical Narration* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2022).

¹⁰ Rosa Gómez Redondo, 'El descenso de la mortalidad infantil en Madrid, 1900–1970', *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, 32 (1985), 101–39.

and social vicissitudes of the 1930s and 1940s.¹¹ From the late 1950s until the mid-1970s, however, rapidly declining child death ratios concurred with increasing fertility rates, provoking a baby boom.¹²

Some other countries had already experienced after the Second World War (and even before) baby booms of different intensity, but in Spain the large and lingering increase of birthrates began a decade later, coinciding with the start of 'an exceptional phase of rapid [economic] growth lasting until 1974'.¹³ Economic expansion came only after Spain managed to be perceived as a significant ally of the United States in the Cold War and the Francoist governments abandoned the ideas of domestic demand and import substitution as main drivers of growth.

These changes in foreign and economic policies impacted on society, progressively rising the low living standards that had prevailed since the end of the civil war. Optimism regarding the evolution of economic conditions and quality of life encouraged young people's projects of migrating from rural areas and creating (or relocating) families in urban localities.¹⁴ In fact, the rapid growth of the industrial and service sector of the Spanish economy since the end of the 1950s led to a 'dizzying process of urbanisation', as evidenced, among other indicators, by the doubling of the percentage of people living in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants between 1940 (19 per cent) and 1970 (40 per cent).¹⁵

As religious marriage was the only permissible way to form a family, church weddings mushroomed and became important social events, with white bridal dresses and banquets as key symbols of economic and social capital of families. But these ceremonies also concealed a political dimension to the extent that Francoism had 'restored the eternal Catholic family values and elevated them to national duties for men and women in order to rebuild the country'.¹⁶ Consistent with this tenet, for the Spanish Church and many Catholic opinion leaders marriage was more a matter of obligation, restraint and reproduction than of romantic love, affection and companionship.¹⁷ Nevertheless, '(f)or the majority of the youth of the late 1950s and early 1960s marriage was a paramount aspiration, so much so that a cloud of failure hung over single people and especially single women'.¹⁸ Not surprisingly, the percentages of unmarried women sharply declined between 1950 and 1975.¹⁹

The alternative to marriage was not very auspicious. On the one hand, getting married entailed, in addition to the biographical milestones of the wedding party and honeymoon trip, some alleviation of conventions regarding personal relations and leisure activities that were specifically onerous for young unmarried women. Above all, it opened the possibility of rightful sexual intimacy, since virginity was required from all unmarried decent women. Meanwhile, staying single meant first having to do poorly paid work (most likely as a secretary, a teacher or a nurse) with scarce or no possibility of promotion; and second, living with one's parents while being responsible for taking care of them until their deaths. For the average Spanish woman, remaining single 'turned into a personal tragedy and a source of public embarrassment'.²⁰ Against this background, marriage held for women the promise of getting at

¹¹ On the relationship between declining child mortality and falling fertility see John MacInnes and Julio Pérez Díaz, 'The Reproductive Revolution', *The Sociological Review*, 57, 2 (2009), 262–84. Total fertility rates consistently fell from 1905 (4.69) to 1955 (2.53).

¹² After five decades of unwavering decline, the total fertility rate increased between 1955 (2.53) and 1975 (2.85). It then swiftly began to drop. By 2000 it had plunged to 1.19.

¹³ Leandro Prados de la Escosura, *Spanish Economic Growth, 1850–2015* (London: Palgrave, 2017), 20.

¹⁴ Jan Van Bavel and David Reher, 'The Baby Boom and Its Causes: What We Know and What We Need to Know', *Population and Development Review*, 39, 2 (2013), 257–88.

¹⁵ Fundación Foessa, *Informe sociológico sobre la situación social de España 1970* (Madrid, 1972), 157, 326.

¹⁶ Aurora G. Morcillo, *Seduction of Modern Spain: The Female Body and the Francoist Body Politic* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2010), 136.

¹⁷ Mónica García-Fernández, 'From National Catholicism to Romantic Love: The Politics of Love and Divorce in Franco's Spain', *Contemporary European History*, 31 (2022), 2–14.

¹⁸ Montserrat Huguet, *La España del seiscientos. Memoria de la generación de los sesenta* (Madrid: La Catarata, 2019), 17.

¹⁹ In 1950, 79 per cent of women aged 21 to 25 were single; in 1970 the percentage had fallen to 58, and in 1975 it was six points lower (52 per cent). Benito Cachinero Sánchez, 'La evolución de la nupcialidad en España', *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, 20 (1982), 87.

²⁰ Morcillo, *Seduction*, 136.

least some autonomy within their own household, enjoying a more extensive and varied social life and giving birth to children, thus eliciting social approbation.

The increase of young married people favoured higher fertility under conditions of very limited birth control practices, which were banned by the Catholic Church and the regime.²¹ A young married woman's first 'responsibility' was to get pregnant, motherhood representing 'the main and only natural destiny for a Catholic woman'.²² To prepare the 'nest' a married woman should stay at home. If she had previously been employed, marriage (not pregnancy) implied her exit from the labour market. Female labour participation after marriage tended to be perceived 'as indicating either that the woman was not a good mother or that her husband was unable to provide for the family'.²³

In this cultural context of virtually 'mandatory motherhood',²⁴ more than 650,000 children were born yearly between 1958 and 1977, an absolute threshold that had not been reached since 1934.²⁵ These developments of nuptiality and natality seemed to give backing to the argument made by Adrian Shubert, according to which under the moral national-Catholic vision imposed by the regime and the Church during Francoism, '(w)omen could aspire to marriage and motherhood but little more'.²⁶ Nevertheless, that 'little more' was far from irrelevant.

Housewives and Mothers

Writing at the beginning of the 1980s, Lucy Sponsler identified the Spanish woman 'until recently' as 'one of the most subordinated in all of Europe'. She found support for her argument in the legal status of married women previous to the 1975 reform of the 1889 Civil Code, which established 'the wifely duty of obedience and the need for the husband's permission in the event that she wished to act on her own'.²⁷ Indeed, marriage under Francoism meant accepting principles of male family leadership for the benefit of the marital community. As heads of the household, husbands enjoyed the legal ability to manage the community property and were granted a preference in case of conflict over the parental authority. Wives were accorded 'domestic authority' (*potestad doméstica*), i.e. the power to run the household and incur ordinary housekeeping expenses without their husbands' approval, but they needed marital permission to independently exert civil rights regarding the sale, lease and gift of properties as well as to stand trial or appear in court (with the exception of defence in criminal cases or lawsuits against their spouses).

