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Myth of Equality? Professional Life of Spanish Republican Women in Exile in Mexico

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Marion Röwekamp

(Freie Universität Berlin)

Abstract:

While the research on the Spanish Republican exile in Mexico has mainly concentrated on the 'intellectual male exile' this article will focus on the female Republican exile. It attempts to analyze whether the promises of gender equality that were granted in the constitution of the Second Republic prevailed in exile, whether the Republicans transferred all democratic ideals equally to their exile or whether some achievements were less important to uphold in the Spanish community than others and thus remained at least partly a myth.

It analyzes the equality of women in two ways: First in terms of the development of their professional life in their new host country, considering especially the aspect of how far women participated in the 'intellectual exile' of their community. Second in terms of equality within the marriage and the family in the Republican community.

Keywords: access to professions, exile, Myth of Equality, Spanish Republicans, Women



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Myth of Equality? Professional Life of Spanish Republican Women in Exile in Mexico

Marion Röwekamp
(Freie Universität Berlin)

El exilio tampoco ha sido igual para el hombre que para la mujer. Se fueron nuestras mejores mujeres, pioneras, con consciencia o sin ella, de los contemporáneos movimientos de liberación de la mujer. Profesionales, estudiantes, campesinas y obreras que nos hubieron transmitido el perfume de la libertad y la solidez de su experiencia. [...] Ellas debieron levantar el telón de la arrogancia del varón español y dares cuenta de que empezaba justamente entonces a perfilarse su auténtico lugar en el mundo. Lo que pasó por sus conciencias durante esos años es hoy casi un enigma (Roig 1978: 210).¹

The transformation in women's lives in the Spanish Second Republic and the Civil War in the Republican area were both social and legal in nature. While the various movements and parties had diverging opinions, even within the same movement or party, about how to address women's subordination in the best way, the dislocations of war and revolution required most women to take on new responsibilities and opened opportunities for thousands to get paid for their labor. In addition to that, legislation at the regional and national levels improved women's legal status in society. Women received suffrage and improvements in marriage law and divorce. Occupational training and literacy programs for women were approved and a growing number of women of the middle class started to get into the job market.² In the civil war these trends were even more marked, as thousands of women started to work for the war effort of the Republic. These three years, as Shirley Mangini pointed out, were the times when "women began to break through the patriarchal 'steel ceiling' that had kept them doubly oppressed for centuries as poor, powerless citizens and as subjugated females" (Mangini 2002: 674). Although women worker's wages were still not equal to those of men, the gap between them was considerably reduced. For the first time, a significant number of women took their places as delegates and officers in UGT and CNT locals (Ackelsberg 1985). Yet, these gains did not come without a price. Women may have been more independent, but that was, in part, because their husbands and families were now even more dependent on them. Furthermore, in the absence of any changes in the prevailing

¹ Mercedes Roig (1978): 'La mujer en el exilio'. In: *Tiempo de Mujer*, p. 210.

² About women in the Second Republic see for example Franco 2007 and Ackelsberg 1991.

understanding of men and women's roles, the "freedom to work" has been perceived by many women as a burden rather than a gain (Ackelsberg 1986: 10).³

The experience of defeat was not always the same but it was, among others, characterized by gender. As a consequence of the defeat the Republican women were not only deprived of all the professional achievements and the public life they had gained within the Second Republic, but they were furthermore forced –the ones who remained in Spain– into a new privacy of the home, a quasi 'domestic exile'. The ones who escaped Spain were forced into the harsh world of real exile, first in France and later in other exile destinations.

Mexico is chosen as an exile destination for this article because it was, next to France, the country that admitted the largest number of Republican exiles. Around 25.000 refugees found a new home there and encountered a very special situation as they –due to their number– managed to stay basically among themselves and participated only in terms of work in their new host society. Since many refugees started to work in Mexico in the fields of academia, culture and media, they promptly created a self-attribution for themselves of an 'intellectual exile' that was adopted by the academic research dealing with the Republican exile in Mexico. This framing supported the original conception of the Republicans as the group that, even if they had lost the civil war, constituted the 'better' part of Spain while being in exile. They started to idealize the Second Republic and understood themselves as the heirs of the *niña bonita*, the incarnation of the Second Republic, and therefore transferred all the achievements of the destroyed democracy with them into exile. One part of these accomplishments was equal rights for women.

The promise of equality can be analyzed in different ways. The legal situation of women is usually a good indicator for the (at least nominally) granted equality. But since the refugees were subject to Mexican law, this way of examining equality is not possible. It is however possible to investigate either the situation of women within their own exile community or their professional situation as these two factors are, to a certain extent, clear indicators of their status as a whole, even though the reality of exile life necessarily restricted or changed certain options. These two factors are strongly intertwined and can not be strictly separated, but as far as possible, this article will focus on the entrance and development of the professional life of women in exile in Mexico.

It attempts to analyze the myths of gender equality that was granted in the constitution of the Second Republic and the role of the women in exile. In addition to that it I will investigate whether the Republicans really transferred all democratic ideals equally into their

³ About women in the Civil War see Iturbe 2012; Lines 2012; Mangini 1995; Mary Nash 1995; Fyrth / Alexander 1991; Alcalde 1976.

exile community or whether some achievements were less important in the Spanish community than others and thus being partly a myth.

The first chapter of the article deals with statistics and numbers, the other chapters will examine the special situation of the so called intellectuals in order to see if this attribution also extends to the Republican women in exile or only to the men. The third chapter will analyze the general development of Republican women's professional life in the 1940s and its development, after resolving the first economic difficulties, which meant that work –for women– became an option and not a necessity.

The problems writing an article on the women among the Spanish Republicans are manifold. It does start with the fact that the equality, granted by the Second Republic, was more nominally rather than a socially and broadly lived equality. Certainly there were 'new women' that lived up to the new gender and the social and cultural changes that the laws of the Second Republic granted. But the majority of Spanish women, even Republican women, often remained rooted in their traditional roles. Hence it is already problematic to talk about 'the' Republican women as the phrase can refer to an intellectual, economically independent writer, lawyer, teacher or doctor of medicine, independent union worker or to a married woman, having a profession or being a housewife. All of them experienced the equality granted by the Republic very differently and thus approached their role in the exile community later on with different expectations and attitudes. This was shown in their attitude towards their professional life in exile. Is it already difficult to generalize, in addition to that –as a historian– we meet our limits in the archival situation that does not allow us to make precise assumptions about the professional motivations of Republican women in exile.

