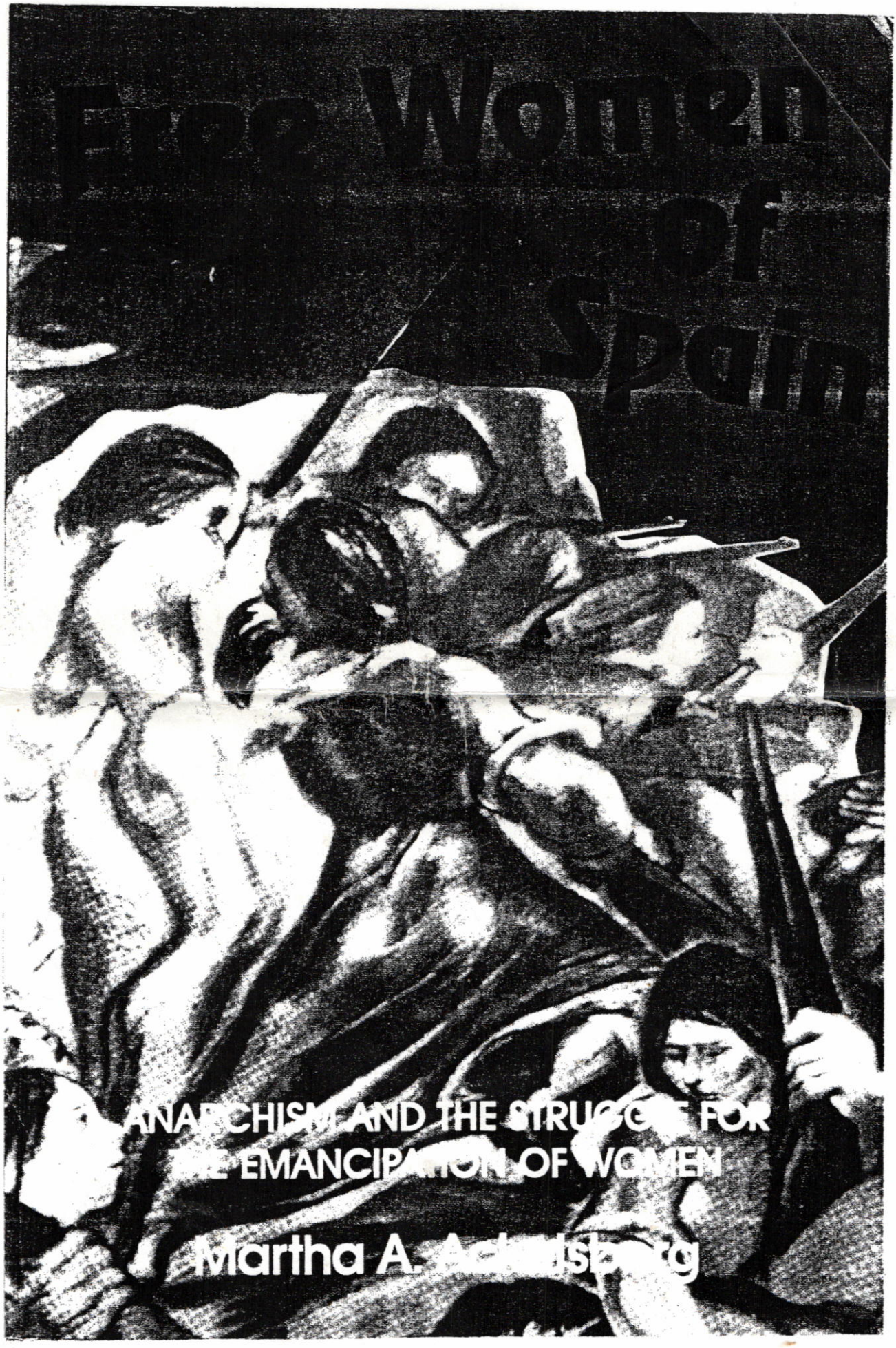
Free Women of Spain
ANARCHISM AND THE STRUGGLE FOR
THE EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN
Martha A.

IISG/EG Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam, Emma Goldman Archive
IISG/FAI Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam, Archivo FAI-CP
NYPL-EG New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, Emma Goldman Papers
NYPL-RP New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, Rose Pesotta Papers

Puño en alto mujeres de Iberia
hacia horizontes preñados de luz
por rutas ardientes,
los pies en la tierra
la frente en lo azul.

Afirmando promesas de vida
desafiamos la tradición
modelemos la arcilla caliente
de un mundo que nace del dolor.

¡Que el pasado se hunda en la nada!
¡Qué nos importa del ayer!
Queremos escribir de nuevo
la palabra MUJER.

Puño en alto mujeres del mundo
hacia horizontes preñados de luz,
por rutas ardientes
adelante, adelante
de cara a la luz.

Fists upraised, women of Iberia
toward horizons pregnant with light
on paths afire
feet on the ground
face to the blue sky.

Affirming the promise of life
we defy tradition
we mold the warm clay
of a new world born of pain.

Let the past vanish into nothingness!
What do we care for yesterday!
We want to write anew
the word WOMAN.

Fists upraised, women of the world
toward horizons pregnant with light
on paths afire
onward, onward
toward the light.

Mujeres Libres' Anthem
Lucia Sanchez Saornil
Valencia 1937

I

ANARCHIST REVOLUTION AND THE LIBERATION OF WOMEN

When the Republic came, many people went to storm the prisons to free the prisoners, and I went, too. There was some guy there shouting, "Abajo la política! [Down with politics!] Abajo la Guardia Civil! [Down with the Civil Guard!] . . . all sorts of abajos." And then he yelled, "Viva la anarquía!" [Long live anarchy]. And I thought, "Aha, here is an anarchist." This was my first encounter with an anarchist—and he did not look like he was a terrible person. He had a good face.

—Soledad Estorach

People would say to us, "Were you children baptized?" and we would say to them, "We weren't baptized." "How terrible, what girls! Such beautiful children"—because we were six handsome sisters (I mean from the standpoint of health) and one brother—"being brought up without God, you are like dogs!" And we would say, "No, you are the ones who are like dogs, that you need a master."

—Enriqueta Rovira

Domination in all its forms—whether exercised by governments, religious institutions, or through economic relations—is for anarchists the source of all social evil. While anarchism shares with many socialist

ABBREVIATIONS

AIT	Asociación Internacional de Trabajodores (International Workingmen's Association), Anarchist International
AJA	Asociación de Jóvenes Antifascistas (Antifascist Youth Association), sponsored by the Communist Party
AMA	Asociación de Mujeres Antifascistas (Antifascist Women's Association)
BOC	Bloc Obrer i Camperol (Workers' and Peasants' Bloc)
CENU	Consell de l'Escola Nova Unificada (New Unified Educational Council)
CNT	Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labor), anarcho-syndicalist trade union federation
FAI	Federación Anarquista Ibérica (Iberian Anarchist Federation)
FIJL	Federación Ibérica de Juventudes Libertarias (Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth), anarchist youth organization
JJLL	Juventudes Libertarias (Libertarian Youth), another name for FIJL
PCE	Partido Comunista de España (Spanish Communist Party)
POUM	Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (Workers' Party of Marxist Unity), Trotskyist
PSOE	Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party)
PSUC	Partido Socialista Unificado de Cataluña (Catalan Unified Socialist Party)
SIA	Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista (International Antifascist Solidarity), anarchist-affiliated international relief organization
UGT	Unión General de Trabajadores (General Workers' Union), Socialist-affiliated trade union federation

AHN/SGC-S	Archivo Histórico Nacional, Sección Guerra Civil, Salamanca
AMB	Archivo Muncipal, Barcelona
AMHL	Archivo, Ministerio de Hacienda, Lérida
IISG/CNT	Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam, Archivo CNT

ing class," their own identity as working-class women disappeared. Similarly, when black or Jewish women in the United States are forced (whether by members of their ethnic-cultural group or by other women) to choose between a loyalty to other women or a loyalty to their ethnic-cultural group, their own identities are denied. It is not surprising in this context that many working-class or ethnic minority women in the United States are wary of "the feminist movement," even though they may express support for many feminist goals. Individualist appeals deny or demean the bonds that working-class or ethnic minority people feel toward one another. It appears that the promise of individual achievement and fulfillment is to be won at the cost of abandoning group identity and solidarity.[41] At the same time, these appeals divide working-class women (whether white or of color) from middle-class white women by denying the separate reality of each situation.

No one should be forced to choose among aspects of her or his identity as the price for political or communal belonging. We are each whole beings, capable of multiple commitments to a variety of collectivities. Those commitments enrich our lives and empower us. Although, as in the case of Mujeres Libres, they are often labeled "divisive," they need not be so. In fact, multiple commitments are divisive only in the context of communities that make claims to exclusive loyalty. If we can move away from prevailing hierarchical patterns, in which one sort of commitment is conceived as primary or superior, and acknowledge that each of us has a variety of commitments of different intensities to different groups—the importance of which may change over time—then we can begin to create communities that recognize those commitments and do not make exclusive claims on our loyalties. Perhaps we can then claim for ourselves the legacy Mujeres Libres struggled so hard to create.

> We took the first steps . . . toward emancipation, first steps that have been taken up by women's liberation movements of today. They were first steps; we couldn't take the "giant steps," because of the war and the exile, which cut our struggle short. . . . Now, the world has changed. . . . Our children have to be the pacesetters for the future. But our memories, such beautiful memories, of that struggle so hard and so pure. . . . Is it possible that it has been of some use?[42]

traditions a radical critique of economic domination and an insistence on the need for a fundamental economic restructuring of society on a more egalitarian basis, it goes beyond Marxist socialism in developing an independent critique of the state, of hierarchy, and of authority relations in general. Where socialists have traced the roots of *all* domination to the division of labor in the economy, anarchists have insisted that power has its own logic and will not be abolished through attention to economic relations alone.

Anarchism aims to abolish hierarchy and structured relations of domination and subordination in society. It also aims to create a society based on equality, mutuality, and reciprocity in which each person is valued and respected as an individual. This social vision is combined with a theory of social change that insists that means must be consistent with ends, that people cannot be directed into a future society but must create it themselves, thereby recognizing their own abilities and capacities. In both its vision of the ideal society and its theory of how that society must be achieved, anarchism has much to offer contemporary feminists. The anarchist analysis of relations of domination provides a fruitful model for understanding the situation of women in society and for relating women's condition to that of other oppressed groups. A theory of social change that insists on the unity of means and ends and on the strengths of the oppressed provides a striking contrast to many existing theories—and most existing practice—of social revolutionary movements.

Furthermore, some nineteenth-century anarchist writers and activists, both in Spain and elsewhere in Europe and the United States, specifically addressed themselves to the subordination of women in their societies and insisted that full human emancipation required not just the abolition of capitalism and of authoritarian political institutions but also the overcoming of women's cultural and economic subordination, both inside and outside the home. As early as 1872, for example, an anarchist congress in Spain declared that women ought to be fully the equals of men in the home and in the workplace.

Yet neither the theory of anarchism as it developed in Spain and elsewhere in Europe during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries nor the practice of anarcho-syndicalism in Spain was egalitarian in the full sense of the word.[1] Although many writers seemed to acknowledge the importance of women's emancipation to the anarchist project and the importance of women to the movement, few gave those concerns top priority. As was the case with socialist movements throughout Europe, many anarchists treated the issue of women's subordination as, at best, secondary to the emancipation of workers, a problem that would be resolved "on the morrow of the revolution."

The founding of Mujeres Libres represented an effort by women

within the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist movement both to challenge the movement to fulfill its promise to women and to empower women to claim their places within that movement and within the larger society. At the same time that the founders were frustrated by the failure of the movement to adequately incorporate women and issues of concern to women, they nevertheless remained convinced that the movement provided the only context for achieving a true liberation of women.