Such legal restrictions for women were not new in Spanish history.²⁸ They had been present in civil legislation for centuries and were included in the standing Civil Code of 1889. Not until the Second Republic (1931–6) were women's rights put on the political agenda. According to the 1931

²¹ Adrian Shubert, *A Social History of Modern Spain* (London: Routledge, 1996), 213–14. Though abortion had been legalised by the government of the Second Republic in 1937, Franco abolished this legislation as he took power. The 1941 Penal Code introduced harsh repressive measures for all persons involved in abortion practices. Until 1978, three years after Franco's death, oral contraception was only allowed as a therapeutic gynecological drug. Teresa Ortiz-Gomez and Agata Ignaciuk, "Pregnancy and Labour Cause more Deaths than Oral Contraceptives": The Debate on the Pill in the Spanish Press in the 1960s and 1970s', *Public Understanding of Science*, 24, 6 (2015), 658–71.

²² Morcillo, *Seduction*, 159.

²³ María Sánchez-Domínguez and Anna Sofia Lundgren, 'The Marriage Boom: Spanish and Swedish Women Making Sense of Marriage During the Marriage Boom', *The History of the Family*, 20, 1 (2015), 81.

²⁴ As defined by Morcillo, *Seduction*, 138, who claims that women's bodies and families were nationalised under Francoism in line with ideological and demographic goals.

²⁵ During the baby boom natural population growth (difference between births and deaths) in Spain exceeded yearly 360,000 persons, unprecedented figures before 1958 which have never been reached after 1977. Anna Cabré, Andreu Domingo and Teresa Menacho, 'Demografía y crecimiento de la población española durante el siglo XX', *Mediterráneo Económico*, 1 (2012), 123.

²⁶ Shubert, *Social History*, 214.

²⁷ Lucy A. Sponsler, 'The Status of Married Women under the Legal System of Spain', *Louisiana Law Review*, 42, 5 (1982), 1599.

²⁸ Rosario Ruiz Franco, 'Nuevas leyes para nuevos tiempos: la situación jurídica y social de las mujeres en España del tardo-franquismo a la transición a la democracia', *Spagna contemporanea*, 55 (2019), 38.

Constitution, marriage was ‘founded on the equality of rights for both sexes’ and could be ‘dissolved by mutual discord or on request by either spouse on the basis of a fair cause’ (article 43.1). Nevertheless, the strength of traditions and the short duration of the Spanish Republic prevented extensive changes in women’s and family life.

Legislation concerning obligatory civil marriage, marriage dissolution and equality of the sexes was immediately wiped out after the civil war with the argument that it indisputably evidenced the liberal, communist and anarchist attempts to destroy the family institution, even though the Constitution of the Second Republic put the family explicitly ‘under the special care of the State’.²⁹ By reinstating marriage as an indissoluble sacrament, the Church recovered the moral and legal authority over the family.³⁰

True, the female model of the Catholic doctrine stressing temperance and obedience did not fit perfectly with the female model supported by the Feminine Section, the women’s organization of the fascist *Falange*, the only political party allowed during Francoism.³¹ The falangist femininity as outlined in the years following the civil war was not represented in the compliant ‘domestic angel’. Instead of ‘passive’, ‘spineless’ and ‘faint hearted’, the falangist woman was expected to be ‘strong’ and ‘resolute’ and eager to appear in the public space.³² However, already before the end of the Second World War, the Francoist dictatorship veered discreetly towards a Catholic autocracy, blurring its most clearly fascist traits. The emblem of the Catholic mother, represented as a humble housewife wholeheartedly devoted to her husband and children (and to other family members in need of care), became culturally hegemonic.³³ Public discourse nurtured by political and church elites fervently encouraged an ideal type of family structured according to a strict gender division of labour. The breadwinning husband had the say regarding ‘big’ decisions, i.e. those implying substantial amounts of money, like the acquisition of properties or other durables (first and foremost, the car, but also expensive household appliances). The housekeeping mother assumed the ‘small’ decisions, related to food, clothes and health, but also to the school life and social network of their offspring. Hard work and good performance were expected from both, but women’s behaviour – and particularly their decency and self-restraint – were at least as important for the family’s image as men’s job and pay. This family model was further strengthened by extensive family subsidies and pro-natalist policies which represented the hallmark of a rather precarious social safety net.³⁴

In the late 1950s the Francoist regime took several initiatives to modernise legislation deemed not critical for its political stability and redrafted some paragraphs of the Civil Code. Thus, the Law of 24 April 1958 recognised that ‘sex cannot by its own determine a difference in treatment in the realm of civil law which leads in any way to the limitation of the woman’s capacity for the purpose of her intervention in legal relations’. Yet, ‘being the more intimate and essential of communities’, the family could justify ‘certain differences derived from the duties of its members in order to better achieve the moral and social aims that according to Natural Law it is called to accomplish’. The law’s preamble went on to emphasise that matrimonial unity required the existence of ‘a power of direction that

²⁹ Paul Ginsborg, *Family Politics. Domestic Life, Devastation and Survival 1900–1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 228–311.

³⁰ Only marital separation was allowed, but under limited conditions (among them, adultery, abandonment of home, maltreatment or violence).

³¹ General Franco suppressed all political parties that existed during the Second Republic, except for two (the Fascist-style Spanish Falange and the Traditionalist Communion) which were merged in 1937 in *Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional-Sindicalistas* (known as the *Falange*). This was the only legal party in Spain until 1977.

³² Zira Box, ‘Metáforas de linealidad, género y fascismo español. Una propuesta de análisis socio-metafórico’, *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, 164 (2018), 41–56; Ángela Cenarro, ‘La Falange es un modo de ser (mujer): discursos e identidades de género en las publicaciones de la Sección Femenina (1938–1945)’, *Historia y Política*, 37 (2017), 91–120.

³³ Meriwynn Grothe, ‘“Franco’s Angels”: Recycling the Ideology of Domesticity’, *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 33, 3 (1999), 513–37.