1. Statistics

The archival problems start with the basic statistics of the Spanish Republican exile which have been already thoroughly reviewed. The number of Republicans is estimated to have been around 25.000 persons.⁴ For a number of reasons it is not very likely to obtain a truly reliable number since the databases in the archives are factually not comprehensive. Therefore most researchers avoid dealing with statistical information in bigger scales. The few that did so obtained, due to the archival sources they used and the problems of selection that all statistical work involves, different results (Lida / García Millé 2001; Pla Brugat 1999, 1994). As far as women are concerned there is very little statistical data provided so far; most statistics are

⁴ The numbers given by scholars are generally vague, see de León Portilla 1978: 76; Pla Brugat 1994:220. Fagen estimates the number between 20.000 and 40.000 (1973: 40), Fresco on 16.000 (1950: 53) Smith around 22.075 (1955: 305).

either related to both genders together or only to men. Only Lida and García Millé (2001) have used a gendered division that gives us helpful clues about the differences in gender in the exile community. Research work done especially on women in exile usually uses the statistical data already provided without another attempt to concentrate on the qualitative, statistical side of research by broadening the statistical samples (Domínguez Prats 2009). As a consequence most of the work done in this field focuses so far on women's memories, their identities and the role they played within the Spanish community (Martínez 2007; Rodrigo 1999a; Alted 1997; Mangini 1995; Bosch Giral 1994; Bravo et al. 1993).⁵ It concentrates little on their professional activity and when it does, it is either casually or with a particular focus on the outstanding intellectuals. In most cases the researchers deal almost exclusively with female writers, as their work is published and thus easily accessible. To research the professional life of less visible women means to face the archival problems and general limitations already mentioned above. This article attempts to provide some statistical data on the exile of Spanish Republican women being aware of all the problems that the use of these data involves.

According to Lida and García Millé (2001: 214) the total number of men in between 1939-1944 was on average 62.19% as opposed to 37.81% of women. In between 1945-1950 the percentage changed to 59.05% of men and to 40.95% of women and between 1945-1947 to 60.29% of men and to 39.71% of women. In 1948-1950 it gets more balanced, resulting in a percentage of 56.31% of men and 43.69% of women. The numbers do not match the ones of Dolores Pla taken from the list of the first three exile ships that had arrived in Mexico. They provide an average of 67% men, 33% women and 18% children for the year of 1939 (Pla Brugat 1999: 164). According to my sample taken from the immigration data of the AGN (*Archivo General de la Nación*), the average percentage number of men was 68.83% and of women 31.17% and thus correlates more with the data found by Pla Brugat for the first three ships, though my numbers include the exile until 1948.

The relative significance of the data is also reflected by all others sets chosen. The marital status of the exiles as reported by Pla Brugat includes only the general overview for both genders. According to her 63% were married, 33% single and 4% widowed (Pla Brugat 1999: 164). The sample taken by Lida and García for the years of 1939-1950 puts the unmarried status of men to 30.45% and of women to 11.01%. 29.83% of men and 22.58% of women were married. 1.69% of men and 4.1% of women were widowed, 0.22% of men and 0.11% of women divorced (Lida / García Millé 2001: 200). In my sample 55.4% of men and

⁵ An exception that deals also with women working is Domínguez Prats 2009.

50% of women were married and 40.2% of men and 46.9% of women unmarried. 2.4% of men were widowed as opposed to 3.1% of women, 0.5% of men divorced and 1.5% of men unaccounted.

Let us turn, however, to the statistic that is of the greatest interest for the professional exile of women, the one of their professional background. Clara Lida and Leonor García have used their findings from the RNE, providing for the first time a list of professions among the exiles that contains a gendered division (*ibid.*: 228s.). They used the frame as provided by the Mexican government and adapted it to their standards, which made sense as it contained the professions of both men and women. But as the standards in this case are more adapted to the professions of men, it is too multifaceted for our purposes here. Consequently I will refer in my sample only to the group of professions actually declared by women:

Profession	Number	Married Status	Unmarried	Widowed
Housewife	97	67	22	8
Schoolteacher	10	7	3	
Student	16		16	
Nurse/Specialized Nurse	4		4	
Actress	2	1	1	
Artists	5	3	2	
Merchant	4	2	2	
Sewer	7	5	2	
Tailor	16	13	3	
Lawyer	3		2	1
Steno typist	8	2	6	
Worker	1		1	
Expert in Mercantile	2	1	1	
Teacher for Tailoring and Fashion	6	2	4	
Midwife	2	2		
Modeler	1	1		
Pharmaceutical Helper	1	1		
Helper in Accounting	1	1		
Helper in Medicine	1		1	
Office Worker	1		1	
Sales Clerk	3		3	
Piano Teacher	1	1		
Employed in Textiles	2	1	1	
Confectioner (chocolate)	1		1	
Unaccounted	5			
Total	200	110	76	9

Since the school education of the exiles is not included in the statistics, the historian is faced with the problem of how to interpret the facts in terms of the social and educational backgrounds of the subjects. It is not surprising that about half of the women did not practice a profession. On the other hand it is not certain if everyone who claimed to have had a profession had really been practicing it. Many of the women faced with the uncertainty of exile were aware of the necessity of starting a new life and probably also of their need to provide economically for their family and therefore declared as a profession what they had learned to do: sewing, cooking, ironing, hence in most cases, especially for women of higher social background, playing the piano and thus being a piano teacher. Thus some caution is necessary in taking the declared profession as granted.