My aim in this book is to make clear just what Mujeres Libres' vision was and to explore its relevance for contemporary feminists and social change activists. But in order to do so, we must first locate it—as did the women of Mujeres Libres themselves—in the context of anarcho-syndicalist theory and practice. In this chapter, I examine the works of Spanish anarchist writers and others in the "communalist anarchist" tradition who provided the theoretical grounding of the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist movement. My aim is to highlight their approaches to the understanding of women's subordination, their critiques of hierarchy and domination, and their understanding of the process of fully integrating a concern with the subordination of women into a theory of radical social transformation. But I also wish to explore the ambiguities evident in these analyses, the ways that—despite the apparent awareness at the core of anarchist theory that relations of domination were manifold and complex—attention to the subordination of women was repeatedly given lower priority than the oppression of male workers. This contextualization of Mujeres Libres' program and activities should lay the basis for a demonstration of the ways Mujeres Libres' programs effectively addressed the weaknesses of anarcho-syndicalism at the time and constituted both a critique and extension of Spanish anarcho-syndicalist theory and practice.

I focus here on Spanish anarcho-syndicalist analyses of domination and subordination, on the vision of an egalitarian society, and on the process of empowerment, specifically as related to the situation of women. Exploration of these concerns on a theoretical level can then serve as backdrop and counterpoint to the more historical analysis of the roots of Mujeres Libres in the anarcho-syndicalist movement, which I undertake in chapter 2. In fact, for anarchists, theory and practice were hardly distinguishable in this sense. The theoretical positions we will be discussing in this chapter were developed in the context of historical struggles, at the same time that they contributed to the development of those struggles. I separate them here only for analytical purposes.

Domination and Subordination

Anarchist visions are politically, socially, and economically egalitarian. Politically and socially, an anarchist society is a society without govern-

United States, for example, many of the collective strategies the women proposed to address the isolation and discrimination they experienced as women were open only to other middle-class women like themselves. They ignored the extent to which their programs relied on the continued exploitation of working-class women.[39] Over time, feminism came to be identified with the goal of access to, rather than fundamental restructuring of, existing hierarchies of privilege.

In the contemporary United States, protest groups have argued that prevailing conceptions of politics are biased not only along class and gender lines but also along lines of racial-ethnic identity, sexual orientation, physical ability, etc. The "universal citizen" of liberal democratic theory is not only an upper-class male, but also a white, able-bodied, heterosexual family head.[40] In treating all people as mere bearers of interests, liberal democratic individualism masks structures of power and, in particular, relations of domination and subordination that affect people (and structure their "interests") as members of subnational collectivities.

At the same time, the individualist paradigm provides little or no place for the conscious articulation of interests and perspectives deriving from differing cultural, ethnic, religious, or gender backgrounds. That paradigm treats these either as generating different "interests" around which individuals may gather or, more commonly, as occasions for oppression or discrimination, on the basis of which members of particular groups are denied equal access to social goods. But being a part of a collectivity is not simply a matter of experiencing oppression as a member of that collectivity. To say that blacks, women, gays, Jews, Muslims, or the disabled are discriminated against (or disadvantaged) in a system that takes the normative citizen to be a white, Christian, heterosexual, able-bodied male should not deny that there are positive characteristics and values that members of those groups have developed—even if they have developed them partly in response to their oppression. Liberal individualism would "wash out" all those differences in the name of universal citizenship. Marxist socialism would wash out all but those based on class in the name of the workers' revolution. Similarly, some radical feminists would wash out all but those based on gender, in the name of "sisterhood." But those who are now finding strength in their identities as members of one or more of these collectivities are rightly unwilling to abandon them as the price of fully inclusive citizenship.

The challenge is to develop a conception of politics and political life that moves beyond both individualism and a narrow class or gender analysis. Such a reconceptualization must recognize people not as bearers of interests, but as participants in a variety of communities that contribute important components to their identity. When French socialist women were forced to choose between "women" and "the work-

cultural struggle and community-based organizing. Much current protest politics in the United States, beginning with the civil rights and antiwar movements of the 1950s and 1960s and including education, tenant organizing, ecological, and antinuclear protests, has been based on nonunion organizational forms: neighborhood or community groups, racial-ethnic cultural communities, and coalitions formed around shared political/social concerns.

Feminists have added another dimension to this critique of liberal democratic politics, pointing out that our conceptions (and practices) of politics have gender as well as class encoded into them. When "the political" is defined as those matters which take place in some public sphere, allegedly separate from (and superior to) the private or domestic sphere, the concerns of many women and men are defined as outside of politics; the political nature of their activities is denied or made invisible. Carole Pateman has noted in *The Sexual Contract*, for example, that the subordination of women was not problematized in liberal political theory. Since, she argues, the assumption of these theories is that women are related to society through men, women's exclusion from the social contract has barely been noticed. Her claim, I believe, is related to my earlier one that when women are seen totally in terms of their "specificity," the actual concerns of real women are often neglected. Entire dimensions of human concern and collective action are thus devalued, and the community as a whole is diminished.[38]

In highlighting the collective nature of the oppression that both men and women experienced as members of the working class, Mujeres Libres insisted that liberation from oppression required collective action and could only be evaluated according to collective norms: success could not be defined as individual women making it in the political or corporate world. Hierarchical structures had to be abolished, and women had to be involved both in that process and in the creation of the new society. Issues of class and gender must be addressed simultaneously.

Many feminists (both in Spain and elsewhere in Europe and in the United States) share an aspect of that insight, arguing that women are oppressed as a group and can redress their grievances only through collective action. The class component of the analysis, however, has all too often been neglected. This neglect resulted in feminism becoming identified with the efforts of women to achieve favored positions in existing hierarchical institutions and organizations. There have been exceptions, of course—working-class women's suffrage organizations in Great Britain, efforts to organize socialist feminist groups in France, "material feminists" in the United States who attempted to assert control over the so-called domestic sphere. But many of these were ultimately unable to sustain the joint focus on gender and class issues. As Dolores Hayden argues with respect to material feminists in the

ment, without institutionalized hierarchical relationships or patterns of authority. Anarchists claim that people can organize and associate themselves on the basis of need, that individuals or small groups can initiate social action, and that centralized political coordination is not only harmful but also unnecessary. The right or authority to direct or command a situation should not inhere in roles or offices to which some people have privileged access or from which others are systematically excluded. Finally, anarchists are committed to nondominating relationships with the environment, as well as with people. Anarchists have focused not on conquering nature, but on developing new ways to live (as much as possible) in harmony with it.[2]

Virtually all major social thinkers in the West have assumed that social order requires leadership, hierarchy, and, in particular, political authority. Many argue that social life, especially in a complex society, could not exist without structures of power and authority. "Society means that norms regulate human conduct," and norms require authorities with power to enforce them.[3] In a slightly different vein, social contract theorists have argued that political authority is necessary to create a stable social order, the precondition for moral choice. Theorists of social movements argue that it takes a strong person (or persons) to unite disparate individuals into a coherent unit and give them direction. Organization, in turn, *requires* that some people be in positions to give orders and that the rest—whether as "good citizens" or as "good revolutionaries"—be prepared to take and follow them.[4]

Anarchists argue in response that formal hierarchies are not only harmful but unnecessary and that there are alternative, more egalitarian ways in which to organize social life. Most important, along with socialists and, more recently, feminists, anarchists have insisted that human nature is a social construct; the way people behave is more a product of the institutions in which they/we are raised than of any inherent nature. Formal hierarchical structures of authority may well create the conditions they are presumably designed to combat: rather than preventing disorder, governments are among its primary causes.[5] Hierarchical institutions foster alienated and exploitative relationships among those who participate in them, disempowering people and distancing them from their own reality. Hierarchies make some people dependent on others, blame the dependent for their dependency, and then use that dependency as a justification for the further exercise of authority.[6]

Many Spanish anarchists used the existing subordination of women in society as an example to demonstrate the power of social institutions to create dependent persons. While there were many views among Spanish anarchists about the nature of women and about the appropriate role for women in a future society, most anarchist writers seemed to agree that women were severely disadvantaged in Spanish society and

that existing inequalities between men and women were largely the product of social conditioning and male power. As early as 1903, for example, José Prat argued that "women's 'backwardness' is a consequence of the way she has been, and still is, treated. 'Nature' has nothing to do with this. . . . If woman is backward, it is because in all times man has kept her inferior, depriving her of all those rights which he was gradually winning for himself."[7] Gregorio Marañon and Mariano Gallardo, while acknowledging that there were significant sexual differences between women and men, argued that societal gender inequalities were the result of denying opportunities to women: "Woman's . . . presumed inferiority is purely artificial, the inevitable consequence of a civilization which, by educating men and women separately and distinctly, makes of the woman a slave and of her compañero a ferocious tyrant."[8]

Spanish anarchists, like contemporary feminists, argued that the exercise of power in any institutionalized form—whether economic, political, religious, or sexual—brutalizes both the wielder of power and the one over whom it is exercised. On the one hand, those who hold power tend only to develop an ever-increasing desire to maintain it. Governments, for example, may claim to represent a "common interest" or "general will." But this claim is false and masks the state's role in preserving and maintaining the economic and political power of the few over the many.[9]

On the other hand, the exercise of power by some disempowers others.[10] Those in positions of relative dominance tend to define the very characters of those subordinate to them. Through a combination of physical intimidation, economic domination and dependency, and psychological limitations, social institutions and practices affect the way everyone sees the world and her or his place in it.[11] Anarchists argue that to be always in a position of being acted upon and never to be allowed to act is to be doomed to a state of dependence and resignation. Those who are constantly ordered about and prevented from thinking for themselves soon come to doubt their own capacities. Along with contemporary feminists,[12] anarchists insist that those who are defined by others have great difficulty defining, or naming, themselves and their experience and even more difficulty acting on that sense of self in opposition to societal norms, standards, and expectations.[13]

Anarchists, therefore, oppose *permanent* structures of authority in which particular people seem to find their "calling," arguing that authority relations in society ought to be more fluid: "People are free. They work freely, change freely, contract freely."[14]

United States? Although Mujeres Libres' explicit focus vis-à-vis other leftist movements was gender, its experience offers us the model of an independent, but nonseparatist, strategy for dealing with diversity.

Specifically, beyond a focus on empowerment and on the incorporation of differences, the history of Mujeres Libres points to the importance of a community of orientation in the process of consciousness-change. Feminists and socialists, as well as anarchists, have argued that truly meaningful political participation can take place only within a more or less egalitarian, mutually respectful political community. But the question remains, What kind of community meets those criteria? Mujeres Libres identified itself not with other women's organizations, but with the libertarian movement.

Feminists, workers, and people of color have argued repeatedly in the contemporary context that we need subcommunities of people like ourselves in order to feel validated and valuable in our specificity.[35] Mujeres Libres insisted that however important and necessary these subcommunities might be, they are, in the end, insufficient and partial. No one group by itself can provide the sole basis for a movement to transform society. A movement must incorporate many such collectivities under a larger umbrella that respects the differences among them, values the particular contributions each group has to offer to the whole, and can take advantage of the power that comes from united action. Concepts of difference and diversity can provide us with new ways of thinking about the constitution of empowering communities. I will end by focusing on two related aspects of Mujeres Libres' legacy: the challenge to the gendered and class-biased construction of "the political" and the beginnings of a conceptualization of a politics of diversity.

Critics of liberal democratic polities point to the class bias built into the structure and very conceptualization of politics. As E. E. Schattschneider once put it, "The flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent."[36] Poor and working-class people are disproportionately underrepresented among those who participate in politics, and they are fundamentally disadvantaged in the outcomes. As generations of critics have noted, the "rules of the game" of liberal democracy—the emphasis on isolated individuals with independently constructed interest profiles—benefit those already in power and prevent others from recognizing their differing needs, let alone articulating and struggling for them in the political arena.[37] Politics, as both Marxists and anarchists insist, is not simply about the distribution of positions in a "political opportunity structure." It is about the structuring of power in the society as a whole. Thus Marxists and, more especially, anarchists have insisted on the practice of widespread popular participation in a variety of forums. Marxists focused primarily on unions and workers' parties; Spanish anarchists added

While the variations among these groups are significant, we can see them contributing to the development of an emerging perspective on difference. Such a perspective rejects the notion of woman (or person of color, or worker) as "other," insisting that we must de-center the dominant definitions, understandings, and institutions and make room to claim and validate a variety of perspectives. It insists on locating women within collectivities, while recognizing that many, if not most, women are located within a variety of collectivities, not just one. It therefore refuses the choice so many political women have had to confront between solidarity with other women and solidarity with their class or racial-ethnic group. At the same time it affirms the multilayered character of women's (and of all people's) identities. It would replace a politics of difference, in which all are defined relative to one norm, with a politics of diversity, which recognizes and validates distinct ways of being without ranking them according to some hierarchically defined norm.[33] Those in Mujeres Libres who affirmed the importance of a "women's perspective" in the anarchist movement, and those of our own day who insist on hearing women's "different voices," all urge women to value their particular strengths. At the same time, they insist that society as a whole would be better off if many of those characteristics were more widely shared.