³⁴ Sergio Espuelas, ‘Political Regime and Public Social Spending in Spain: A Time Series Analysis (1850–2000)’, *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Economic History*, 35, 3 (2017), 355–86.

nature, religion and history attribute to the husband'.³⁵ In sum, although this law introduced some improvements on married women's civil rights, heavy restrictions on women's autonomy to act legally prevailed.

This persistent legal discrimination was the main object of critiques uttered by women's associations from different ideological and professional backgrounds, whose voice began to gain presence in the public spheres when censorship of print media was relaxed as of the mid-1960s.³⁶ Debates about sensitive issues like romantic love and sexuality within marriage, as well as family planning and the indissolubility of marriage, were no longer absent from magazines, particularly those with a progressive Catholic background.³⁷ In the context of massive emigration from rural to urban areas and intercultural contacts (mostly due to the growing entrance of foreign tourists, but also to temporary emigration to Europe of hundreds of thousands of Spaniards), moral rigidity started to relax particularly in those territories where interactions with foreigners and/or returning migrant workers were more common.³⁸ However, in spite of these changes affecting the understanding of gender relations, the regime resisted legal reforms. Just a few months before the dictator's death (20 November 1975), the Civil Code was amended to suppress existing constraints on the legal capacity of married women.

A (Not so Old) Past of Strong Gender Discrimination in Education

By the time Franco died in 1975 Spain's educational system was leaving behind decades of extremely poor funding and strong gender discrimination at schools and universities. Although at the beginning of the twentieth century obligatory school for both sexes was set at twelve years, girls on the whole attended school for less time than boys and usually received their education in single-sex schools, with specific instruction in tasks that would make of them good wives and mothers.³⁹ While the Second Republic (1931–6) emphasised the importance of advancing society's education and promoted coeducation, sex-segregation in secondary schools and teacher training colleges was rapidly restored (with only few exceptions) after the civil war. However, perhaps because during the early years of Francoism few girls were expected to attend secondary schools, their formal curriculum was not very different to that of boys (even though girls got supplementary instruction in domestic disciplines by the Feminine Section).⁴⁰

In fact, the presence of female students in secondary and tertiary education had already begun to grow during the first half of the Francoist regime.⁴¹ In the early 1940s around a third of all secondary

³⁵ These quotes are taken from the preamble of the Law of 24 Apr. 1958 which modifies some articles of the Civil Code (Ley de 24 de abril de 1958 por la que se modifican determinados artículos del Código Civil, B.O.E. 25–04–1958).

³⁶ On the development and mobilisation of progressive Catholic female associations since the 1960s, see Celia Valiente, 'Social Movements in Abeyance in Non-Democracies: The Women's Movement in Franco's Spain', *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* [online], (2015), 270–9, and Mónica Moreno, 'Mujeres en la Acción Católica y el Opus Dei. Identidades de género y culturas políticas en los años sesenta', *Historia y Política*, 28 (2012), 167–94. Ruiz Franco, "'Nuevas leyes", explains how female lawyers' associations managed to influence changes in civil law decision making. The contribution of women's organisations to civil society and democratic citizenship has been analysed by Pamela Radcliff, 'Citizens and Housewives: The Problem of Female Citizenship in Spain's Transition to Democracy', *Journal of Social History*, 36, 1 (2002), 77–100.

³⁷ García-Fernández, 'From National Catholicism', 8–12.

³⁸ See also Mary Nash, 'Turismo, género y neocolonialismo', *Historia Social*, 96 (2020), 41–62. It has been estimated that during the 1960s and early 1970s more than 100,000 workers per year emigrated to France, Germany and Switzerland: Olympia Bover and Pilar Velilla, 'Migrations in Spain: Historical Background and Current Trends', *Banco de España (Documentos de Trabajo)*, 9909 (1999).

³⁹ Carmen Sarasúa, 'Aprendiendo a ser mujeres: las escuelas de niñas en la España del siglo XIX', *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea*, 24 (2002), 297.

⁴⁰ Thus, a decree published in 1910 forbade the establishment of specifically female requirements for the access to secondary and tertiary education. See Antonio F. Canales, 'Little Intellectuals. Girls' Academic Secondary Education Under Francoism: Projects, Realities and Paradoxes', *Gender and Education*, 24, 4 (2012), 377.

⁴¹ Canales, 'Little Intellectuals', 386.

education students were females, while in the late 1950s the proportion amounted to about 40 per cent. The increase was more significant in tertiary education: if the share of female university students was less than 15 per cent in the early 1940s, it was close to 25 per cent in the late 1950s.

In 1964 compulsory school age was raised to fourteen years and in 1970 the General Education Law recognised the right of equal education for both sexes, albeit overlooking the gender discrimination resulting from ‘a long history of education in and for difference’.⁴² At the beginning of the 1970s only one fourth of the university students were female, but Spanish sociologists considered that, after equality of educational opportunities between both sexes had been virtually achieved until Higher Secondary Education (*Bachillerato Superior*), a similar progress in university degrees was to be expected (as effectively occurred).⁴³ They envisaged the growing participation of females in the education system as a key factor of change in attitudes towards the role of Spanish women.⁴⁴

This article argues, however, that this attitudinal change had started *before* the increase of female educational levels became evident in the figures. By highlighting the decisions of many parents to support the education of their sons and daughters on an equal footing, it shows a different pace of evolution and places mothers at the heart of it. Indeed, although these family strategies would have been hardly possible without the consent of fathers, it was the commitment of mothers to the life prospects of all their children and also their generous willingness to at least partially liberate their daughters from the household burdens that proved to be decisive.