Still, most women who practiced a profession seem to have had a certain professional education, but only a small number of them fall under the definition of academic or intellectual. Most were –with a specialized education of crafts– related to the clothing industry. Besides sewing and tailoring and saleswomen (for clothes), we also find helpers in different fields and some more in specialized but not academic professions, like midwives and nurses as well as teachers of their crafts.

It is noticeable that none of the women claimed to have worked in the agricultural business, though some had been married to peasants and had probably also worked the land. It is worth acknowledging the relatively equal distribution of married and unmarried working women. It seems that some professions like teaching, midwifery and tailoring / sewing were considered to be more compatible with marriage than others. Apart from that it appears that in case of the more specialized professions –lawyers, teachers or even stenotypists– women were less likely to be married. On the other hand –and this cannot be found in the figure as it does not show the age of the women– most of the more professionally specialized women in the blue and white collar professions were younger than the teachers and thus less likely to be married yet and more likely to be making their own living.⁶

A surprising fact is the big number of unmarried women who declared their profession as 'their home'. Many of them were too young to practice a profession but they were obviously also no longer students. Half of these women were at the age of marriage but they did not seem to be in need of a profession.

The sector of intellectuals or professionals with academic education comprises university teachers, (school) teachers and lawyers, in this case 13 women which is the 6,5% of

⁶ See for example: AGN, RNE, AGA (Archivo General de la Administración), RIEM, 005, 140; Historial Archive of the INAH, National Library of Anthropology and History, collection CATARE, cited as INAH, CATARE, 0057; INAH, CATARE 0150.

the entire sample. Including the artists, who are usually also counted as intellectuals, there are altogether 20 women, which equals 10%. Especially the high presence of female lawyers in this sample is surprising and coincidental, since the lawyers were a very small group among the female academics. According to Lida and García women made up 15.71% in the so called third sector, which in their case also included communication, transport, commerce and finances. I personally consider these categories for placing them as academics or intellectuals deceiving, because we are not fully informed about the education of the people that worked in those sectors, and working in communication can mean being a telefonist, or to someone working in transport a bus driver etc. (Lida / García Millé 2001: 231). According to the collection of biographies in the 1982 edition *El exilio español en México, 1939-1982*, 12.5% of the remarkable exiles were women (Fondo de Cultura Económica 1982).

Since the Republican exile has been overwhelmingly declared to be one of intellectuals, this classification carries some weight. Therefore let us turn to the professional work of the intellectual and academic women among the exiles and their careers in Mexico although they only form a small percentage of the Republican women working.

2. Intellectuals and Academics

According to Mauricio Fresco and to the biographical part of *El exilio español en México, 1939-1982* there was a larger number of women in other academic professions. Fresco's collection is based on a list of female members of the *Union de profesores universitarios españoles en el extranjero* that was first founded in 1939 in Paris and afterwards re-established in Mexico.⁷ The mentioned book contains 650 biographical entries of persons considered to be the most important influences in exile. Of the 25 women exiled in México that Fresco follows, the book only contains information about seven of them.⁸ For the purpose

⁷ Humanidades: Margarita Comas: Profesor de pedagogía, Universidad de Barcelona; Concepción Muedra Benedito, Profesor Auxiliar de Historia medieval, Universidad de Madrid; María Zambrano, Profesor Ayudante de Filosofía, Universidad de Madrid. Ciencias: Leone Abramson, Profesor Ayudante de Química Organica, Universidad Valencia; Adela Barnés, Profesor Auxiliar de Química Inorganica, Universidad Madrid; Enriqueta Peláez Fernández, Profesor Auxiliar de Biología, Universidad Barcelona. Derecho: - ; Medicina: - ; Farmacia: - ; Profesoras del Instituto Aguilo: Campos Arteaga, Angela, Literatura; Carnicero Prieto, Ernestina, Frances; Comas Ros, Joaquina, Geografía e Historia; Ana Martínez Iborra. Cursillistas asimilados a catedráticos del Instituto: María Gudelia Blanco Martínez Tejerina, Historia y Geografía; Sol Ferrer y Guadria, Frances; María Mayor Colóm, Frances; Josefina Oliva Teixelle, Filosofía y Letras; Olga Pajevalinsky Ferrer, Filosofía y Letras; María Luisa Sánchez Bellido; Elena Verdes Montenegro y Martín, Dibujo. Profesores de escuelas normales e inspectores de enseñanza: Dolores Caballero Núñez, Prof.; Margarita Comas Camps, Prof. Emilia Elías Herrando, Prof.; María Nuría Folch y Pi, Prof.; Pilar Munárriz Sánchez, Ins.; Juana Ontañón Valiente, Prof.; Concepción Tarazana Colomer, Prof.; Josefa Uriz Pi. List from Mauricio Fresco (1950).

⁸ Wrongly mentioned by Fresco were a number of women, who did not exile to Mexico: Margarita Comas Camps exiled to England, Dolores Caballero Núñez to Panama and Pilar Munárriz Sánchez to Venezuela. What happened to Enriqueta Peláez Fernández, Ernestina Carnicero Prieto, Sol Ferrer y Guadria, María Mayor Colóm, Olga Pajevalinsky Ferrer, María Luisa Sánchez Bellido, and Josefa Uriz Pi I could not find out. None of them

of analyzing their professional career in Mexico, it is interesting to follow their lives a bit more in detail. We find some women working in the human sciences at university level:

Concepción Muedra Benedito, born in December 1902 in Valencia, studied history at the University Central and worked as an archivist at the National Historical Archive in Madrid. At the same time she was assistant professor for medieval history at the University of Madrid. 88% of the 65 Republican librarians and archivists (60 were men, five women) who exiled to Mexico worked as librarians, 34% in the graphics industry and 11% in other institutions dedicated to graphical art; only 5% worked in the enterprises created for the refugees (Armendáriz Sánchez / Ordóñez Alonso). Concepción Muedra Benito started to work together with Adela Ramón as a professor of the National School of Librarians and Archivists (ENBA) that was established in 1945 (Sánchez-Albornos 2000: 164, 186).⁹

The philosopher María Zambrano, formerly assistant professor at the University of Madrid, belongs to the few women that were renowned enough to have an easy entry into Mexican Academia. She became immediately a professor at the University of Michoacan, later in Havana, Cuba and Puerto Rico. She is one of the women who are constantly researched and remembered in the Spanish exile community, while most other academic women had neither an easy time getting into the Mexican job market nor did they gain any comparable influence in the cultural collective memorizing of the exile community (Sánchez Cuervo et al. 2010; Blanco 2009; Fondo de Cultura Económica 1982: 877).