We must challenge the hierarchical ranking of the dominant value system and begin to conceptualize a society (or movement) in terms of diversity, rather than of differences from one particular norm (however it may present itself as "universal"). Such a perspective underlies the calls by Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, Marilyn Frye, and others for feminists to confront racism, heterosexism, and class oppression within the women's movement and within the society at large.[34] It is also one way to understand what Mujeres Libres was attempting in its insistence on a separate status. One approach to de-centering the male-defined norms of the anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movements, they seemed to be arguing, was to incorporate into that movement another organization with a different set of valued characteristics.

Mujeres Libres' very existence, then, was a form of direct action. The incorporation of Mujeres Libres into the libertarian movement as a fully equal organizational partner would have challenged the normativeness of male-defined visions, not only of women and their capabilities, but also of the range of human nature and, more generally, of the possibilities of a truly egalitarian society.

Toward a New Conception of Politics

What lessons can we draw from Mujeres Libres that might contribute to contemporary feminist and participatory democratic politics in the

Community and Equality

Many theorists, of course, have argued that, despite the negative effects of hierarchical structures, domination and subordination (whether in the political, economic, or sexual realm) are necessary for social life. In response, anarchists describe alternative ways to organize society that embody both freedom and equality in the broadest sense. Such visions locate individuals firmly in a communal context and require attention to economic relationships, to mechanisms for coordination, to sexuality and male-female relations, and to those ongoing systems of education and socialization that make it possible for a society to perpetuate itself over time.

In place of inequality as a basis of organization, anarchists offer mutualism, reciprocity, and federalism. In place of hierarchy and domination, they propose to empower everyone to achieve his or her full potential, thus obviating the need for social, political, or sexual inequality. I will highlight those aspects of the anarchist theory of revolution that were to be of particular significance for Mujeres Libres and through which we will see most clearly Mujeres Libres' contribution to the development of the theory and practice of nonauthoritarian social change: the social nature of freedom, the vision of an egalitarian society, and the process of consciousness-change and empowerment.

Freedom, or individual liberty, was a basic premise of the Spanish anarchist tradition. "Individual sovereignty" is a prime tenet of most anarchist writing; the free development of one's individual potential is one of the basic "rights" to which all humans are born.[15] Yet Spanish anarchists were firmly rooted in the *communalist*-anarchist tradition. For them, freedom was fundamentally a social product: the fullest expression of individuality and of creativity can be achieved only *in and through community*. As Pilar Grangel (a teacher who was also active in Mujeres Libres) wrote, describing the relationship of individuality and community: "I and my truth; I and my faith. . . . And I for you, but without ever ceasing to be me, so that you can always be you. Because I don't exist without your existence, but my existence is also indispensable to yours."[16] They made frequent appeals to Kropotkin's claim that social life was regulated not by an antagonistic struggle for survival, but by "mutual aid": "Without association, no life is possible."[17] Only in a fully egalitarian society, devoid of hierarchies of economic class, political, or sexual privilege, would everyone be free to develop to the fullest and would individual initiative be able to flourish.[18]

The focus on individuality and individual initiative, and the communal context that nourishes it, provided a potential context for Spanish anarchists to address male-female differences. This perspective generated an awareness—at least on a theoretical level—of human diversity,

of the variety of ways people can contribute to the social whole, and of the benefits to the society of the incorporation of different groups. But the working out of this vision, whether in theory or in practice, as related to sexual differences was much more limited. As contemporary feminists and minority activists have made us well aware, it is not always obvious how to ensure respect and equality in nonhomogeneous communities. Many supposedly egalitarian social forms have ignored differences between men and women, for example, or assumed they were irrelevant to politics, thus effectively reproducing the subordination of women.[19]

The limits of the Spanish anarchist vision become clear as we examine their understandings of the basic constituents of social organization. Most Spanish anarchist writers located economic relationships at the center of their vision, insisting that the basic principle of social organization must be economic, rather than political. Economic relationships must be as nonhierarchical as possible, with respect both to the remuneration that people receive and to the structure of work. They differed among themselves as to what ought properly to constitute equality of reward, varying between collectivism (to each according to contribution) and communism (to each according to need). Nevertheless, all agreed that relative equality of reward was essential to the functioning of a just society. This was so both because economic inequalities are easily converted into social or political power and, more basically, because most human labor is collaborative and it is virtually impossible to assign value to an individual's contribution to a collective task.[20]

To say that economic equality must be at the root of a society based in reciprocity and mutuality, however, is insufficient to define what the overall structure and organization of that society might look like. For communalist anarchists, society was best conceived as a series of voluntary associations that, while recognizing individual autonomy, could still provide for the overall coordination essential to freedom and justice. Social order was to be achieved through the voluntary cooperation of locally based, decentralized units rather than through formal political structures. They pointed to railways, international postal services, and other forms of communication as models of networks, set up by voluntary agreement, that functioned efficiently to provide services to people without the intervention of some higher authority.[21]

This central focus on economic structures, however, particularly in a society characterized by a sharp sexual division of labor, raised serious questions for women. How would women be involved? Would a new society challenge and overcome the sexual division of labor? Or would it leave that division in place and strive to achieve a kind of "separate but equal" status for women? An emphasis on economic structures as the root of social organization effectively belied the anarchist insistence

anarcho-syndicalist movement could only be enriched by incorporating it.

Mujeres Libres demanded of its members that they see themselves as fully capable social beings and act accordingly. Its programs of education, consciousness-raising, and apprenticeship provided opportunities for women to educate themselves and to develop skills in organizing, public speaking, and building self-esteem—skills they would need to act effectively in mixed-sex organizations. Female solidarity as a context for changing consciousness was essential to the capacitación for which they aimed. The separation Mujeres Libres insisted on was strategic and temporary—necessary only until sufficient numbers of women had developed the requisite skills and self-confidence that they could then rely on their numbers and the force of their arguments and personalities to influence the mainstream organizations from within. Until then, Mujeres Libres would stand as a kind of direct-action reminder of the significance of gender to the movement.

From "Difference" to "Diversity"

This review of Mujeres Libres' analysis and experience returns us to an earlier question: What difference should differences make? Neither Mujeres Libres nor contemporary feminist theorists have articulated a methodology for distinguishing between those differences which are temporary, socially constructed manifestations of women's social and political subordination and those particularities which, although they might now be rooted in relations of domination, are worth valuing and retaining in a future society, either as special characteristics of women or as characteristics of both men and women. The early feminist tendency to deny the significance of differences has, in fact, been replaced more recently by a countertendency to emphasize them, although feminists have never agreed on what those differences might be.

A number of significant common themes emerge from contemporary feminist efforts to deal with differences. Feminists inspired by the work of Michel Foucault and literary deconstructionists have focused on patterns of cultural dominance and subordination, as well as the resistance expressed in "submerged discourses." They suggest that we need to attend not only to differences between women and men, but also to different orientations to life and politics that are captured under the rubric of gender and then ascribed differentially to women and men.[30] Others focus on the particular life and social circumstances of women (or members of the working class) that generate different orientations to politics and social life.[31] Still others have adopted methodologies focusing on the development (or blocks to development) of subnational collective or communal identities, which may generate cultural and political perspectives different from the dominant norm.[32]

> the new justice. There cannot be a just society unless masculine and feminine are present in equal proportions.[27]

Here, the writer seemed to be discussing the incorporation of a special perspective that women bring to political/social life. Another article in the same issue, which addressed problems of food distribution in the republican zone, made the case even more explicitly:

> The bars and restaurants of the rich and propertied must be controlled by workingmen [*obreros*] or, better, by workingwomen [*obreras*] because it is women and mothers who know what it is not to have milk for a weak or sick child, meat for a husband tired out from hard work in war industries. . . . Control of food must be in the hands of community women.[28]

Such arguments can easily slide into, or reinforce, assumptions about some "eternal female" characteristics. *Mujeres Libres* was not completely immune to such constructions, despite the anarchist insistence on the social construction of personality and of sexuality. Many articles in the journal seemed to presume the existence of some timeless notion of "femininity," omitting any reference to its social construction. Others focused on the particular hardships women faced as mothers, and took it for granted that women would be the ones most affected by what happened to their children.

As an organization, Mujeres Libres did not articulate a definitive position about the differences between men and women, what their sources were, or which of them ought to be retained and revalued in the revolutionary society. At times, Mujeres Libres seemed to agree with Emma Goldman and Federica Montseny, who had ridiculed feminist claims that women were morally superior to men. Given the opportunity to exercise power over others, Goldman and Montseny had insisted, women would be just as likely as men to abuse it. Their writings, and those of Lucía Sánchez Saornil and Amparo Poch, implied that any existing differences in attitude or perspective between men and women were rooted in societal oppression and would disappear in a more egalitarian society.

More commonly, however, Mujeres Libres seemed to assume that women were somehow different from men, that those differences had not found full articulation in the existing oppressive society, and that a fully egalitarian anarchist society would incorporate the female along with the male. Although Mujeres Libres did not develop an analysis of these differences comparable to that which has since been articulated by contemporary feminist "difference theorists,"[29] the group attempted both to revalue those differences and to develop a strategy for incorporating them into a newly organized society. Whatever the source of women's higher levels of concern for children and for morality in the social-political arena, they argued, that perspective was valuable. The

that domination and subordination had many facets and that economic issues were not the only ones that needed to be addressed. In fact, as we will see in chapter 2, debates about the core institutions and structures of the new society were to be quite divisive during the pre–Civil War period, although they rarely focused on the implications of these decisions for women's position or participation.

Most of the debate instead focused on what sorts of organizations would form the basis of the new society. Those who were to become known as anarcho-syndicalists (and who, by 1910, represented the majority position within the CNT) envisioned a society with unions at its base.[22] Unions would be coordinated both locally and industrially through federations to which each union (or group of unions) would send a delegate. This vision, however, provided little opportunity to nonworkers (including children, the unemployed, old people, the disabled, and nonworking mothers) to participate in social decision making.

Others, identified as "anarchists" rather than as anarcho-syndicalists, insisted that unions represented too narrow a base for coordinating a libertarian communist society. Soledad Gustavo, Federico Urales, and Federica Montseny, for example, argued that unions are products of capitalism and that it does not make sense to assume that they would be the basis for organization and coordination in a transformed economy: "There are workers because there are bosses. Workerism will disappear with capitalism, and syndicalism with wages."[23] Both Gustavo and Federica Montseny pointed to another tradition with a long history in Spain, the *municipio libre* (free commune): "Especially in agricultural villages, where the syndicalist solution is not appropriate even in a transitional sense, I reserve the right to pursue the revolution from the moment that we proclaim free communes throughout Spain, on the basis of the socialization of the land and of all the means of production, placed in the hands of producers."[24] Interestingly, these two women who argued for a more community-focused organizational base were also two of the more outspoken supporters of women's emancipation—although, to my knowledge, neither explicitly connected her concern for women's emancipation with this organizational focus on community as opposed to workplace. As we will see in chapter 2, community-based organizing strategies were often more successful than workplace-based ones in addressing issues of concern to women and in galvanizing women's participation.

Eventually, most theorists and CNT activists attempted to combine the municipio libre with the union, although the terms of the combination still tended to favor the syndical solution. Isaac Puente, for example, argued that the municipio libre in cities should actually be the local federation of unions. In rural areas, the town would hold everything within its boundaries as common property; the communal decision-

making body would be composed of "everyone who works." The only ones exempted from this requirement would be the young, the sick, and the aged.[25] This resolution, of course, based social and political rights on *economic* productivity, even in the "free commune."