Listening to the Narratives of Mid-century Spanish mothers (and Their Daughters)

The contribution made by families formed during the second half of the Francoist regime, between the late-1950s and the mid- 1970s, to increasing female education and advancing gender equality in Spain becomes clear when listening to women who became mothers and brought up their children during that time span. With this aim, the author conducted between October 2019 and January 2020 seven in-depth individual interviews in Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia. The interviewees were taken from a sample of women drawn from within the author’s broad professional and social network who fulfilled the requirement of having raised at least a son *and* a daughter born during the Spanish babyboom period (1958–77). At a later stage (November 2021–January 2022), seven daughters of these women were interviewed with the specific goal of delving into their own experiences of family life and education during childhood, adolescence and youth.⁴⁵ Daughters’ interviews provided a triangulation strategy to confirm the information offered by their mothers, and also served as a control against the idealised self-perceptions bias that may arise from autobiographical narration. Oral histories are taken here as sources of information about the family’s views and behavior, but also about family life under Francoism. Without disregarding the fact that these narrations are also constructions of the self and of others, they may provide powerful biographical examples of social phenomena while they allow us to approach aspects of history that often remain invisible to researchers.⁴⁶ The guides used for these semi-structured interviews are included in the appendix.

The following sections contain a selection of insights shared by these fourteen women. Their testimonies have been ordered taking into consideration their socioeconomic status as married women and beginning with those with a lower educational level and fewer economic resources in

⁴² Pilar Ballarín Domingo, ‘Género y políticas educativas’, *Revista de Educación*, 6 (2004), 35–42. A similar critical argument regarding the 1970 bill, in Consuelo Flecha García, ‘Desequilibrios de género en educación en la España contemporánea: causas, indicadores y consecuencias’, *Áreas. Revista Internacional de Ciencias Sociales*, 33 (2014).

⁴³ M. Antonia García de León and Marisa García de Cortázar, ‘Universidades y universitarios (1970–1990)’, *Revista de Educación*, n° extr. (1992), 89–108.

⁴⁴ Foessa, *Informe*, 1972, 283.

⁴⁵ Where there was more than one daughter, the author has selected only one after taking into consideration the birth order of siblings so as to include different positions.

⁴⁶ Lynn Abrams, ‘Heroes of Their Own Life Stories: Narrating the Female Self in the Feminist Age’, *Cultural and Social History*, 16, 2 (2019), 205–24.

their households. Pseudonyms have been used to refer to the interviewees in order to protect their identity, even if none of them expressed any reservation on the publication of their stories.⁴⁷

‘Keep on Studying!’

Sitting in the dining room of her daughter’s ‘so precious’ house, Ángela (b.1937) speaks about how her father, a farmworker, died in the late 1940s, leaving a thirty-six-year-old widow and three daughters between four and twelve years old in a small town of Toledo (around 1,000 inhabitants in 1940). Without any income to live off, Ángela’s mother and the girls dedicated the bulk of their time to embroidering table linen which they sold to a commercial distributor.

We four embroidered table linen every week. Each of us started from a corner. We got canvas and threads as well as the design . . . We woke up at five in the morning to make the best use of daylight in a house with no electricity and running water.

Like her younger sisters, Ángela went to school until she was twelve. Their lives were not very different from those of their neighbours (‘Town women had neither holidays nor weekends’) except for the fact that at home there was no male provider, and the girls had often to comfort a very sad mother who frequently cried and lamented being ‘four women in four walls’.

Marriage in 1959, at the age of twenty-two, did not mean emancipation for Ángela. Together with her husband, a peasant living in the same town who could ‘read and write and little else’, she rented a house and brought her mother and sisters to live with them. Rodolfo, Ángela’s first son, came soon afterwards, and Anabel was born in 1965. The children’s arrival persuaded the young parents to leave behind the town and emigrate to a city. It was Ángela’s husband who moved first alone to Leganés, a municipality nearby Madrid (8,500 inhabitants in 1960), where he began working in the booming housing market as a bricklayer. Six months later he found a tiny apartment for the whole family in the fast growing town. It was so precarious that there was not even room for a stable baby cradle, so that one had to be arranged every evening using two chairs.

Rodolfo and Anabel went to single-sex public schools in the neighbourhood. Ángela recalls the happiness she and her husband shared when their daughter’s maths teacher told them that Anabel ‘was apt to study’ and encouraged them ‘to pull off stones with your mouth if necessary to keep her at school’. And so they did. Ángela’s husband worked long days as a crane driver and overtime as a guard, but he could not avoid repeated unemployment spells during which he even picked up scrap and cardboard. The additional money which Ángela made by embroidering at home was always welcome.

At fourteen years old, Rodolfo refused to continue his education and began to work. But Anabel remembers how he encouraged her to keep on studying. And she devoted most of her time to her studies: ‘During the week I did few domestic chores. My mum used to say: “Don’t lose time, you have to study”’. Ángela uses similar words when evoking the message she conveyed to her daughter: ‘Keep on studying!’ In her senior year in high school Anabel got a public grant to study Classical Languages at the university:

Maintaining the scholarship required me to succeed in the first round of exams. I had this duty because at home there was not enough money to pay for my studies. I’ve always studied very hard, but I liked it. Yet, I was quite tired when I finished my degree in 1988.

Anabel graduated from the university in the late 1980s and very soon began to work as a teacher in a private school. After successfully applying for a public high school post in the province of Madrid, she married at thirty-four and became a mother of twins two years later. Once more, Ángela backed her daughter’s career by taking care of her grandchildren. Anabel praises her mother’s generosity and life wisdom: ‘If only she would have had the opportunity to study...’.

⁴⁷ All the interviews are in the possession of the author.

'Study Always for Yourself!'

The childhood of Amalia (b. 1939) was easier than that of Ángela. Being the youngest of six siblings in an Andalusian middle-size town (c. 12,000 inhabitants by 1940), she evokes how her parents strove hard to keep their farm production. 'My mother organised everything, she was the "big boss". My father, who was not a "macho", supported my mother's decisions. Everybody worked, but we lived very well'.

Amalia liked to go to school and was a brilliant pupil, but studying was unthinkable for her and for her three older sisters as her two eldest brothers had been deprived of this possibility by the civil war and post-war hardship: 'Since the eldest [boys] hadn't studied, the youngest [girls] shouldn't study'. So she went to school until she turned fourteen and her family decided that she should accompany her recently married sister to Barcelona. There, Amalia started to learn sewing as an apprentice with different tailors and dressmakers. She settled in Barcelona and at the age of twenty-five married her fiancée, a young man who came from a Castilian town but had decided to remain in Barcelona after having completed his military service. Working as a taxi driver, he lacked a fixed wage. Amalia, who did clothing alterations at home to supplement the household income, was central in organising the domestic economy: 'I had my little envelopes for this and for that. Everything was counted up'.