In the group of natural scientists that had worked in Spanish universities we find two women:

Leone Abramson Navarra, sister of the attorney Inés Abramson Navarra, formerly assistant professor for organical chemistry at the University of Valencia worked either in UNAM or the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (Lloréncs 2006: 331).¹⁰ Adela Barnés de García (other information Barnés González) was formerly working at the Rockefeller institute as assistant professor for non-organic chemistry at the University of Madrid. When she arrived in 1940 in Mexico, she started to work in 1941 as a lab helper in the Instituto Politécnico Nacional and the UNAM. One year later she started to teach in the same institution in which she remained until her retirement in 1961 (Alcalá Cortijo et al. 2009; Giral Barnés 2001; Fondo de Cultura Económica 1982: 733).¹¹

has an entry in the RNE of the AGN. There is also hardly any information on Joaquina Comas Ros, but she had published broadly and due to her publications it might be assumed that she exiled to Brazil.

⁹ AGA, Educación, expediente María Concepción Medra Benedito, 32/16199, cited after Otero Carvajal (2006: 129).

¹⁰ AGN, AGA, RIEM, 002, 034.

¹¹ AGN, AGA, RIEM, 027, 179.

Most of the women mentioned in the book worked as teachers at high school level. Little is known about the ones, mentioned by Fresco, who taught in the Instituto Aguilo. Angela Campos taught at the Republican schools Instituto Luis Vives and the Academia Hispano Mexicana in Mexico City (Fondo de Cultura Económica 1982: 750).¹² Ana Martínez Iborra (La Vaca) exiled first to Santo Domingo where she founded with other exiles the school Juan Pablo Duarte and worked in the National Library. After transferring to Mexico in 1941 she taught as her husband did for 37 years in the Instituto Luis Vives (Aub / Mancebo 1986; Fondo de Cultura Económica 1982: 808).¹³ Josefina Teixell de Coll who studied geography in Spain made her way via teaching geography in the Instituto Luis Vives into a successful university career (Fondo de Cultura Económica 1982: 824). María Gudelia Blanco Martínez Tejerina arrived in May 1941 in Veracruz and seemed to have worked in her former profession as a geographer, but research so far is unclear in which job exactly (Castañeda Rincón 2006: 105).¹⁴ Besides working as an artist and being exhibited in the exposition of Spanish Painting organized by the Junta de Cultura Española presented in 1940 by José Bergamín, Elena Verdes Montenegro y Martín also worked in the Instituto Luis Vives as a teacher (Lloréncs 2006: 342). Emilia Elí(a)s Herrando de Ballesteros arrived in 1939 in Mexico and worked at the Escuela Normal Superior and the Escuela Normal de Varones as well as the Escuela Normal in Pachuca (Fondo de Cultura Económica 1982: 766).¹⁵ María Nuría Folch y Pi exiled first to Santo Domingo and later to Mexico where she and her husband, the writer Joan Sales, were the soul of the journal *Quaderns de l'Exili*. They returned to Catalonia where she was co-founder of the Club Editor (Guillamon 2010).¹⁶ Juana Ontañón Valiente worked after her arrival in the Sinaia in 1939 at the Instituto Luis Vives, later as a professor at Bryn Mawr College and upon her return to Mexico in the Universidad Femenina de México (Jiménez-Landi 1996: 491; Fondo de Cultura Económica 1982: 825).¹⁷ Concepción Tarazaga Colomer worked after her arrival in Mexico in the Academia Hispanomexicana (Cruz Orozco 2004: 90).

Concluding we can only state, that even after over 60 years since the book by Mauricio Fresco was published, there is very little known about the first female Republican professors at university and high school level.

¹² Immigration card of her mother, she herself was still under 15 when coming to Mexico AGN, AGA, RIEM, 042, 086.

¹³ See also the interview with her husband Antonio Deltoro Fabuel, Dirección de Estudios Históricos, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia-Dirección de Archivos Estatales, Ministerio de Cultura (INAH), cited as DEH-INAH, DAE-MCE, PHO 10/39.

¹⁴ AGN, AGA, RIEM, 034, 054.

¹⁵ AGN, AGA, RIEM, 026, 058.

¹⁶ AGN, AGA, RIEM, 239, 134.

¹⁷ AGN, AGA, RIEM, 220,033.

Now let's turn to the entries for women in the biographical part of the *Exilio Español* published in 1982 and analyze the composition of women chosen by a committee of Republican exiles as important and representative to deserve an entry into the encyclopedia.

Of 650 biographical entries 81, so to speak 12.5% are women.¹⁸ The majority of them were actresses (15, 18.5%). About half of them had already been working as actresses in Spain, the other half were still girls when arriving in Mexico and had received their education only in Mexico. The majority of them went through the three exile schools in Mexico City before their more specialized education as actresses. This group is followed by the group of schoolteachers (14, 17.3%), of whom most taught in Republican institutions like the Colegio Madrid, the Instituto Luis Vives and the Academia Hispanomexicana. Most of these women were already teachers in Spain and thus belonged to the elder generation of the first waves of exiles. The third group are the university teachers (11 in total: pedagogy (1), history (1), anthropology (1), philosophy (1), literature (2), law (2), linguistics (2), and biology (1)). Here the majority of the professors were also from the younger generation that received its education in Mexico and went again through the three Republican schools before entering the university. The next comprises the plastic artists, painters, in which we find 9 women out of the 81, equaling 11.1%. Out of them the majority (7) were educated in Mexico, most of them in the Republican school institutions. Next are the group of writers (7), followed by the journalist (5), female lawyers (4), chemists (3), poets (3), social workers (2), geographers (2), dancers (2), editors (2), psychologists (2), economists (2), translators (2), anthropologists (2), librarian (1), biologist (1), physicist (1), industry workers (1), singer (1) and one composer. Here we usually find at least one of the women from each profession belonging to the younger generation of the first wave of exiles. It is only among the female lawyers that members of the older generation prevail strongly. In all the cases of the younger generation their members went to the Spanish Republican schools. Often the careers of the younger generation appear to have been more successful, while the elder generation usually struggled to keep up and to get jobs and maintain the same level of social prestige that they had obtained in Spain. This was also evident in the careers of the women members of the *Unión de profesoras* mentioned by Mauricio Fresco (1950).