As we will see in the next chapter, to the extent that there was any resolution of questions of organizational structure and vision, it was achieved through the practice of the anarcho-syndicalist movement, rather than through theoretical debates in the press. It is important to note here that the Spanish movement differed from most other European working-class movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the place it accorded to activities and organizations that were not strictly union-based. The differences between the Spanish and other movements took on particular significance in the context of discussions about "woman's place."[26]

Significantly, neither Montseny's nor Puente's discussion of the free commune mentioned women—or, for that matter, unemployed men. As for the latter, we might well be meant to assume that, in a properly ordered society, there would be no unemployment—except of those who refuse to work—and that refusal to participate in the common business would justify deprivation of political rights. Nevertheless, the position of women was much less clear, since these writers did not state whether both men and women would work (they make no mention of arrangements for child-care or child-rearing); whether they would count women's domestic work as work (but, then, would there be a "union" to certify that women are working properly in their homes?); or whether they simply did not expect to recognize women with small children as full citizens. While Puente seemed to assume that all women would be workers, Mella addressed women as wives and daughters, rather than as workers: "Workers: your obligation is to throw yourselves into the struggle. Your wives will go with you, as they are no less slaves of the brutality of the bourgeoisie."[27] Marañón argued that motherhood was incompatible with work (since motherhood was, or at least should be, a full-time occupation if done properly). Nevertheless, he argued that work was important for nonmothers, whom he seemed to treat as a special, even possibly abnormal, class of women.[28]

Sexuality and the Subordination of Women

In fact, the lack of agreement on these issues is evidence of a divergence among anarchist writers not only about the place of women within working-class organizations, but also about the nature of women's subordination and of what would be necessary to overcome it. Mary Nash has suggested that two differing streams of thought about the nature of male-female relationships developed among Spanish anarchists during

although most of the leadership of Mujeres Libres continued to be active in other organizations of the libertarian movement, their influence was relatively limited. As long as Mujeres Libres was denied *organizational* access to ongoing discussions and policy debates (a limitation it attempted to overcome through its claim for autonomous incorporation into the movement in October 1938), the libertarian movement never fully incorporated women or issues of concern to women into its agenda. In fact, the FIJL's decision to create a Women's Bureau illustrates the widespread perception that women were not adequately engaged in the movement as a whole. As it was, independent women's voices were marginalized. Autonomy allowed Mujeres Libres to continue its work *with women* virtually unconstrained except financially, but it did not necessarily help the organization to make its case effectively with men.

Mujeres Libres' claim to organizational autonomy was based both on its understanding of the gender dynamics of intraorganizational relations and on its views of women's "difference" from men. In its argument that women were triply oppressed by ignorance, by capitalism, and as women, we can find an attempt to articulate a perspective on the workings of institutional oppression. Mujeres Libres drew from its analysis the lesson that these forms of institutional oppression were problems not just for women, but for all workers. Consequently, overcoming the subordination of women—whether in the home, at the workplace, or in the larger culture—was essential to the well-being of *all* workers, men as well as women. Therefore, Mujeres Libres argued, the appropriate response of working-class organizations (e.g., the CNT and FAI) to differences between men and women based in institutional oppression was to struggle to eliminate them.

Nevertheless, many of Mujeres Libres' writings and programs seemed to assume that at least *some* of the differences between men and women were not based solely in oppression. These differences also represented values that ought to be retained in the new society. A number of articles in *Mujeres Libres*, for example, seem almost to foreshadow Carol Gilligan's call for listening to that "different voice" often associated with women. We read in an editorial celebrating the founding of the National Federation of Mujeres Libres in August 1937:

> In identifying its goals with the CNT and the FAI, [Mujeres Libres] has gathered the most genuinely Spanish and the most authentically revolutionary and enriched it with the best of its own specifically feminine characteristics. Mujeres Libres desires that the new social structure not be afflicted by that same unilateral quality that has been the undoing of the world to date. Mujeres Libres desires that in the new Society, the two angles of vision—masculine and feminine— will converge—that they will provide the equilibrium necessary on which to pour the foundations of

On the other hand, even when women did join unions and other movement organizations (such as the FIJL, ateneos, and the FAI), many were drawn in by the more nontraditional structures, especially ateneos and youth groups. But once they were in the mainstream organizations such as unions, the agendas of those organizations rarely changed to accommodate them. If Teresina Torrelles Graells was able to report that her textile workers' union advocated equal pay for equal work and maternity leave for women workers as early as 1931, her case was exceptional—an exception she attributed to the strength of the women's group in the union. Very few unions adopted the call for equal pay or concerned themselves with maternity leave or child care—concerns which were, of necessity, primary to many women workers.

Although the movement's commitment to a politics of direct action provided for the *possibility* that its practices would address the specificity of women's lives, movement organizations rarely took that step. Instead, their agendas relegated issues of concern to women to a secondary (or tertiary) status, treating them as special interests, rather than as issues that affected all workers. In such a context, it is hardly surprising that women did not join these movements in equal proportion to men or that they were only minimally active when they did join. The pattern in Spain up until the time of the Civil War was barely different from that found in most working-class organizations in western Europe or the United States.

Mujeres Libres and the Politics of Women's Difference

Mujeres Libres attempted to address this marginalization of women and of women's concerns through its insistence on a separate and autonomous status. Independence allowed the women of Mujeres Libres to define their own agenda for organizing and capacitación and to retain their focus despite the demands of the war situation. Having created an independent base for themselves, they could reject the bipolar analysis that destroyed the visions of so many socialist women, who were forced to choose between class and gender. Instead, they were able to forge an analysis and a program that spoke to the needs and aspirations of working-class women in their particularity. That is not to say that the realities of war and of interorganizational competition with AMA and other Communist-affiliated organizations did not affect Mujeres Libres' programs. We have already seen that they did. But organizational autonomy, so precious to Mujeres Libres' members and so threatening to the mainstream organizations, partially shielded Mujeres Libres from the control that male-dominated movement organizations attempted to exercise over it.

Still, Mujeres Libres paid a price for its autonomy. It never had the funds or the organizational support that its leaders desired. Further,

the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[29] One, drawing on the writings of Proudhon (and exemplified in Spain by Ricardo Mella), treated women essentially as reproducers who make their contribution to society in and through their role in the home. According to this view, what was necessary for women's emancipation was the revaluation of women's work in the home; her work outside the home must always be secondary to that of men. The second stream (similar to a Marxist perspective), which found theoretical roots in the writings of Bakunin (and was exemplified, at least in its productivist aspects, in the works of Isaac Puente), insisted that women were the equals of men and that the key to women's emancipation was their full incorporation into the paid labor force on equal terms with men. In this view, if women were to overcome their subordination, they would have to join the labor forces as workers and struggle in unions to improve the position of all workers.[30] The official position of the CNT followed the latter view, though it should be noted that the acceptance of a *theoretical* commitment to women's equality in the workplace was no guarantee that the majority of CNT members would act in accordance with that commitment. As we will see in chapter 2, the practice of the movement rarely lived up to its stated beliefs in this regard.

Nevertheless, there were also those within the libertarian movement who insisted that organizing women into unions—even if it were possible to do so—would not, in itself, be sufficient. In their view, the sources of women's subordination were broader and deeper than economic exploitation at the workplace. They argued that women's subordination was as much a cultural phenomenon as an economic one and reflected a devaluation of women and their activities mediated through institutions such as family and church. Thus, in an article revealing her understanding of the process of revolutionary change as it affected male-female relations, "Javierre" commented on reports from *Pravda* on the numbers of "new Soviet men" who had abandoned pregnant women: "Politics, alone, cannot make men morally ready for a common life. . . . [These men] no more learned to be a man by Marxist baptism than they did by Christian baptism."[31] Furthermore, at least some Spanish anarchist writers located woman's subordination in her reproductive role and in the double standard of sexual morality. These, too, would have to change—through the adoption of a new sexual morality and the widespread use of birth control—if women were to be fully equal partners in a revolutionary society.

Even this broader understanding was not without ambiguity. Kyralina (Lola Iturbe, the journalist who was to become an active supporter of Mujeres Libres) insisted on the need for an analysis and practice that took into account broader cultural phenomena. Yet her article "Anarchist Communism Will Liberate Women" reveals a belief, common to anarchist cultural critics early in the twentieth century,

that the abolition of private property will lead to free love and the emancipation of women: "Only the reign of libertarian communism can provide a humane solution to the problem of women's emancipation. With the destruction of private property, this hypocritical morality will fall by the wayside, and we will be free. . . . We will experience love with the complete freedom of our appetites, respecting all the various forms of amorous and sexual life."[32]

For many anarchist writers and activists, a reorganization of sexual and family life and a reconstitution of women's roles were essential components of the revolutionary vision. In this attention to the "private" relations of family and sexuality, Spanish anarchists shared much both with nineteenth-century utopian socialists and with contemporary feminists.[33] But there was more than one way to apply an anti-authoritarian analysis to sexual and familial relations. What was to be the structure and nature of families and family relations in a new anarchist society? And how was woman's social participation to relate to her familial or reproductive roles? Was the unquestioned authority of the husband/father in the family to be preserved, as Proudhon and his followers advocated, or was that authority, too, to be abolished and replaced with voluntary egalitarian relationships? Some Spanish anarchists apparently agreed with Proudhon; others advocated asceticism, opposed the use of alcohol and tobacco, and advocated monogamy or sexual chastity. The majority of writers who addressed this topic in the early years of the twentieth century, however, advocated gender equality and free love. This last group insisted that true freedom meant the full expression and development of all human capacities, including the sexual. To them, prevailing social ideals of chastity, monogamy, and fidelity reflected a legacy of Christian repression and would be replaced in an ideal anarchist society by free love and egalitarian family structures.

This latter position gained strength and legitimacy during the 1920s and 1930s, particularly as the works of Sigmund Freud, Havelock Ellis, and other sexologists began to be known. By the 1930s, Spanish anarchists—writing in such journals of cultural criticism as *La Revista Blanca* and *Estudios*[34]—were combining Freudian psychology, neo-malthusian rhetoric, and doctrines of free love to develop a broad picture of the importance of sexuality and sexual emancipation to human development and, ultimately, to social revolution.

A plethora of contributors to *Estudios* during the 1930s argued for a new sexual ethics, one based on the positive value of sexuality and opposition to the double standard of sexual morality for men and women. These writers ridiculed anarchists who advocated chastity and the repressing of sexual urges. They insisted, to the contrary, that enforced abstinence led not only to the classic double standard (resulting in prostitution and the oppression of women) but also to stunted

"disorderly" and their characters and actions devalued. This labeling seems to have been the consequence of a number of factors. First, it suggests a denial of the legitimacy of organizations structured differently from the norm: the truly political is the formally structured; temporary organization is not deserving of that title. Second, it may also reflect an attempt to undermine and devalue those activities by women that challenge male dominance.[26]

One way this latter process is effected is through the use of sexuality to label and undercut the activities of women protesters. On the one hand, those women who claim the same prerogatives to sexual freedom that men enjoy are often made the butt of ridicule designed to negate the seriousness of their activism. But even those who do not make sexual freedom a focus of their protest often find themselves defined by their sexuality. Thus, both Nancy Hewitt and Jacquelyn Hall have noted that radical women labor union activists and organizers in the southern United States met frequently with sexual innuendos and slurs, not only from representatives of management, but even from male unionists who apparently resented their independence and autonomy. Such labeling recalls the ways in which members of Mujeres Libres were taunted with the epithet "Mujeres Liebres."

In such cases, gender again becomes a constitutive element of what is defined as political. Women, as women, cannot be political beings. But this splitting of sexuality from activism or, more properly, from personhood is not required of men. In fact, to the contrary, male political activists tend to be described, and to describe themselves, in language that emphasizes their maleness as a component of their "politicalness." Of course, not all men are allowed the free expression of their sexuality, either. A focus on sexuality has been used in the United States to control black men as well as all women.