The first child, Mara, arrived in 1968 after a traumatic delivery in a public hospital: 'In those years too many children were born . . . Medical care was so bad. I nearly died'. Four years later Amalia gave birth to Juan. She remembers devoting countless hours of the day during the 1970s and early 1980s to 'making life easy' for her children and husband, whom she did not expect to participate in household chores. Mara stressed this point: 'My father was very traditional; he worked six days a week and on Sundays he thoroughly cleaned his taxi. He acted as the house patriarch, though my mother was the one who administered all at home'.

Amalia explained in her interview that she took virtually all decisions relating to the children's education in this period: 'My husband washed his hands of these things. He only wanted them to study'. Mara points out: 'We fortunately liked studying; this was a great satisfaction for my parents, and specially for mum. I can hear her saying repeatedly: "Whoever has an ability or quality, it's like a sin to not take advantage of it". Since she hadn't had the opportunity to study, we shouldn't forgo it.' Amalia was a major factor in her son's decision to go on to study piano and singing, despite the scepticism of her husband. According to Mara, her father believed that studying music and rehearsing at home was not proper work. 'So, he often told my brother: "if you don't want to study for a degree, then you should work. When I was your age, I had been working already for many years and I only see you singing". But my mother countered him and backed my brother.'

Juan became an opera singer, while Mara, who studied Economics, has occupied managerial positions in important firms and institutions since the 1990s. She has definitely fulfilled what her mother wished for her: 'Look, you have to study so that tomorrow you don't depend on anybody. If you want to marry, you marry; if you want to stay single, you stay single. Study always for yourself!' Her mother's advice has stuck in Mara's mind, as well as 'Knowledge does not take up any space'. Neither marriage nor mothering two children in her thirties have moved Mara away from professional life.

'I Made Her that Way'

Like Amalia, Carmina (b. 1931) went to a school close to her family's house until she was fourteen, but she describes her school as quite extraordinary because it was private, co-educational and non-religious (even though pupils were sometimes required to go to church during school time). She then had to stop studying to help their parents with their small business in a maritime quarter of Valencia (c. 450,000 inhabitants by 1940). Dwelling close to the sea, she remembers living during the postwar 'in a very repressed manner. Young girls couldn't mingle with men at the beach and they couldn't wear a swimsuit without a bathrobe, which they could only remove to enter the sea'.

Together with her younger sister, Carmina worked in the family's warehouse until she married at twenty-six a customs officer from a strictly Catholic family ('my sister-in-law attended mass three times a day'). After the wedding, Carmina never worked again outside her home, where she raised

two boys and one girl born between 1957 and 1964. Carmina and her husband agreed on sending all three children to a newly founded private secular school in Valencia which offered bilingual education. Over the course of many years they made every effort to pay for summer stays for their three children abroad so that they could practise in foreign families the language they were learning at school.

Trying to provide all of her children with the best affordable educational opportunities meant Carmina came into direct conflict with her in-laws. As her daughter Gala recalls: 'My grandparents and my single aunt absolutely disliked my trips'. In fact, Gala considers that her mother put different pressures on her offspring depending on their gender:

My mother 'crushed' me. She always wanted me being active. In the summer, when school ended, I had to learn English, typewriting or whatever, while my brothers managed to cop out. And I also had to help at home much more than they did. I objected and often argued with my mother: our fights were at times remarkable.

Ultimately, Carmina was highly influential in her daughter's university studies. 'I decided to study Veterinary Science, a degree not offered by the local university', Gala declares. 'My father and his family definitely did not like that I left home to study in another city. Furthermore, Veterinary was then considered a very masculine degree. I had to live in a flat together with male students, a situation that distressed my poor father.' But for Carmina these worries were secondary to the principal aim her daughter should pursue: university graduation.

Carmina perceives her daughter as 'very meticulous and self-demanding; she struggles to do everything right'. Looking back to the time when their children went to school, she adds: 'Of all three, she was the most mindful, the one who worked most. And she is also very independent. When I complained about her being too self-determined, my husband used to add: "You made her that way". And that's right. I made her that way.'

Gala, married but childless, chats daily with her recently widowed mother, who likes to listen to the stories her daughter tells about her veterinary clinic. Carmina enjoys recounting these anecdotes before she concludes: 'Life has been sometimes hard – you know, we suffered the loss of our second son when he was very young – but altogether in the family we have helped each other a lot. A beautiful life, I can label it just like that.'

'Each Child Carried out Equivalent Tasks'

The tragedy of losing a young son also hit Adela (b. 1943) and yet she shares with Carmina the feeling of having had a full life. Adela spent her childhood in an inland village of Valencia (c. 3,000 inhabitants in 1940) where her father had some farmland and her mother worked as teacher at a public school. Like her older sister, when Adela turned ten she was sent to a bigger town as an intern to pursue secondary education. 'My mother did not allow us to simply study [for the] Elementary Baccalaureate until fourteen and then go for teaching or nursing studies like many girls did. She told us: "Be anything except a schoolteacher". Schools had no heating, had nothing . . . And schoolteachers earned miserably.' Adela describes her mother as 'very modern', making no difference between three children as regards education and demanding little help from them for household tasks: 'My mother did not require us girls to help at home, but the boy even less. Boys were sacred.'

In spite of her mother's wishes, Adela did not follow higher education studies because she married an accountant at the age of twenty and decided for herself to become a housewife and mother: 'As of that moment [marriage] I began doing what a woman ought to do: be at home taking care of children and have things done for the earning husband. I never felt badly as a housewife and never lamented not being employed during that time.' Before turning twenty-four, Adela already had one son and two daughters, Alma and Eva. Two additional boys were born in the following years.

Both Adela and her husband stressed the importance of academic education and chose carefully the schools of their children. Alma remembers her father insisting at home on the importance of 'spelling

and numbers'. 'He worked a lot, but also kept an eye on our education'. Though strict with schedules and openly sexist when it came to household chores and domestic order, as regards education he was totally egalitarian: 'same opportunities, same educational challenges', says Alma.

For example, at the end of the 70s he spoke to us five children: 'If any of you learns Russian, we'll go to the Olympics in Moscow.' I was the only one who began doing it and he was happy. To be sure, we did not travel to Russia. How could he have paid [for] this trip? But he offered this learning possibility to us all.