But besides all the setbacks it is clear that the women collected in the exile book had some influence on the area they worked in, be it the arts or the academic professions. Florentina González Ciprés for example received her PhD in psychology from the Universidad Central de Madrid, arrived in Mexico in 1945 and worked in the Instituto México

¹⁸ There can be double counting for the single professions as university professors often worked as teachers first, editors as journalists and writers etc.

Pedagógico Parque Lira with mentally limited children as a teacher and founded later the first workshop for the mentally impaired in Mexico where they could earn money (Fondo de Cultura Económica 1982: 785).

Among the collected female biographies are some peculiarities. One of them is that the number and influence of the artists seems to be as strong as that of the academics. And some striking features appear as well. For example, in the academic part there are no medical doctors among the women mentioned and very few women in the natural sciences. The only physicist found, María Pilar Sanz de Obregón, worked in Mexico as an accountant in various enterprises (ibid.: 858). This is a pattern that strongly differs from the usual entrance pattern of the first women into academia in most other European and Anglo American countries, where women were strong in the medical profession and also better represented in the natural sciences, because performance evaluations are less subjective as in the human sciences and therefore women could not be kept out based on the argument of a weaker scientific profile. Though other sources provide the names of other women, the knowledge about women especially in the academic professions, remains surprisingly small (Ordóñez Alonso 1999).¹⁹ Besides their names, there is little known about the careers and lives in exile. This finding is both sad and surprising, since the literature on the Republican exile, especially on the intellectuals, is already so extended. It does also surprise because in comparison with other exile movements, such as the German and Austrian Jewish exile, the research done about female exiles, surpasses by far the number of studies on academic women remaining in Germany.²⁰

As we have seen so far, the easiest profession to get into was education, either as a teacher in high school or even as university teacher. In terms of the schoolteachers, a big help in finding work, as has already become obvious, came from the founding of the Spanish Republican schools that taught children according to the principles of the *Instituto Libre de Enseñanza* established in the Second Republic. Thus the teachers educated by those principles in Spain were designated to take over the teaching of the culture and tradition of the Second Republic in the new schools:

¹⁹ Among the ones not already mentioned: Chemists: Palma Delgado, Serafina; Suñer Pi, Irene; Pharmacists: Beya Pons, Asunción; Castro Bravo, Ma. Luisa; Salomé Gay Méndez; Trinidad Madinaveitia Jungerson; Carmen Olmos Fernández; Ma. de la Rezola Arratibel; Ma. Teresa Somonte Iturrioz; Ciencias Exactas: Alvarez Santullano, Ma. Luisa; Encarnación Martínez Sanz, Ma. del Pilar Díaz Riva, Elisa Poza Juncal.

²⁰ Small selection: Simone Barck et al. 2003; Quack 1995a; Quack 1995b; Lixl-Purcell 1988.

El primer Colegio español auténtico que va a funcionar en la capital desde que la República Mexicana existe ... un Colegio español responsable, digno exponente de la cultura y la enseñanza hispánicas.²¹

Besides the teachers already mentioned above there are a number of other teachers like Estelle Cortichs and the piano teacher Pilar Álvarez Aguado, wife of the attorney Miguel Vidal Rico, who started to teach musical lessons at the Instituto Luis Vives.²² While the beginning of the Republican schools was characterized by teachers with an education in Spain, the next generation of teachers were taught in Mexico in the same schools, and also, occasionally, Republican women with less formal education but strong ties to the community. According to Domínguez Prats the teaching was gender segregated; women mostly taught the smaller children while the elder ones were taught by male teachers. Consequently, in the Academia Hispano Mexicana that had the highest teaching level there were fewer women employed than in the Instituto Luis Vives and the Colegio Madrid (Domínguez Prats 2009: 178).

But for the teachers that did not find work in the Spanish schools, finding a job turned as difficult as for the other women working in academia. The teacher Enriqueta Linares remembered:

He tratado por todos los medios honestos de encontrar trabajo, pero al ser una mujer sola encuentro muchas dificultades. El hombre frecuenta tertulias donde se informa ... Entre mis amistades de señoras he encontrado costura, con lo mal pagada ésta y mi poca práctica ... he conseguido una clase en una escuela primaria en un barrio obrero: media hora de autobús, tres horas de clase, piojos y suciedad por 50 pesos al mes y sólo hasta las vacaciones (ibid.: 176).²³

In fact, according to a statistic of the CATARE, done in February 1940, half of the exiles who have been in the liberal professions were without employment, that refers to the attorneys, journalists and military. Women were hit by this situation even harder than the men. Who would employ them if even the men were unemployed? They often had to work below their qualification (ibid.: 193).

This was especially true for the lawyers. Female attorneys worked often as office helpers before managing to open their own law offices or changing into editing and journalism. The former judge María Luisa Algarra Coma worked first as a typist for a lawyer and –not being able to find work in her old profession– concentrated on her other passion, the writing of theater plays, making a good living out of this. The former attorney and judge Florentina Boadella Clota also wanted to return to her profession but worked as a helper for

²¹ Boletín al Servicio de la Emigración española, Nr. 19, 28.12.1939, p. 4.

²² DEH-INAH, DAE-MCE, PHO/10/017; AGA, RIEM, 055, 123; INAH, CATARE, 0087.