These patterns of gender differentiation may help to explain some of what has happened to women in traditional mixed-sex organizations. The Spanish case illustrates this point. The forms of activism most common to women—through which many of them came to consciousness and became active in more traditional unions or protest organizations—were devalued by the male members of those organizations. For example, although "quality of life" strikes mobilized many thousands of women in the first two decades of this century and many anarchist men recognized that women's protests had accomplished much that traditional union activity had not been able to achieve, the CNT did not change its sense of the *form* that organization ought to take or of how to mobilize women. The vast majority of the women who participated in those strikes were never fully incorporated into the anarchist movement because the movement was unable to acknowledge *difference*, either in forms of participation or in its definitions of activism.

union movements, for example, especially when the work force is a mixed (male-female) one. Women's activism tends to focus, more than does men's, on quality of life issues, which may be centered in communities rather than in workplaces or which cross the boundaries between home, workplace, and community. Most dramatically, women's activism often takes forms that, by conventional standards, appear as "spontaneous," "unplanned," or "disorganized."[23]

In effect, the social construction of gender differences creates different contexts for women's organization and protest activities. As Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward noted, people protest those institutions in those contexts and with those means to which they have access.[24] To the extent that the sexual division of labor and other institutional forms of oppression structure women's lives differently from men's, the contexts in which they experience and resist oppression must necessarily be different. Even unionized women may not have the full support of unions for the specificity of their situations as women. The expectation that they bear prime responsibility for household maintenance and for child care, for example, may render it impossible for them to participate fully in union meetings.

It should not be at all surprising, then, to find that the contexts and forms of women's resistance often differ quite markedly from those of most men. They often depend less on work-related or formally structured organizations and more on local networks of friends, family, associates, or co-workers. Much more so than men's, women's protests tend to be of the direct action sort, functioning as much to mobilize and raise the consciousness of participants as to influence those in power. The experience of participating in protest actions in those arenas of life formerly marked out as "private" or "personal" can have a major radicalizing effect. While according to Marxist theory, men are most likely to come to a consciousness of class in workplace-based organizations such as unions, the sources of changing consciousness for women may be quite different. As Myrna Brietbart and I have argued, "neighborhoods, like workplaces, are neither all-encompassing footholds of domination nor the loci of revolution . . . but they may contain the possibility for emancipatory struggle."[25]

Formally structured organizations, particularly those constructed along hierarchical lines such as union organizations and political parties, are defined as political. More loosely structured and nonhierarchically organized "spontaneous" forms of protest such as food riots, rent strikes, peace demonstrations, and public shaming—the predominant forms that much female activism has taken—are often dismissed as nonpolitical. Paradoxically, as Jacquelyn Dowd Hall and Nancy Hewitt have reported of women workers' resistance activities in the early part of this century in North Carolina and in Florida, the more effective the women's protests became, the more they were labeled

lives and, at worst, criminal behavior. They argued, following Freud, that sexuality was a basic life force and an important component of both psychic and social health. Rather than repress sexual feelings or divert them into prostitution, the writers concluded, people should learn more about sexuality—and practice birth control.[35]

Dr. Felix Marti-Ibáñez, the "dean" of anarchist writers on psychosexual health matters, outlined a new perspective on the place of sexuality in human life.[36] First, he insisted on the importance of genital sexuality—for both men and women—as a component of human growth and development and of successful marriages. His articles rejected the church's view that marriage existed only for the perpetuation of the species, and he insisted, instead, that marriage must be understood as a way of life, voluntarily chosen by two people. Whether in a marital or a nonmarital context, sex involved not just procreation, but recreation. Successful sexual relationships (whether marital or not) required a valuing and respecting of sexuality for both partners and a recognition that sexual union and satisfaction could be an end in itself, not just a means to produce children. Consequently, successful marriage would involve knowledge and use of birth control. His articles were intended both to articulate this new view of the place of sexuality in human life and to make information about birth control available to the proletariat.[37]

Marti-Ibáñez further argued that a new understanding of sexuality was necessary. For too long, he said, sexuality had been confused with genitality. He criticized the practice of enforced chastity, arguing that it denied important human needs. At the same time, he insisted that sexual energy could be channeled in a number of different directions and need not necessarily be expressed through genital contact: "Let us recognize that *the genital*—erotic impulses, the sexual act—is but one small part of *the sexual*, and that apart from this aspect, sexuality has many others (work, ideals, social or artistic creation, etc.). . . . Sexuality can express itself either erotically or through work in its various forms.[38] Nevertheless, he asserted, if efforts to redirect sexual energy were not successful, neither young women nor young men should hesitate to have sexual experiences—as long as they did not assume that sex must be linked with love or that it required a woman to give up her sense of self or her sense of self-respect![39]

Despite their calls for new and freer attitudes toward sexuality, however, virtually all these writers identified "normal sexuality" with heterosexuality. This identification was usually implicit rather than explicit—their discussions of sexuality assumed and asserted the "normal" or "natural" attraction between people of the opposite sex. In his series on "Eugenics and Sexual Morality," Marti-Ibáñez did address himself explicitly to the question of homosexuality. In an article focused primarily on the history of attitudes toward homosexuality, he at-

tempted to distinguish between "sexual inversion" ("congenital homosexuality") and "sexual perversion" (that practiced "voluntarily, out of snobbery or curiosity, or for utilitarian ends"). Despite his efforts to delineate the two types, the article acknowledged that it is often difficult to determine which cause is primary. Finally, he asserted that there was nothing immoral about homosexuality and, therefore, that homosexual behavior should not be punished (any more than we would find it appropriate to punish a kleptomaniac who cannot help stealing!). At the same time, however, he made clear his belief that homosexuality was deviant and that homosexuals were "victims" of "sexual inversion."[40]

Many writers recognized the potentially liberating impact of new attitudes toward sexuality for women. Abandonment of traditional attitudes toward chastity (which had always bound women much more strongly than men—apparently even in anarchist circles) would free women to explore and express their own sexuality. More specifically, many writers—both men and women—had viewed women's reproductive activity as the key to their subordination. As long as married women were subject to their husband's sexual desires (an aspect of marital relations that was apparently only rarely questioned at that time) and as long as there was no way to regulate fertility, women would be subject to the emotional, physical, and psychic drain of repeated childbirths and the managing of a large household. The disabilities fell most dramatically on women of the working class. The control of fertility, then, could be particularly liberating for women. Maria Lacerda de Moura, a frequent contributor to *Estudios* on issues of women and sexuality, criticized anarchist men who opposed the dissemination of birth control information among the working classes: "For them, a woman is just a fertile and inexhaustible womb, destined to produce bourgeois soldiers or, more accurately, red soldiers for the social revolution." On the contrary, she insisted, birth control could become a fundamental arm of the struggle for the liberation of women.[41]

As had feminists and birth control advocates in the United States and in a variety of European contexts, Lacerda, Marañón, and other Spanish anarchists argued that both working-class families and individual working-class women suffered from the production of more children than a family could properly maintain and that the emancipation of women must also involve the choice of whether, when, and how often to become a mother. But they also insisted on the benefits of birth control for individual women: it could relieve women, both married and unmarried, of the fear of pregnancy and thus allow them to enjoy sexual relations more fully.[42]

Some analysts took these arguments further, linking malthusianism, birth control, and class analysis to articulate an anarchist neomalthusianism. Dr. Juan Lazarte argued that the meaning and consequences of

recognize women *with* their gender differences. But they were largely unsuccessful.[20] Forced to choose between loyalties, most of these women, whose political identities were rooted in socialist organizations and who certainly had little sympathy for bourgeois feminists, felt they had no option but to "choose socialism," effectively abandoning their efforts to appeal to women workers in their particularity. Constructions of women's difference and gendered understandings of politics and protest combined to assure that both parties and union movements, even those committed to radical social transformation, accepted gendered definitions of what was an appropriate issue and of how people ought to be mobilized around it. Dominant understandings of "women's difference" either denied the significance of any differences between men and women—and therefore of the need to make a special appeal to working women—or else defined women so completely in terms of their difference from men that there seemed to be no place for them within party or union organizations. The pattern of "forced choice," in fact, continues to our own day. Yasmine Ergas has noted in her discussion of women in the Italian Left in the post–World War II decades, for example, that women confronted a "bipolar process of validation [between the mutually exclusive categories of 'woman as mother' or 'woman as worker'], based on the alternative between specificity and marginality on one side, and integration and assimilation on the other."[21]

While the approaches may have differed, the consequences were similar. Women were thoroughly underrepresented in organized socialist movements in western Europe in the early years of this century, and those women who were present fought a losing battle for attention to their needs as women. Although socialist parties and organizations recognized that prevailing understandings of politics were biased against the working class, they were unable to recognize the social construction of their own views about women. Women's "otherness" was as encoded into the programs of socialist oppositional groups as it was into the policies of the capitalist regimes they opposed.

As I noted earlier, a parallel set of blinders affected many feminist movements. With the exception of working-class suffragists in England, for example, virtually all feminist organizing effectively ignored the class dimension to their critique of "male hierarchy."[22] It was, of course, for this reason that Mujeres Libres refused to identify itself as "feminist."

If women are marginalized in mainstream politics, there is also a further sense in which gender differences are inscribed in prevailing definitions of "the political." Both revolutionary activists and scholars of social movements often fail to recognize women's activism when it does not follow conventional lines. And women's activism often does not. Women are much less likely than men to take on leadership roles in

in Spain), women seemed largely to disappear from the consciousness of both party and union.[16] In Spain, for example, during the early years of this century, only the Catholic church and related organizations took the plight of women workers seriously enough to mount substantial organizing drives.

Socialism and feminism arose in western Europe more or less simultaneously, sparked by related economic and cultural phenomena—the promises of freedom and universal citizenship offered by the French Revolution and the promises of abundance and economic growth offered by the Industrial Revolution. Both socialism and feminism highlighted the contradictions of these revolutions and of the democratic political regimes that struggled into being during the course of the nineteenth century. Socialists challenged the protection of private property built into democratic constitutions and the mockery it made of any process of universal suffrage. Feminists, too, focused on the contradiction between theory and practice: "The Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen did not exclude women from social and political spheres; it did what was far worse: it established their absence."[17] In such a context, feminists and socialists might have turned to one another as allies, both struggling against limited notions of citizenship that, in not recognizing differences (whether of class or of sex), masked and perpetuated relations of domination and subordination.

In fact, European socialists and feminists did make common cause on many occasions. But as Barbara Taylor noted in *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, the "sex equality radicalism" that characterized British utopian socialism in the early nineteenth century was lost with the development of Marxist, scientific socialism, which forefronted class as the central category of analysis. "Organized feminism was increasingly viewed not as an essential component of the socialist struggle, but as a disunifying diversionary force with no inherent connection to the socialist tradition."[18] Socialism lost its feminist component; mainstream feminism lost its concern with class and "collectivity," providing the backdrop to the equal rights, liberal individualist feminism that is the dominant contemporary variety, at least in the United States.[19] The British experience was far from unique. In France, Italy, the United States, and even in the USSR, as well as in Spain, left-wing opposition groups were no less affected than were mainstream parties by the bifurcation of sex- and class-based critiques and by polarized understandings of women's differences from men. Women in European socialist movements were repeatedly forced to choose between socialism (posed as loyalty to the working class) and feminism (cross-class loyalty to women).