As regards some activities that he considered gendered – like homemaking for the girls and driving cars for the boys – Alma's father was less egalitarian. Adela recalls some of these instances: 'He told me: "you have two daughters, they should help you". And I answered: "I have five children and not only two daughters". This type of "machismo" was at the very bottom of his soul. Thus, I organised errands in shifts, so that each child carried out equivalent tasks.'

Alma does not remember experiencing significant tensions at home, but she now knows that her sister did not always feel well in this quite demanding and competitive family environment:

My older brother was very smart, but he did not study, he was more of a troublemaker. I was not so smart, but I studied more and obtained better grades. Yet, Eva has later told me she felt stupid, the most silly of us. At home she used to be more feisty and often complained about my brothers helping less than us girls.

University was assumed for Adela's children. Alma studied Law and passed senior civil service exams, whilst Eva studied Physiotherapy. It was Eva's enthusiasm for her university studies which prompted Adela to start studying the same degree when she was forty-four. Adela worked as a physiotherapist for some years in a private clinic until her husband fell seriously ill and she decided to take care of him full time. After his death she returned to work until she retired at sixty-five. 'My work experience was very happy, but I never grieved for not having done this earlier.' However, she admires Alma and Eva for being working mothers (of three and two children, respectively) and good professionals, having never given up their employment.

'We Greatly Celebrated When They Got a High Mark'

Emilia (b. 1925) does not lament having devoted her life after marriage to her children and husband, even if she regrets not having worked enough in her younger years to receive a contributory retirement pension. In the school for orphans of railroad workers to which she and her brother were sent after their father's death, Emilia was educated by the falangist Feminine Section. Considered a very skilful student, the school offered her the possibility to prepare for the entrance exam to the national telecommunications enterprise. Her first paychecks as a phone operator allowed her widowed mother to stop working as a cleaner. Emilia worked in this job for ten years, the last four as the fiancée of a lawyer whom she married in 1953, when she was twenty-eight.

Despite the satisfaction with her job, she stopped working immediately after marriage: 'my husband emphatically told me that I should quit my job and devote myself to the family. It seemed right to me. My mother also wished that I stay at home.' Between 1957 and 1968, Emilia gave birth to four girls and two boys. She describes her life during their childhood as 'non-stop work'. Rita, the youngest daughter, emphasises her mother's centrality at home: 'My father did nothing at all at home, he did not even know how to fry an egg. We siblings helped, though not that much, because above all my mother wanted us to study and not to fumble with other things.' However, Rita acknowledges that her father was crucial as regards academic education: 'Though it was very important for my mother, she thought that my father had a better background to take the lead in matters of education.'

Emilia and her husband attached great importance to grades and let their children know about their significance: ‘We greatly celebrated when they got a high mark.’ Rita avows that her two eldest sisters were their ‘parents’ joy’ because of their excellent performance at school and later at university. ‘But my third sister stopped studying at nineteen and decided to join a puppeteers’ group. This was very hard for my parents, terrible. And neither my brothers nor I got good grades, so we had to suffer my father’s loud reprimands. “Study, study, willpower, willpower”, he exclaimed permanently.’

The children went to different private religious schools in the vicinity which Emilia and her husband considered good educational institutions. Ultimately, five out of the six children completed tertiary education, and the oldest daughters became professors of Microbiology and Architecture. Emilia remains convinced that every effort to improve her children’s education and professional opportunities was worth it, and she interprets the kindness and affection they show her as the return for her lifelong commitment to the family she and her husband created in the mid-twentieth century.

‘I Wanted to Ensure a High Teaching Level for Them’

Catalina (b. 1942) is a rare case of a young ‘rebellious daughter’ in the 1950s and early 1960s. Born into a middle-class family from Madrid, her father did not want her to study at university. Higher education was planned for her two younger brothers, but not for her — she should marry a wealthy boy. Catalina portrays her life at home as not very pleasant, with a bad-tempered father and an open-minded but virtually silenced mother. Though her father worked as a journalist for a private newspaper and used to bring home foreign press, addressing public issues at home was forbidden: ‘He was terrified to be caught doing or saying something he shouldn’t do or say. We weren’t allow to talk about anything or complain.’

Against her father’s will, Catalina began studying Biology after she finished higher secondary education at a girls’ religious school and the preparatory course for university: ‘I fully financed my studies with a public grant and I also gave private lessons to earn some money. My father didn’t give me a cent.’ Among her former schoolmates, very few went to university: ‘Most of them married straight away. They wished to leave their home.’ The University of Madrid offered in those years a space for opposition to the dictatorship, but Catalina’s experience as a university student was not emancipatory: ‘To be honest, I was dumb, blind and deaf.’

Catalina was not anxious about marriage (‘everyone thought I would become a spinster’) and only got engaged in the mid-1960s after making sure that her future husband would support her decision to continue working as a part-time schoolteacher whilst simultaneously working on her dissertation. ‘From the very beginning’, she explains, ‘it was clear to me that I wouldn’t ask him for permission to do anything and that, come what may, I would always do whatever I found correct.’ Yet domestic and family tasks were very unevenly distributed, particularly when their four children – Blanca, Felipe, Charo and Laura – were born in the space of six years: ‘I loaded myself with all the problems concerning household and children, as well as working outside the home. My husband did not intervene as regards to good manners, etc. Yet studying was for him fundamental. He expected nevertheless that I took the decisions in this sphere.’ Her daughter Laura also comments on her father’s ‘delegation of educational power’ to her mother. Yet, she also points out that Catalina’s authority in education matters was less strong when it came to Felipe. The choice of her son’s school, and the discussion of his participation in household chores, were issues on which Catalina had to follow her husband’s desires (and her mother-in-law’s, according to Laura).

Despite Catalina’s firm will to keep her employment, she decided after her third pregnancy to stop working, a circumstance that gave her the opportunity to engage more actively in the parents’ associations of her children’s school with the main purpose ‘to ensure a high teaching level for them’. Only in the early 1980s did Catalina return to work as a mid-level civil servant. But even as her children grew up, she continued keeping track of their educational trajectories. Laura vividly remembers the day her mother sat with her at the kitchen table to speak about her university studies: ‘I didn’t know what to study. I was fully lost. After asking me many questions, we decided together that I should study Economics, and so I did.’