²³ Archivo de la JARE-CAFARE: Documentos de Ayuda a los Republicanos Españoles en México, Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Madrid, AMAE M-110.

attorneys.²⁴ Some of the female lawyers like Julia Álvarez Resano and María Ascensión Chirivella Marín returned to their old professions, but most of them seem to have started to work more in the editorial, literature and journalistic business (Pérez-Nievas Borderas 2007; Yanes Pérez 1998).²⁵ María Soteras Mauri de Vileta opened with her husband an international law office, specializing in civil and criminal law (Fondo de Cultura Económica 1982: 862).²⁶ Another group of female lawyers worked in legal science, especially at the *Escuela Nacional de Jurisprudencia*: Aurora Arnáiz Amigo, Gloria Caballero who actually studied humanities in Spain and law after arriving in Mexico, Margarita de la Villa and Victoria Kent (Sánchez-Galindo 2003; Gutiérrez-Vega 2001; Dolores Ramos 1999; Rodrigo 1999b; Arnaiz Amigo 1996; Fondo de Cultura Económica 1982: 728s.).

In the journalistic profession women usually also worked below their qualifications. The biographical encyclopedia by Juan Carlos Sánchez Illán gives us an idea on this situation (2011). He could make out 33 women under 340 journalist, which makes a percentage of 9.7%. But since he is covering the entire Republican exile, not only the Mexican one, a more detailed counting shows that only 14 of the 33 women, meaning, 4.1%, exiled to Mexico. Most of them had different professions in their main employment and started to work as journalists as a sideline already in Spain, a situation that did not change in exile. Matilde Cantos Fernández for example was a social worker and collaborated for the journals *Población* and *Confidencias* (ibid.: 167.). Ernestina de Champourcín Morán mainly worked as a translator in exile (ibid.: 195s.) also the Nelken sisters mainly worked in other professions. Carmen Mansberger Nelken as an actress and translator, and Margarita Nelken in other means, writing for *Excelsior* (ibid.: 430-434). It appears as only a tiny number like Luisa Carnés and Cecilia Guilarte worked as journalists in full time in Spain as well as in exile.²⁷

As stated by Domínguez Prats the female medical doctors had fewer problems finding work. But if we pay attention to the statistics this statement can only relate to a small number of female doctors, though the group of medical doctors in general has been the largest among the Republican scientists in exile. While some state that around 500 doctors came (Cueli 1982), only 141 registered in the archive of the CTARE (Ordóñez Alonso 1999). According to this list there were five female medical doctors, Trinidad Arroyo, Cecilia Sanz Sanz, Ma.

²⁴ INAH, CATARE 067; INAH, CATARE 441.

²⁵ AGN, AGA, RIEM, 060, 085; AGN, AGA, RIEM, 012, 181.

²⁶ AGN AGA, RIEM, 255, 062; Segura, Isabel / J. S. Yanes: *Advocades i jutgesses a Barcelona (1877-1939)*. Comissió de Dones del Col·legi d'Advocats de Barcelona, unpublished study.

²⁷ See Sánchez Illán 2011:167 (Matilde Cantos Fernández); ibid.: 195s. (Ernestina de Champourcín Morán); ibid.: 430-434 (Nelken sisters), ibid.: 181s. (Luisa Carnés), ibid.: 325s. (Cecilia Guilarte).

del Coro, Ursula Mayer Van Beijeren and the surgeon Rena Mietkiewicz. Ursula Mayer van Beijeren though seems to have been a German medical doctor who exiled to Mexico and returned later to the German Democratic Republic, which makes it four female medical doctors.

A pioneer in her field, Doctora Trinidad Arroyo, arrived together with her husband Manuel Márquez Rodríguez (1872-1962) on the *Flandres* in 1939 at Mexico. Both of them were already in their late sixties and started to work together in a common clinic. Trinidad Arroyo never received an official post anymore but worked for charitable causes especially taking care of women and children as well as writing together with her husband on medical scholarly literature (Márquez Arroyo 2010). On the other mentioned doctors no information was available. I learned from personal testimonies of some of her patients that the doctor María del Coro was a dentist and practiced on her own for many years in Colonia Condesa. Besides the ones mentioned on the CATARE list we find Mercedes Maestre Martí, a pediatrician in Spain and former vice president of the medical syndicate of Valencia of the UGT. She came to Mexico on board of the *Nyassa* in May 1942. She worked in the mornings for free for the street kids and in the afternoon at her own pediatric office (Domínguez Prats 2009: 194).²⁸ This practice was not new for many Spanish doctors who back in Spain had dedicated one day a week to the poor.

As stated above it is amazing how little is known on the lives and work of these pioneering women first in Spanish and later in Mexican academia, especially in comparison with the research on female academics in the United States or other European states.

3. Gendered working situation in Mexico in the first decade of exile

After having taken a look at the statistics and the work situation of academic or intellectual women we now turn to the general working situation of the exiled women in Mexico. The main focus will be on the question whether female exiles encountered a different working situation within the host society and within the Spanish exile community.

Before arriving in Mexico Spanish Republican women were already treated differently than their male compatriots because Mexico had a different set of immigration rules for women. As opposed to Republican men they had to prove to have family ties in Mexico and thus economical means to be sustained in daily life before being accepted as refugees (Domínguez Prats 2009: 102). Thus especially single women faced a different and a more difficult immigration situation.

²⁸ DEH-INAH, DAE-MCE PHO/10/028;

Having arrived in Mexico, women in general and once again especially single women had to face different problems than men. The starting help of the Spanish aid organizations was cut off for the husband as the head of the family. It was him who was considered to provide for the women and the family and thus the one who applied for the help (ibid.: 105). Married women did not apply for business help since legally the husband had to sign for them in any case, an extension of the discriminating rules of the Civil Code that did not give women the status of independent legal subjects. They could not sign contracts without the permission of their husbands and thus often the women had their applications for the help submitted by their husbands.