Socialist women throughout Europe challenged this polarization and attempted to create a socialist feminism that recognized women's specificity *within* the working class. They called on socialist movements to

pregnancy and birth varied with social class. Frequent pregnancies could be disastrous to a woman's health and also to the health and stability of a family already strapped for resources. And the more children a family had, the higher the rates of infant mortality. In short, as Malthus had argued, the poor were particularly hurt by unlimited reproduction. But with the availability of birth control, working people could replace "restraint" (of which Malthus did not believe the poor were capable) with birth control, which a conscious working class could use as a component of a strategy toward its liberation. With smaller families, workers' wages could sustain higher levels of health and strength. Limiting births could also lead to a smaller wage force, reduced unemployment, more power for workers, and even an end to wars.[43]

Finally, in addition to making possible the separation of procreation and pleasure in the expression of sexuality, these new attitudes toward sexuality had important implications for anarchist understandings of love and marriage. Many anarchists had claimed that permanent monogamous marriage constituted a form of despotism, which required a virtual renunciation of self on the part of women, and that free love (by which they meant the right of both men and women freely to choose a sexual relationship without benefit of clergy or state and freely to end it when it was no longer mutually satisfying) was the only appropriate manifestation of the natural tendencies of both men and women. Some of these writers assumed that, even in an ideal society, existing differences between men and women with respect to sexuality would continue to exist or that new ones would emerge; others insisted that existing differences were largely the product of social conditioning. But all assumed that, whatever the source of those differences, both men and women would be able to experience their sexuality more fully and more satisfyingly in a society that accorded full equality to women.[44]

Critiques of both chastity and monogamous marriage were common during the 1920s and 1930s, and numerous articles appeared advocating either free love or "plural love" in its place. Beyond arguing for free love, many anarchist writers insisted that monogamy itself was a product of the desire for possessiveness, rooted in private property and in the subordination of women, and that it would disappear in a future anarchist society.[45] Amparo Poch y Gascón, who was to become one of the founders of Mujeres Libres, wrote in *Estudios* in 1934 that traditional notions of monogamy made a woman, "whether she was still in love or not, a permanent possession of the man to whom the church or the judge gave her." But, she argued, properly understood, monogamy "does not mean 'forever,' but as long as . . . the will and feelings of the lovers lasts." Furthermore, if women as well as men held such attitudes, all would be freer and more satisfied.[46]

Maria Lacerda de Moura departed even further from accepted notions

of monogamous love and marriage. "Love," she insisted, "has always been in open struggle with monogamy." In a truly egalitarian society, in which men and women were respected equally, monogamy would be replaced by plural love, the only form of sexual expression that would allow all people (in particular, women, who had been denied any sexual autonomy) the full growth, expression, and meeting of their sexual needs. By allowing both women and men to have more than one lover at a time, she insisted, plural love would eliminate most problems of jealousy, allow women to be truly free to choose their mate (or mates), and end prostitution and the sexual exploitation of women (since unmarried, sexually active women would no longer be stigmatized and vulnerable).[47]

Nevertheless, many writers were not as sanguine as she was. At the very least, they recognized that doctrines of either free love or plural love would be much more complicated to apply in practice than in theory. Many writers, especially women, were quick to point out that few anarchists actually practiced what they preached when it came to equality for women. Soledad Gustavo noted, for example, that "a man may like the idea of the emancipation of women, but he is not so fond of her actually practicing it. . . . In the end, he may desire the other's woman, but he will lock up his own."[48]

In response to criticisms raised of Clara, the sexually emancipated female heroine of her novel *La Victoria*, Federica Montseny argued that the notion of a weak, adoring woman protected by a strong man, though appealing to some male anarchists, was hardly a libertarian vision. Very few women may have been ready to live according to, or even to conceive of, a free and unlimited mutual freedom. But "there [were] even fewer men capable of accepting her."[49]

In Montseny's view, the fact that few Spanish women were morally ready for their emancipation, enslaved as they were by traditional attitudes and beliefs, presented a more serious problem than did male resistance to sexual and economic equality. Emma Goldman had argued that women needed internal emancipation to know their own value, respect themselves, and refuse to become psychic or economic slaves to their male lovers. But, Montseny lamented, Goldman gave no real guidance about how to achieve that liberation.[50]

In the case of familial and sexual relations, as in the economic realm, the ideal was equality with difference. Both women and men should be free to develop and express their sexuality, inside or outside what we might now term a "committed sexual relationship." Both should be free to enter—and to leave—sexual relationships without bringing down on themselves social condemnation or ostracism. Families, too, should be egalitarian institutions—the unquestioned authority of the father ought to be replaced by reciprocity and mutual respect.

they make? How ought they be incorporated organizationally? What could it mean for us to create a society that recognizes diverse groups of people with diverse needs without treating the perspectives and characteristics of some as the norm for all?

Women's Difference, Different Politics?

Prevailing definitions and expectations of what constitute legitimate political issues and forms of political behavior have important implications for our understandings of politics, for what we recognize as political activism or protest, and for the creation of policies and programs. In the political realm, the claim that women are fundamentally different from men has been used both to justify women's relative marginality from political and social power and to blame women for it.[13] Unions and political parties have set their agendas according to male-defined criteria, ignored issues of primary concern to women (such as maternity leave, equal pay for equal work, child care), and devoted little attention to mobilizing women into their ranks. In addition, they have tended to ignore, ridicule, or deny the political significance of protest actions women did undertake, whether on their own or others' behalf. As a result, women have rarely seen themselves, or been seen by others, as "political animals" capable of engaging in joint action to address issues of common concern.[14]

The experience of women within the Spanish anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movements has illustrated some of the ways in which these understandings of difference constrained women's activism within the movement. A burgeoning literature on women in social protest movements, particularly in socialist organizations, makes clear that the frustrations Spanish anarchist women experienced were hardly unique.

In western Europe and the United States, political parties and workplace-based unions have been the dominant normative structures of social and political participation. But with a few notable exceptions, each of these types of organization has appealed overwhelmingly to men. Denied the right to vote through the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth on the grounds that it would "defeminize" them, women were largely ignored by political party organizations, except when these organizations were pressured on the question of suffrage.[15] Although women were joining the paid industrial work force in increasing numbers during the early years of the twentieth century, only rarely did unions actively mobilize women as members or make women's issues their priority demands in negotiations with management. Prevailing gender ideology constructed work as a male responsibility and treated any women who did engage in paid work as, somehow, anomalies. With the exception of unions inspired by traditions of direct action (for example, the Wobblies in the United States, in addition to the CNT

Thus, finally, another aspect of anarchist and feminist attention to community as a context for empowerment is a focus on the interrelationship of community and individuality. As Martin Buber once noted, a person needs "to feel his *[sic]* own house as a room in some greater, all-embracing structure in which he is at home, to feel that the other inhabitants of it with whom he lives and works are all acknowledging and confirming his individual existence."[12] For Buber, the essence of true community was the strengthening of self that comes from active membership in a community of peers. Spanish anarchists insisted that individuality and community were mutually reinforcing. Mujeres Libres built on that insight. The experience of both personal and collective empowerment, rooted in networks of support and shared commitment, was a crucial aspect of revolutionary transformation. The empowerment they experienced required, in turn, a community that respected and valued differences *among* its members.

Difference, Diversity, and Community

Although Mujeres Libres understood empowerment as a communal process, it also recognized that not all communities empower. For example, societies structured hierarchically along lines of class, race, and gender, empower some while disempowering others. A second legacy of Mujeres Libres, then, is its effort, through a focus on gender, to create a community that fully incorporates *all* its members—in this case, respecting both women's similarities to, and differences from men.

Mujeres Libres demanded that the call for recognition and respect for diversity include women as well as men. It insisted that the anarchist movement and the new society it was attempting to create *treat women equally with men while, at the same time, respecting women's differences from men*. The women of Mujeres Libres did not always agree about what those differences or their sources were. But all insisted that women had to be accepted in their particularity: to be addressed in ways that acknowledged their different life situation—without necessarily assuming its permanence—and that women must be allowed, in fact encouraged, to contribute their unique perspective to the movement and the new society.

Their experiences parallel those of contemporary feminists in important ways, and offer suggestions for dealing with some of the more pressing questions on the contemporary feminist agenda: (1) How do we acknowledge differences among people (whether differences between men and women or differences of class, ethnicity, and culture among women) without precluding the possibilty of change? (2) Once those differences are acknowledged and named, what "difference" should

These, then, are the major components of the anarchist social vision—a society in which all people are respected equally and mutually, in the sexual as well as the economic and political realms, a society organized around people's contributions to the ongoing life of the community, in which there are no relations of domination and subordination and in which decisions must be made by all and acceptable to all. But how is that society to be achieved? How are the "new anarchist man and woman" to be created?

Revolutionary Transformation: Consistency of Means and Ends

Recognizing the social construction of relations of domination and subordination is, of course, not the same as changing them. The complexities of the anarchist perspective on revolutionary change become clear when we examine the attempts of Spanish anarchists to deal with overcoming subordination in general and the subordination of women in particular. How would it come about that self-interested, disempowered people—and anarchists were quick to admit that people living in capitalist societies were hardly immune to the self-interest that those social and economic arrangements reinforce—would come both to recognize their own capacities and to direct their attentions to the needs of others? How were people to achieve the inner emancipation that would enable them to recognize their own worth and demand recognition from the larger society? How would they develop a sense of justice appropriate to living in an egalitarian society? And how would such a society generate continued commitment to its values? More specifically, if women's subordination is a product of social institutions, and if social institutions disempower those who would attempt to overthrow them, how are those institutions to be changed?

One of the defining characteristics of the communalist-anarchist tradition is the insistence that means must be consistent with ends. If the goal of revolutionary struggle is a nonhierarchical egalitarian society, then it must be created through the activities of a nonhierarchical movement. Otherwise, participants will never be empowered to act independently, and those who lead the movement will direct the postrevolutionary society. In the words of one participant in the civil war experience, "a la libertad sólo se llega por caminos libertarios" [one only achieves freedom through libertarian means].[51] As Kropotkin had written about the dilemmas of parliamentary socialists, "You thought you would conquer the State, but the State will end up conquering you."[52]

But where existing practices disempower people, how are they to become empowered? The anarchist commitment to an egalitarian, non-

hierarchical revolutionary process seems to require that people recognize their own abilities in order to participate. Successful anarchist revolution apparently depends on the prior achievement of what is perhaps the most complex aim of the revolutionary movement itself: popular empowerment.

The solution to this paradox is to be found in anarchist understandings of the revolutionary process. People are expected to prepare themselves for revolution (and for living in a communitarian society) by participating in activities and practices that are themselves egalitarian, empowering, and therefore transformative. There can be no hierarchy structured into the process of social change. The way to create a new society is to *create* new reality.

Direct action

We can best understand the Spanish anarchist perspective on empowerment and the process of consciousness-change by examining their commitment to decentralism and "direct action." Decentralism referred to an insistence that revolution must be, at its core, a local phenomenon, growing out of the concrete realities of people's day-to-day lives. A revolutionary movement develops from people's struggles to overcome their own subordination, and it must speak to the particularities of their situation. Thus, as we will see, one important new institution that Spanish anarchists created was the ateneo libertario (storefront cultural center), which served as a school, a recreational group, and gathering place for working-class young people in the years preceding the war. As Enriqueta Rovira explained, describing one such group,

> We were in a group called Sol y Vida [sun and life] with both boys and girls. . . . We did theater pieces, gymnastics, went on trips to the mountains, to the sea. . . . It was both a cultural and a recreational group. . . . There was always a little [educational] talk of some sort. And in that way, ideas got stirred up, they created a sense of being compañeros and compañeras. True, people went to union meetings and the like, but relations within our group were more intimate, the explanations more extensive. That's where we were formed, most deeply, ideologically.[53]

Direct action meant that the goal of any and all of these activities was to provide ways for people to get in touch with their own powers and capacities, to take back the power of naming themselves and their lives. It was to be distinguished from more conventional political activity even in a democratic system.[54] Instead of attempting to make change by forming interest groups to pressure politicians, anarchists insisted that we learn to think and act for ourselves by joining together in organizations in which our experience, our perception, and our activity can

of change. Collective confrontation with structures of authority and/or the creation of some new social-political reality in the interstices of existing power relations generates changed consciousness and energizes continued action (resistance)."[9] I would emphasize here the importance of *collective* confrontation. Radicalization seems to require—or at least be enhanced by—the existence of a community of others with whom one shares the experience and which then continues to validate the new sense of self (though, of course, not all experiences of commonality are radicalizing in a progressive sense).[10] It is that community which Mujeres Libres provided to its members, and it is that sense of community among contemporary feminists (and those of the "first wave" as well) which has been crucial to feminist consciousness-change.