Catalina's wish to get a PhD was finally realised by Blanca and Charo, her two oldest daughters who completed their doctorates in Chemistry and Geography, respectively. It was again a family event, the birth of Catalina's only grandchild, which moved her to retire at sixty-seven, earlier than she had planned in order to help her unmarried daughter Blanca with the newborn. Her retirement pension gives her the economic independence she considers central to the liberation of women, while allowing her to support her own children whenever she considers it appropriate.

'Do Not Need Anyone!'

Rosa (b. 1940) looks back to the post-(civil)war years when she left with her parents and four siblings a small and poor town (c. 400 inhabitants in 1940) in the province of Teruel to migrate to the city of Valencia. Her father, a man who could read and write and who had even been mayor of his town, took this decision in search for a future for his children. Being the youngest sister, she and her little brother were sent to school while her eldest sisters began to work in the modest food store which their parents opened in a popular neighbourhood, also helping their mother at home and sewing clothes for the whole family.

Rosa enjoyed learning and her family supported her when she went to university to study Chemistry, a degree which only few women chose at the time. After finishing her studies she obtained a temporary post at her faculty to teach and prepare for a PhD, which she concluded only after marrying a lawyer in 1964 and having her first child, Lina, one year later. Without any right to maternity leave, Rosa asked her mother to take care of the baby. Less than two years later, her son Mateo was born. It was not easy to make her professional career at the public university compatible with raising two small children, and she sometimes felt belittled or regarded as less promising than her male colleagues.

The choice of school for her children was a decision determined by Rosa and readily accepted by her husband. She opted for a well-respected private lay school which furthermore offered her a convenient schedule. Class-free afternoons allowed children to stay at home after lunch and to be looked after by kin and home help.

Rosa remembers her anxiety when in 1974 she got unexpectedly pregnant and wondered how a new child would fit into her busy life. Still, she managed to organise her days:

I remember when my youngest daughter, Andrea, was two or three years old . . . As soon as I concluded my afternoon classes at the university, I rushed home through the avenue with my small car. . . . I arrived home and began asking my children by age; first, my oldest daughter and then her brother: 'Have you done your homework? Have you got ahead with it all?' You know, grades have been always for me very important. And only after this review did I pick up my baby.

Lina confirms the great importance her mother attributed to marks. Depicting herself as a very docile girl, she evokes feeling deeply obligated to satisfy her mother's expectations, even more so as Rosa often stressed how much she was sacrificing herself for the children: 'She expected from us excellence, but my brother usually defied her while I acquiesced.'

Rosa's economic independence allowed her to separate from her husband when Andrea was still a preschooler. Tired of 'his scarce family commitment', after separation Rosa continued being a very hardworking professional and a demanding mother towards her three children. She admits not requiring them to participate on a regular basis in household chores (and in this regard the two girls and the boy were treated 'on a perfectly equal footing', a fact that Lina corroborates by stressing her brother's habitual defiance), but 'high performance at school was a must'. After completing high school, all three went to university, but while both sisters successfully studied Medicine and Economics, respectively, their brother decided to begin working before concluding his university studies.

Economic autonomy was for Rosa one of the most important values she tried to instill in her daughters: 'Do not need anyone! Do not even fear staying single!' Both Lina and Andrea are nowadays full-

time professionals and mothers of three children each. Rosa feels proud of them, but also of herself: 'For the kids I gave up professional promotion, but I have been rewarded. The children have been the most important thing in my life, more than my professional career, which I loved.' Yet, this appraisal of motherhood contrasts with Lina's belief that her mother would not have minded if she had stayed single, childless and fully devoted to her career. 'She was not very happy when I married a boy whose social class of origin and academic record were lower than mine. Anyway, she adores her grandchildren.'

Families as Agents of Social Change and Mothers as Pivotal Family Figures

The above sections offer fragments of 'the slow and almost always painful living of society', which in the words of the Spanish nineteenth-century author Benito Pérez Galdós also constitutes history. In general, the interviewed mothers did not narrate their personal experiences as if they were singular or extraordinary, but fairly mainstream and characteristic of women of similar age in their environment. True, these narratives reflect diverse profiles and experiences, but in their plurality they illustrate patterns of Spanish family history during late Francoism (not without variance), first and foremost the double sidedness of marriage for women (as a means of emancipation from their parents' home, but also as acceptance of the husband's social and legal superiority and of the strict division of labour between spouses). Mothers' authority in the domestic realm, their leverage in matters regarding child-rearing and children's education as well as the importance they attached to the formation and life prospects of their daughters also pervade all these life stories. Noticeably, families took advantage of the increasing economic prosperity and the expansion of the educational offer to improve their social position in the communities they were part of. In a way, the children's achievements in education certified the family's social success and held the promise of upward social mobility.

Indeed, the progress in terms of female education has been impressive. While only one out of ten Spanish women born between 1931 and 1945 had reached higher secondary education or a vocational training degree (necessary credentials to access university or get a qualified job), more than half of those born between 1961 and 1975 have attained this educational level.⁴⁸ From this perspective, the stories narrated by the interviewed mothers seem to be fully successful. Yet, two observations are worth making here. First, though the increase in university students between the early 1970s and the mid-1980s was remarkable and the proportion of female students nearly doubled from 1970–71 (26 per cent) to 1985–86 (50 per cent), the majority of boys and girls born during the baby boom period did not achieve tertiary education.⁴⁹ Belonging to the lower social class was probably a more important hindrance to university access than below average educational performance in secondary education. Second, listening to the daughters allows us to distinguish traces of stress, tensions and conflicts within families underpinning these ambitious family strategies. The emphasis that parents put on education, self-improvement and willpower often elicited feelings of overburdening and frustration among children, while the awareness of the hardships and sacrifices made by their parents to offer them educational opportunities intensified fears of failure. The more or less strong character of children as well as their educational performance vis-à-vis their siblings shaped persistent, and sometimes painful, feelings.