In the few cases where women did apply for business help to the SERE, JARE, CATARE, it appears as they gave less willingly money to women asking for credits for their business ideas as for men. Since the business plans are not kept in the archives it is difficult to judge whether the decisions were made based on the quality of the proposals or whether there was a real gender based discriminating rule for female businesses. The widowed writer and journalist Sofía Blasco Paniagua for example travelled with her daughter and son to Mexico. She had worked for the newspapers *Liberal de Madrid* and *Libertad Castillo* as well as for the radio. In France, Switzerland and Belgium she had given 264 conferences for the Republican cause. In Mexico she did not see her future in journalism and writing and planned to open a shop for photographers. But the credit was denied by CATARE, so that she applied for credit to open a store for hats for women, which in the end was granted.²⁹ It seems like there was a system behind the denial and granting of credit that was related to traditional gender roles and views, framing which business might be fitting for a women and which ones are not. The patterns of granting credit caused some irritation. The former office worker and specialist for embroidery, Josefina Artega Puig, one of the very few divorced women, came alone to Mexico but had to maintain her two daughters who had stayed behind in Spain with her parents. She started to work in a glass company but wanted to open a European style clothes store. As opposed to the case cited before she could not convince the CATARE to give her a credit for the enterprise. After having specified many enterprises of the same sort that had gotten credits she concluded angrily in one letter:

Si Uds. no tienen hijos menores o padre anciano, si Uds. no han sufrido de las calamidades de la guerra, comprendo su actitud; pero si Uds. han vivido la guerra, y han servido lealmente a la Republica como yo lo hecho, no me explico su desprecio a la petición modesta de una mujer sola, que ha sacrificado todo por la salvación del régimen republicano.

²⁹ INAH, CATARE 440.

No quisiera tener que arrepentirme de llamarme republicana española, y tener que decir en voz alta y a todos los que quieran oírme, que los correligionarios encargados de nuestra ayuda son unos logreros y unos malos, que no piensan sino en su egoísmo personal.³⁰

Apparently the organization tended to give credits for sewing machines but not for other businesses women might have asked for. They were expected to stay within their gendered roles. Thus they even developed a hierarchy of works that were considered fitting for the refugee woman. Being a teacher, working in an office or sewing at home was well seen in the Republican community, to open a pension or a restaurant was not considered a proper thing to do.

Especially problematic was the situation for widows coming with children and without family that could help taking care of the children. Some had specialized professions so that they could have found work, but they were bound to the house and the help of the aid organizations for war widows because they could not find day care for the children.³¹

Despite the gendered approach of the aid organizations and the community, most of the women seem to have found their first jobs due to the help of SERE, JARE as well as CATARE, and mostly worked either in one of the enterprises founded by the help organizations like the fabric of toys or in the farm of St. Clara³² or they found work within the Republican networks in general or within the old Spanish community. They usually found jobs in commerce as saleswoman, in offices as steno typists etc. Often they were not very well prepared for their work but they had at least enjoyed a basic school education in Spain, meaning that they were able to count and knew how to treat people. With these minimum requirements they were often better prepared than the locals and made their way up in the companies faster.³³ Not being used to the status of 'better' jobs –unlike men– women succumbed more easily to jobs of low income and prestige. But the majority worked at home, mostly sewing clothes.

Es famosa en todo el mundo la costuera española. Su minuciosidad, limpieza, arte del remate y originalidad en la confección obtuvieron siempre la más favorable acogida en los grandes talleres de Europa. Y en América no podía suceder lo contrario.³⁴

The Republicans often lived together in one house or apartment in order to share the rent and the food, and to help each other out in general. Most times they also did work together on the sewing (Ulacia Altolaquirre 1990: 117). It happened that some women started to employ

³⁰ Letter as of 10/2/1939, INAH, CATARE 0182.

³¹ INAH, CATARE 0095.

³² INAH, CATARE 069; INAH, CATARE 0098; INAH, CATARE 0218; INAH, CATARE 0253; INAH, CATARE 433; INAH, CATARE 437.

³³ Interview with Adelina Santaló. DEH-INAH, DAE-MCE, PHO, 10/064; AGN, AGA, RIEM, 245, 123.

³⁴ Nuestras excelentes artistas de la costura, Boletín de SERE without further specifications.

others to help them with sewing at home, or women met at different homes to do their work together, talking (Domínguez Prats 2009: 155-159). In any case under these circumstances the Spanish women remained in their exile circles and could take care of the children at the same time. In some cases women started to found workshops outside of the house, producing clothes in larger frames and employing either other Spanish women or working with members of their own family. These businesses were often either financed by the husbands after gaining a better position or also by the old Spanish community that was traditionally already involved in small businesses (*ibid.*: 160-164).

At the same time, the economic situation led to another gendered behavior in families. It was of course important to send the boys to finish their studies, but the girls were expected to go to work and help their families in the economically precarious initial years. Afterwards they were too old to get a proper education and felt like a kind of 'lost' generation:

Papá tuvo sus defectos como todas los seres humanos ¿no? Por ejemplo, en el sentido de que no me dejó estudiar, que me tuvo siempre como una especie de objeto: su mujer y yo éramos objetos, que nos manejaba un poco como él quería (cited after Domínguez Prats 2009: 169).³⁵

In other cases when the women were still studying at the time they left Spain, they did not have the means to follow up on their careers and thus were looking for work in related professions. The student of medicine, Pilar Anaya Fernández, for example came with her husband, a writer. While he tried to work as journalist, Pilar attempted to find work as a nurse since she had worked voluntarily as one in the civil war instead of finishing her career.³⁶ The student of chemistry Juana Arjona Muñiz planned to work in a laboratory until being able to afford finishing her university studies while she worked at the same time as a secretary at the Instituto Luis Vives.³⁷

As soon as it became clear that Franco would not be removed by the allies, and the economic situation of most families improved due to the men finding better paid work and getting a hold in their professions, it was usually only the man, as head of the family, who did work. With this improvement of their status the families usually moved from downtown Mexico and their small homes into bigger apartments in other areas of town like Polanco, Nápoles, Roma, del Valle. They often were able to employ housekeeper and live the life of typical middle class families as opposed to before. When they had this economic chance most of the women gladly gave up their work to dedicate themselves exclusively to their families.

³⁵ Interview with Aurora Gené by Domínguez, Mexico 1989.