The experience of consciousness-raising and of empowerment through shared experience is not the only parallel between contemporary feminism and Mujeres Libres. Another side of the recognition of the importance of community is the insistence that we can devise ways to overcome oppressive relations only by taking account of the familial, work, and other relationships in which all of us are embedded. Feminist theory and practice have begun to make clear that the "social glue" holding many societies together is not a formal structure of authority but, rather, patterns of human relationships rooted in common needs. Communities—and even political movements—succeed not because of hierarchical lines of command, but because groups of people build the day-to-day connections that sustain them.[11] The affinity groups of the FAI, the ateneos, the agrupaciones in which Mujeres Libres structured itself were more or less egalitarian collectives, in which everyone could feel part of the community. The interpersonal connections on which those structures were based (and which they fostered) in turn sustained the group and its members. The emphasis in feminist theory on the importance of mutually supportive relationships is strikingly similar to the Spanish anarchist insistence that the ideal society is one based on, and regulated through, relationships of mutuality and reciprocity, rather than of hierarchy and dominance.

Nevertheless, the women of Mujeres Libres were also aware of the ambiguous nature of communities. Specifically, communities that ignore or deny differences can perpetuate relations of hierarchy and domination despite an ostensible commitment to equality. Mujeres Libres' criticisms of the failure of anarchist organizations adequately to address women's uniqueness parallels the criticisms that working-class and ethnic minority women have leveled against U.S. feminist movements. Networks may be crucial to the creation and maintenance of communities. But if the communities are truly to be egalitarian and transformative, those networks must include the previously dominated, as well as the previously dominant, members of the minority and the majority.

empowered her because they were validated by the experiences of others.

Consciousness-raising groups, of course, are not the only contexts in which consciousness changes. As Marx insisted, consciousness changes in and through struggle. Traditionally, Marxists have interpreted that to mean that truly revolutionary consciousness—in other words, that based in class—is born out of conflict at the workplace, when workers come to recognize themselves as engaged in a common struggle against the bourgeoisie. Spanish anarchists criticized the economic monocausality of this analysis while retaining the emphasis on struggle and activity as the prime generators of radical consciousness. General strikes in both rural Andalusia and industrial Barcelona (discussed in chapter 2) demonstrated that consciousness of oppression can derive from a variety of experiences in different contexts and that community-based networks can be as important to consciousness-change as factory-based struggle. Ateneos and rationalist schools also provided contexts for people to test out new cultural visions, new understandings of themselves, and new relationships to the world.

Spanish anarchists recognized, and Mujeres Libres drew on the recognition, that radicalization is born of action. People develop new senses of themselves by breaking with traditional molds, taking on roles and moving in areas previously closed to them. When those who cross the boundaries of what is considered appropriate behavior do so in the context of a supportive group, they can become empowered—and come to question the appropriateness of those boundaries in the first place. The women who participated in the general strikes and "women's war" in Barcelona in the first decades of this century, for example, did not necessarily leave their neighborhoods in protest against high food prices *because* they were challenging conventional understandings of "women's place." However, movement out of their neighborhoods and into more public/governmental arenas opened new perspectives and provided the grounds for the development of a critical consciousness. The women who went to work in factories during the Spanish Civil War did not do so *because* they were challenging the sexual division of labor, but because they needed income to support their families while their husbands, brothers, or fathers were at war and because jobs had to be done. But the process of working in factories—and meeting with other women in similar circumstances—had radicalizing effects. Women who become involved in community-based struggles in their neighborhoods often follow a similar process. While they may join in protests out of their understandings of traditional women's role to protect their families, the process of engaging in action can itself be politicizing.[8]

The development of a "critical consciousness" is an active process, one that involves both "participation in social struggle and the design

guide and make the change.[55] Knowledge does not precede experience, it flows from it: "We begin by deciding to work, and through working, we learn. . . . We will learn how to live in libertarian communism by living in it."[56] People learn how to be free only by exercising freedom: "We are not going to find ourselves . . . with people ready-made for the future. . . . Without the continued exercise of their faculties, there will be no free people. . . . The external revolution and the internal revolution presuppose one another, and they must be simultaneous in order to be successful.[57]

Direct action activities that arose from day-to-day needs and experiences represented ways in which people could take control of their lives. As feminists have learned, whether through consciousness-raising groups or in community organizing, participation in such activities would have both internal and external effects, allowing people to develop a sense of competence and self-confidence while they acted to change their situation. Engagement of this sort empowered people and fortified them to act together again. Soledad described the effects of active participation in the movement on her life and on her friends: "It was an incredible life, the life of a young militant. A life dedicated to struggle, to knowledge, to remaking society. It was characterized by a kind of effervescence. . . . It was a very beautiful youth, of camaraderie. . . . I was always involved in strikes and actions, anywhere. We lived on very little. . . . The men and boys earned somewhat more than we did—but we didn't really resent it. . . . Sometimes, it seemed we lived on air alone."[58] The sense of empowerment was also clear in Enriqueta's recollections: "For the love of those compañeros, and that vision so strong, we would have battled with the Virgin Mary herself!"

Further, direct action not only empowered those who participated in it, it also had effects on others through what anarchists termed "propaganda by the deed." Often, that term meant bomb-throwing, assassination attempts, and the like. It had another meaning, however, referring to a kind of exemplary action that attracted adherents by the power of the positive example it set. Contemporary examples of propaganda by the deed include food or day-care coops, collectively run businesses, sweat equity housing programs, women's self-help health collectives, urban squats, or women's peace camps. While such activities empower those who engage in them, they also demonstrate to others that nonhierarchical forms of organization can and do exist—and that they can function effectively.

Obviously, if such actions are to have the desired empowerment effects, they must be largely self-generated, rather than being devised and directed from above. Hence, the anarchist commitment to a strategy of "spontaneous organization," noncoercive federations of local groups. The aim was to achieve order without coercion by means of what we might call "federative networking," which brought together

representatives of local groups (unions, neighborhood associations, consumer coops, or the like). The crucial point was that neither the individual groups nor the larger coordinating body could claim to speak or act for others. Ideally, they would be more forums for discussion than directive organizations. Spontaneous organization would demonstrate in practice that those who had experienced oppression were still capable of rational thought and action, able to come to know what their needs were and to develop ways to meet them.[59]

Preparation

Finally, and most important, direct action could take place only within a context of "preparation." In the words of Federica Montseny, "Una revolución no se improvisa" (one doesn't improvise a revolution).[60] Although all people had within them a sense of equality and justice based in their participation in social relationships, that almost instinctive sense was insufficient to lead to revolutionary action. Preparation was necessary both to point out to people the communal nature and context of their plight and to enable them to recognize the possibilities of their collective action. Without such preparation, "revolution" would lead only to the reinstitution of authority in new forms. In fact, many anarchists, writing in the years just after the Russian Revolution, pointed to the USSR as a negative example of how hierarchy was easily reimposed in the absence of sufficient preparation.[61]

However paradoxical it may seem, people must be prepared to act spontaneously on their own behalf. Along with Marx, anarchists believed that the best preparation, the best technique for what we call consciouness-raising, was action. "Capitalism is mortally wounded, but its agony will be prolonged until we are ready to substitute for it successfully. And we will not achieve that by pretty-sounding phrases, but by demonstrating our constructive and organizing capacity."[62] People would develop a critical, revolutionary consciousness through reflection on the concrete realities of their lives—a reflection often sparked by their own and others' activities.[63]

Attention to the particular needs and situation of women, and to the activities of Mujeres Libres, can help to explicate the multidimensional nature of this understanding of the process of consciousness-change and to highlight its relevance to many contemporary debates. I noted above that Spanish anarchists argued that one important context for preparation was participation in working-class organizations, particularly unions. Yet, following Bakunin and breaking with Marx, they had also insisted that urban industrial workers were not the only people capable of coming to a revolutionary consciousness. Rural peasants and members of the urban petit bourgeoisie, as well as industrial workers, could develop a consciousness of their own oppression and join in a revolu-

munity of empowerment" for working-class women and, at the same time, an organizational context for women's empowerment within the libertarian movement as a whole.

The organization clearly contributed to the empowerment of many of its members, both those who had little prior involvement in the anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movements and those who had been activists in them. Each experienced the fears—and the pride—of having "to do for oneself" that went along with being an activist in a group of women dependent only on themselves. The sense of community they developed and shared with others through the years transformed them. Having lived through those times, and having planned and organized new arenas of social life, they came to know a much wider range of their own capacities. The community of other women with whom they shared those activities became a primary source of validation of their new sense of self. Continued connection with other Spanish libertarians and with women of Mujeres Libres in the years since the war helped to keep alive not only the memory of their activities together, but the reality of their personal transformations.

The long-range impact of the experiences varied greatly with the individual and with the social and political contexts that they found or created for themselves.[4] The empowerment each of these women experienced was connected not only to what she personally had achieved but, more importantly, to the community of activists, male and female, with whom she lived and worked—both during the revolution and in the years of exile and repression that followed it. This finding should hardly be surprising. Contemporary feminist theorists have placed increasing emphasis on the importance of relationships among women. Some have argued that women's networks provide important supports for women in their families, workplaces, and communities, and enable them to engage in what is commonly recognized as "political action."[5] Others have focused on the ways women's location within networks of friends, family, and associates and their particular relationship to social institutions define the ways women experience themselves in the world to the extent that women may develop psychological orientations, patterns of moral reasoning, and criteria for action that differ significantly from prevailing (male-defined) norms.[6]

Attention to context, a defining characteristic of what we might term a "feminist world-view,"[7] was also an important element of the Spanish anarchist orientation. Many of Mujeres Libres' programs had a strong "consciousness-raising" component, which enabled the participants to locate their experiences in a social context and to build solidarity with others on the basis of shared perspectives. As in consciousness-raising (CR) groups in the early days of the contemporary women's movement in the United States, the realizations an individual woman experienced

ticipation. The women of Mujeres Libres addressed women's difference from men within the context of a working-class movement. Contemporary feminists and participatory democrats are striving to create a society that can address differences of class, racial-ethnic community, sexual orientation, age, and physical abilities, as well as of gender. Mujeres Libres' experience, however, has much to teach us about empowerment and changing consciousness, about the relation between individuals and communities, and about the meaning of difference.

"Cowards Don't Make History": A Legacy of Empowerment

> Do you live in a town where women are relegated to a position of insignificance, dedicated exclusively to housework and the care of children? No doubt, many times you have thought about this with some disgust, and when you've noticed the freedom that your brothers or the men of your households enjoy, you have felt the hardship of being a woman. . . .
>
> Well, against all this which you have had to suffer comes Mujeres Libres. We want you to have the same freedom as your brothers . . . we want your voice to be heard with the same authority as your father's. We want you to attain that independent life you have wanted. . . .
>
> But realize that all this requires your effort: in order to achieve them, you need the assistance of others. You need others to be concerned with the same things as you, you need to help them, as they will help you. In a single word, you must struggle communally.[2]

Both feminists and communalists have recognized that it is difficult for isolated individuals to feel strong and powerful. As Marge Piercy wrote, "Strong is what we make / each other. Until we are all strong together, / a strong woman is a woman strongly afraid."[3] In developing a sense of connection with others, subordinated people often overcome the sense of powerlessness that can inhibit social change.

Thoroughly rooted as it was in the communalist anarchist tradition, Mujeres Libres insisted that the process of individual empowerment was, at base, a collective one. Along with contemporary feminists, Mujeres Libres recognized that people do not exist as social isolates. They live in families and communities, and their sense of self derives from the relations they have with others in those communities. Truly egalitarian communities respect the diversity and individuality of their members, and only when we live and work in such communities can we come fully to a sense of our own powers and capacities.