The mothers' narratives included in this article merit being called 'generation-specific feminographies' since they condense affirmative stories and yield 'legitimation of the lived experience' by women belonging to a particular age group. The stories these mothers reported did not depict them as 'passive

⁴⁸ Luis Garrido and Elisa Chuliá, *Ocupación, formación y el futuro de la jubilación en España* (Madrid: CES, 2005), 46 (table 2.1). The corresponding proportions for males are roughly one fifth (for those born between 1931 and 1945) and a half (for those born between 1961 and 1975). On the consequences of this 'educational shift' for current Spanish families and the structural position of today's adult women in Spanish society see Elisa Chuliá, 'State, Society and Family Change in 20th Century Spain: The Evolution of the "Strong Family Model"', in Jürgen Nautz, Paul Ginsborg and Ton Nijhuis, eds., *The Golden Chain. Family, Civil Society and the State* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2013), 120–43.

⁴⁹ In 1970–71 the total number of university students (352,000) was well below the average number of yearly newborns during the baby boom period (c. 650,000). Ten years later the number of university students had increased to 698,000.

objects of patriarchal structures and ideologies', but rather as main role players within families being able to make conscious decisions which have helped other women (concretely, their daughters) to widen the realm of autonomous decision-making.⁵⁰

These feminographies show the extent to which many mid-century Spanish families which had formed and developed according to the ideal gendered family model managed to move beyond public discourse and official culture in regards to their children's education. Whilst housework still remained quite gendered within the home, even amongst sons and daughters, the importance of education and schoolwork was much more balanced across both genders. Girls were thus expected to take their education as seriously as their brothers, if not more. These attitudes and behaviours were generally supported by fathers and mothers alike, but it was the latter, on whom their husbands mostly delegated child raising, who by encouraging the education of all their children opened for their daughters the opportunity to depart from the conventional and publicly sanctioned path that led them to subdued roles in the private sphere and the public space.

Epilogue

In the last decades historiographic research has made significant contributions to increase knowledge about the role of women's organisations and women's forms of resistance during Francoism as instruments and mechanisms of political change.⁵¹ Yet, families have been to a great extent disregarded in this analysis. Housewives and mothers in particular have generally been portrayed as subjects (mostly victims) of patriarchal domination with scarce capacity to deviate from male dominated normative frameworks and contribute to the modernisation processes starting in late Francoism.

In contrast to this prevailing view, this article shows that mid-century Spanish families, and mothers in particular, were effective drivers of social change as they strove to achieve greater equality of educational opportunities for sons and daughters. Oral histories reveal that the strong bid for children's education made by many middle-class families was motivated by different factors, including economic expansion and consumerism, urbanisation, a slowly advancing relaxation of moral and cultural controls resulting from interactions with foreigners or natives with foreign experiences, secularisation and limited liberalisation of associations and press. Parents wanted to offer their offspring not only a better childhood and youth than their own, but also better professional and income prospects. Fathers and mothers shared this project and displayed it through a family discourse in which learning and studying gained symbolic and effective priority for all children, regardless of their sex. Within this realm, however, mothers acquired a specific leverage not only because they supervised children's lives more intensely than fathers, but also because they were willing to assume the major burden of home-making and family caring to facilitate their daughters' dedication to education. In the context of a society that was improving living standards and seemed eager to catch up with much more economically advanced countries, these mothers facilitated the conditions under which their daughters should be able to achieve as adults economic independence and autonomy to decide how to organise their own lives. Their innovative behaviour implied taking distance from the tradition most of them had been subject to during their own childhood and youth, consisting in investing resources in boys and instructing girls to be exemplary housewives.

Without denying the importance of changes in the legal framework that took place during the transition to democracy, the roots of the remarkable transformation of Spanish families can be traced back to roughly the third quarter of the twentieth century when many of today's working mothers were born. The families in which they were raised have remained virtually invisible in the account of the Spanish democratic transition, mostly centred on public institutions and their main actors. However, as the oral histories show, daughters clearly consider their parents, and their mothers especially, as vital factors in driving their education and shaping their working careers. Along with authors who stress the importance of the emergence of a civil

⁵⁰ Abrams, 'Heroes', 220–1.

⁵¹ See, for instance, Valiente, 'Social Movements', Moreno, 'Mujeres', Ruiz Franco, 'Nuevas leyes' and García-Fernández, 'From National Catholicism'.

society and the construction of a democratic citizenship during late Francoism,⁵² this article vindicates Spanish families as agents of cultural and structural social changes that facilitated the political changes that put an end to the dictatorial period and paved the way to democracy.

The impact of these family strategies can hardly be overestimated, their main consequence being the massive and rapid incorporation of young adult females into the labour market since the 1980s, their increasing economic capacity and personal independence. These developments have deeply affected present families in Spain. While their constitution has been often delayed and de-institutionalised (with the subsequent increase in cohabitation to the detriment of marriages and specifically Catholic weddings), their size has diminished and they have become more heterogeneous and unstable. However, Spanish families continue exhibiting a noteworthy capacity to protect those members who are in need of support, as evidenced by their recognised performance and resilience during the Great Recession and the COVID-19 crisis.⁵³

Appendix. Interview guides

Issues	Mothers	Daughters
Personal data: name, birthdate, family status, number and birth dates of children, employment record	X	X
Own childhood: family life and school education	X	X
Engagement and marriage: facts and feelings	X	
Own parents' values on family welfare and children's education	X	X
Own values on family welfare and children's education	X	
Parents' values on children's education		X
Role of mother/father in the family (1960s–1970s)	X	X
Daughters' and sons' education: importance of school choice and performance	X	X
Everyday family life in the 60s–70s	X	X
Religion and religious practice in the family in the 60s–70s	X	X
Children as adults and their current professional situation	X	
Parents' contribution to own professional situation		X
Differences in parents' attitudes and conducts between daughters and sons	X	X
Mother-daughter relationship: accords and discords		X

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⁵² For example, Pérez-Díaz, *The Return*, and Radcliff, *Making Democratic Citizens*.

⁵³ See, for instance, Almudena Moreno Mínguez, 'Understanding the Impact of Economic Crisis on Inequality, Household Structure, and Family Support in Spain from a Comparative Perspective', *Journal of Poverty*, 21, 5 (2017), 454–81, and Luis Ayuso, Félix Requena, Olga Jiménez-Rodríguez and Nadia Khamis, 'The Effects of COVID-19 Confinement on the Spanish Family: Adaptation or Change?', *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 51, 3–4 (2020), 274–87.