³⁶ INAH, CATARE 0134.

³⁷ INAH, CATARE 0163.

Está claro que tampoco los maridos quieren que sus esposas continúen trabajando después de casadas, unos por ‘machismo’, otros porque la gente no murmure de que hace trabajar a su mujer, otros por celos y la mayoría porque prefieren tener las cosas de la casa hechas por la esposa, que tener que comer y tener limpia la ropa de manos de una sirvienta (Pinto 1943: 14).

With this development the women returned to the culture of domesticity, staying full time at home and dedicating themselves to the other great task in the lives of exile women: to educate the children by the principles of the culture and ideals of their homeland and of the Second Republic. Since this task had become so important for the Spanish community, women –who were responsible as mothers for transferring culture and for making the next generation into proper Republicans– played a stronger role within the community than they had done in Spain. The Republican pride they took in their intellectuality led to the fact that not only former bourgeois families sent their children into the Republican schools that prepared for the entrance into universities, but also former working class families. On these grounds the self-proclaimed attribution was becoming true. This idea of their intellectual exile kept the Republican community away from other social and ethnic groups as they started their process of embourgeoisement within the late 1940s and 1950s.

Since most female exiles started to become housewives, the only ones continuing to work were the academics and teachers who were happier within their work (Domínguez Prats 2009: 259-269). The latter ones were also tightly involved in the female task of educating children within the Republican schools so that they could become proper Republicans without mixing with the Mexican host society. But even those who worked in a Republican environment and had a career often felt that they had not fulfilled their professional and personal lives in Mexico as much as they believed they could have done in Spain:

[...] una de mis mayores frustraciones fue sentir siempre que en España tenía muchas posibilidades de trabajar y de trabajar muy bien, y de haber continuado la República hubiera podido realizar una buena labor educativa. Y en México ... pues he hecho lo que he podido (Tuñón Pablos 2011: 77).³⁸

Conclusion

The data has shown that almost half of the Republican women exiling to Mexico declared to practice a profession, the other half indicated that they were housewives. Most of the professions declared fell into the category of blue and white collar professions while about 10% worked in the academic or artistic world. During the first years –due to harsh economic situations– most women had to support their families or themselves, in case they were singles. The blue and white collar workers usually found their first jobs with the help of the Spanish

³⁸ Interview with Estrella Cortichs, DEH-INAH, DAE-MCE PHO/10/017

aid organizations which provided a form of employment service together with the foundation of their own enterprises or with the help of the Republican network in general or even the old Spanish community. The help of the aid organizations seemed to have been gendered, so that they solely granted the women credits for businesses related to the classical ideas of gendered working spheres. Most women, in any case, worked as sewers or tailors at home until the economic situation of their families improved by the end of the 1940s. Then it seems that they gladly entered their new bourgeois domestic role, regarding their home and family as their exclusive working place. Their roles were not limited to that, because they were also fostering culture and determined with their behavior within the small but politically quarreling Republican community the family's social status. Especially after the shock of defeat, and the hard times experienced in France, they felt some personal liberty in Mexico, but at the same time they held on –as much as the husbands– to the old roles and values in an effort to steady the family against the insecurities and economic hardships of the exile situation. It appears that despite the successes for women's equal rights in the Second Spanish Republic and the entrance of women into the job market, most Republican families did not live by the new concept of equality in marriage. But women's new role not only as mothers but also as carriers of culture enhanced at the same time their status within the families and the Republican community. It appears that they did play a stronger role within the family and as wives in contrast to their role in Spain, which was based on their new role as cultural educators and less on the ideals of equal rights for women transmitted granted by the Second Republic.

The situation of the academic or artistic women seems to have developed independently from the trend of the blue and white collar workers. Since most women in this area were teachers or high school teachers they often found their way back into their professions in the Spanish Republican schools, which were immediately founded and have survived until this day. University teachers had a harder way into Mexican institutions but they largely succeeded, especially those who were young when they arrived and went through the Mexican educational system. The women who received their education in Spain appear to have been hesitant entering into Mexican institutions and never reached the same level that they once had or could have had in Spain.

The other academic professions for example lawyers, medical doctors or journalists had a very difficult time to enter the job market in Mexico. Those lawyers who managed to open their own offices were busy with an all day practice and earned very little. But in the Spanish Republic they often had very important jobs and enjoyed a lot of public attention. Since there

have been very few medical doctors in the samples taken, it is difficult to make a precise statement: one of them was not able to find work in the medical field, the other one seemed to have found a way into practicing her profession and the third concentrated on publishing in her area, but was too old to start exercising as a doctor. Journalists and writers seemed to have basically worked in their professions as sidelines while having other main jobs, thus their entrance into the job market did not seem to be very successful. It appears that the labor market in Mexico in the 1940s did not acknowledge women working in prominent places.

Altogether we have to agree with Dominguez Prats who concluded in her study on Republican women in exile that female intellectuals were not involved or did not get jobs in Mexican universities or centers of investigations –in contrast to the male exiles– and therefore received far less attention than they had received in the Second Republic (Domínguez Prats 2009: 211). It is surprising that research dealt so little with the life and work situation of Republican women in general, but even more so with intellectual women. Apart from the research on very outstanding figures like María Zambrano or Remedios Varo or Elvira Gascón as painters, there is almost nothing known about the biggest part of the women that made up the female intellectuals of the Republican exile, whereas the male intellectuals have been researched more thoroughly. Since the Republicans had strongly idealized the Second Republic and transferred its ideas into exile, it seems like some democratic ideas had more weight than others. Equality within marriage was only partly given: the role of women was enhanced by their new role –not only as mothers– but also as carriers of culture, and based less on democratic ideas of equality. The professional life of women –especially for the first generation– was limited due to the work situation in Mexico. The fact that the work of women in exile is less remembered and researched than the one of men could mean that equal rights for women ultimately did not play such an important role in the Republican exile community. That female pioneers have "transmitted the perfume of liberty and the depths of their experiences" to defy the arrogance of the Spanish men in exile, as the introducing quote suggests, appears to be a wishful myth.

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