Mujeres Libres was founded because too few women had experienced empowerment within the existing organizations of the Spanish anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist movements. It aimed to become a "com-

tionary movement.[64] Many women, in particular, criticized the emphasis of the movement on the male urban industrial proletariat. Emma Goldman, for example, who was to be quite active in support both of the Spanish revolution and of Mujeres Libres, had earlier argued that "anarchists agree that the main evil today is an economic one," but as she pointed out, "they maintain that the solution of the evil can be brought about only through the consideration of *every phase* of life, the individual, as well as the collective; the internal, as well as the external phases."[65] It was most obviously true for women, but also true for men, that the workplace is not the only context for relationships of domination, nor is it therefore the only potential context for consciousness-change and empowerment. A fully articulated movement must transform all hierarchical institutions, including government, religious institutions, and—perhaps most dramatically for women—sexuality and family life.

Preparation, then, could and must take place in a variety of social contexts, in addition to the economic. Both Enriqueta and Azucena spoke of imbibing anarchist perspectives more or less unconsciously "with our mother's milk":

> My mother taught us anarchism, . . . almost like a religious person teaches religion to her children—but without imposing it on us, as the religious one does . . . whether by her actions, by her way of expressing herself, and by always saying that they hoped for, longed for, anarchism. . . . It's almost as if she didn't *teach* them, we *lived* them, were born with them. We learned them as you would learn to sew or to eat.[66]

For those who became part of the movement later in life, the learning process was obviously a different one. Pepita Carpena, for example, was introduced to the ideas by union organizers who frequented young people's social gatherings in hopes of attracting young adherents to the cause. Soledad Estorach, who was to be very active both in the CNT and in Mujeres Libres in Barcelona, gained much of her initial information about "anarchist communists" by reading newspapers and magazines.

Anarchists had long recognized the interdependence of educational practices, narrowly defined, and participation in ongoing institutions, where social approval and disapproval provided continuing mechanisms of social control.[67] Proudhon's notion of "imminent justice"—the claim that we develop a conception of justice through our relationships with other people—was taken up directly by a number of Spanish anarchist writers. Mella argued that the only proper regulator of society is the sense of justice, which people learn through their participation in institutions that recognize and validate their own worth and the equal worth of others. The collective feeling that develops out of such participation would translate into a sense of justice more powerful and

permanent than any imposed on people by church or state.[68] "To practice justice," Proudhon had insisted, "is to obey the social instinct." It is through our patterns of interaction with one another that we learn and experience both who we and others are and what justice is. The best and most effective educational system therefore is society itself.[69]

Another major factor operative in the development of a sense of justice is public opinion, what Mella referred to as "moral coercion" [coacción moral]. Our moral sense develops out of the "exchange of reciprocal influences," which, although it may come initially from outside ourselves, eventually is taken in as a sense of justice and becomes the basis for our own self-regulation. A well-ordered egalitarian society, left to itself, will generate people with the proper sense of justice; anyone who seems lacking in such a sense will be held in check by the opinions of others. Over time, those opinions will have an educative effect; public opinion will be internalized as conscience.[70]

The goal of anarchists, then, was to eliminate those institutions—for example, church, state, judges and courts—whch impeded the development of such a moral sense by taking over the responsibility of looking after others and oneself. Once such authorities were eliminated, reciprocity would become a norm of action; simply living in the community—participating in its activities, in the context of an open educational system, and in communal ownership and disposition of property—would be sufficient to foster and safeguard the development of the individual's sense of justice, in turn necessary to sustain the community.

The complexities of this position are revealed quite clearly when we look specifically at efforts to address women's subordination and empowerment. Both those who emphasized a union-based strategy and those who insisted on the broader cultural components of women's subordination recognized that women were devalued and disempowered, culturally and economically. Both accepted the perspective that means and ends are intimately connected. But how were those principles and perspectives to be realized in practice? How were women in early twentieth-century Spain, who thought of themselves (and were viewed by others) as dependent on men, to begin behaving in ways that developed their own sense of competence and capacity?

These questions are, of course, crucial ones for any would-be revolutionary movement, since a sense of one's own capacities and powers is precisely what oppressors attempt to deny to the oppressed. But even agreement on the importance of the perspective did not guarantee unanimity on its implications for practice. In fact, the question of how best to address and challenge the subordination of working-class women within Spanish society was never effectively resolved within the anarcho-syndicalist movement. Mujeres Libres was created precisely

CONCLUSION
COMMUNITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

> One can talk for a long time about experiences such as those we lived. The most important thing, though, is not having made the revolution, but having continued the struggle in the years since, each in his or her particular setting, or in many settings at once, without trumpet or drum.
>
> —Anna Delso

As women whose particular needs had been neglected by the larger society and by their libertarian comrades, the women of Mujeres Libres had a special commitment to the creation of a society that recognized and valued diversity. Empowerment would come through the struggle for the anarchist vision of coordination without hierarchy, diversity without inequality, and individuality with collectivity.

However short-lived the revolution in which Mujeres Libres played so important a role, the experience of participating in it had a dramatic and long-lasting impact on the lives of the women active in the organization. Women who were only in their teens and early twenties at the time of the revolution reflected years later that those events changed their lives dramatically. The energy, enthusiasm, and sense of personal and collective empowerment that they experienced stood as markers for them of what life could be and of what people could achieve, if they worked together with commitment and hope. The most rewarding aspect of engaging in this study was the contact with people, both women and men, who retained that vision through years of exile and/or oppression. Surely one of the reasons they were able to do so was that, for them, social revolution had not been simply a vision or a hope; they had actually *lived* a change in their daily life.[1]

I wish to explore the implications of Mujeres Libres' activities for some of the central issues confronting contemporary feminists and social change activists—questions of empowerment, the incorporation of diversity, and the meaning and nature of political and social par-

because of a disagreement among movement activists about how to achieve that empowerment.

The issues were played out quite dramatically during the course of interviews I was conducting in 1981. A group of former activists were meeting and reminiscing about their years in the CNT and FIJL. After some discussion of the role of the FIJL and ateneos in opening the minds of young people to new ideas in the twenties and thirties, the conversation turned to the liberation of women. Two different but strongly held positions were put forward. One was articulated by a man who identified himself as a strong supporter of women's emancipation, who was quite articulate about the ways in which even anarchist men tended to take for granted their compañeras' subordination to them. He argued that, precisely because of women's cultural subordination, anarchist men had a responsibility to take the lead in changing these patterns. Women's taking paid jobs would not be sufficient: "There are too many men whose wives work and who still do all the housework." After so many years of socialization, women were all too ready to accept traditional roles. Men, who have the understanding and the sense of their own capacities, he insisted, must take the initiative and encourage their compañeras towards greater self-direction and autonomy.

Another position was articulated by a woman who had been an activist in the Juventudes during the thirties and whose life had been fundamentally changed through her participation in it. She, too, was committed to the liberation of women. But she strongly opposed her compañero's insistence that it was up to men to take the initiative. She argued that his focus on what contemporary feminists call "the politics of housework"[71] was misplaced. The basic problem, she insisted, was not who washes the dishes or cleans the house, but that a woman be able to go where she pleases and say what she pleases. The root of women's subordination was ignorance. In her words, "toda mujer que se çultura un poco desarrolla armas" [every woman who gains some culture (educates herself) develops weapons]. "What matters to me is that a woman be able to open her mouth. It is not a question of cleaning plates." While her interlocutor insisted that a woman's responsibility for all the housework and for the family would prevent her from participating fully in communal activities, this woman insisted that "going to meetings is not the issue. Going to meetings is a kind of sport. What is important is work and reading."

It soon became clear that the fundamental issue between them was not the primacy of work, reading, or housework. It was initiative. While he insisted that, given the weight of cultural subordination that women had to bear, the initiative would have to come from men, she insisted that "a compañero never ought to say to a woman, 'liberate yourself, and I'll help you.' A woman has to liberate herself. It's all right for men

to help, but the *initiative* must come from the woman. It must be her issue."

That the debate sounds so contemporary should not be surprising. It was taking place among people who, while they did not grow up with the contemporary feminist movement, had obviously been influenced by it. Nevertheless, the issues they raised and the particular ways in which they discussed them echoed the written debates of the early part of this century. In 1903, José Prat had urged women to take responsibility for their own emancipation. Some years later, Federica Montseny had insisted that one way for women to work toward the abolition of the sexual double standard was for them to take themselves seriously, to stand up and punish the men who had seduced and abandoned them, rather than to cower in shame. And Soledad Gustavo, echoing Emma Goldman's claims about internal emancipation, insisted that if there were to be a new order of sexual equality, women would have to "demonstrate by their deeds that they think, are capable of conceiving ideas, of grasping principles, of striving for ends."[72]

The question they were all addressing was precisely that of empowerment and the overcoming of subordination: how best to accomplish them consistent with a commitment to recognize both the impact of cultural conditioning and the potential for autonomy of each person. Nevertheless, the question of the *significance* of women's subordination and of its place within the anarchist project was far from resolved, whether in the theoretical writings of Spanish anarchists or, as we shall see, in the activities of the movement. Debates continued within the movement throughout the 1930s and led ultimately to the founding of Mujeres Libres.

they felt a lack of moral as well as of financial support. In December 1938, for example, the Ministry of the Interior attempted to dispossess Mujeres Libres of the building on the Paseo Pi y Margall in Barcelona that housed the Casal de la Dona Treballadora and to turn the building over to the Bank of Spain. After repeated, though unsuccessful, attempts to have the decision reversed, Mujeres Libres agreed to move if the Ministry found them a suitable replacement building. But the Ministry was unresponsive, sending police to evict them. Mujeres Libres requested assistance from the FAI, CNT, and FIJL in Barcelona. The FAI responded, arranging special meetings between representatives of Mujeres Libres and of the Bank of Spain, and calling on Federica Montseny to intervene with the Ministry of the Interior, which she did. FAI representatives supported Mujeres Libres' decision to remain in the building and to engage in passive resistance to eviction until a suitable replacement site should be found.[53] But Mujeres Libres received little support from the CNT, and expressed disgust with the CNT's attitude, characterizing it as "rather timid, and little inclined to support a firm position on our part." "It is a pity," Lucía wrote to the National Committee of the CNT, "that you compañeros have always had so little time to acquaint yourselves with the valuable work of Mujeres Libres and that the consequence of this is the little interest you have shown in responding to our plea."[54] Mujeres Libres was still a long way from being fully accepted by other libertarian organizations.

Nevertheless, it had made considerable progress. Conchita Guillén mentioned one poignant detail that may shed some light on the relations between Mujeres Libres and other organizations in the last days of the war.

> On the very day of the evacuation of Barcelona [January 24, 1939], when the fascists were practically at the gates, we were called to a meeting of the libertarian movement: CNT, FAI, JJ.LL., and Mujeres Libres. Jacinta Escudero and I attended as delegates of the Local Federation of Mujeres Libres. It was a meeting of some importance, because it was a crucial moment: we had either to resist, or to abandon [Barcelona]. . . . We put ourselves at the disposition of the movement; they thanked us, but said it would be a useless sacrifice, since they had no strength at all, and we all should get out as quickly as possible.[55]

The first time that Mujeres Libres was called, as an organization, to a meeting of the libertarian movement was to be, in fact, its last. Even so, Conchita's memory of the event was clear and strong: for once, they were accorded the status as equal members of the movement that they had struggled so long to achieve.

In its responses, Mujeres Libres attempted to meet all these objections. Its initial presentation to the congress addressed the question of autonomy, stressing the uniqueness of women's situation in Spain, the need for an organization to address it, and the demonstrated failure of the CNT, FAI, and FIJL to meet that need. Mujeres Libres' speakers expressed anger at being asked constantly to justify themselves and to prove their worth and commitment. They argued that the organization was working both within and outside the unions and that the work of capacitación and captación required a much broader and multifaceted approach than any of the existing organizations were equipped to do. Further, Mujeres Libres was representing women and their interests in the workplace: for example, struggling for equal pay for equal work, a goal which unions had not defended with appropriate vigor. Speakers repeated that Mujeres Libres was not a separatist organization, and that it had intervened in opposition when it had heard of women's efforts to establish separate women's unions, arguing that the women ought to join with men in existing union organizations. Finally, they argued that anarchism and syndicalism were not the exclusive province of men: as compañeras, they had a right—and a responsibility—to propagate libertarian ideas and practices: "Our self-determination cannot be opposed on the grounds that Anarchism doesn't admit of sex differences, because then it would be necessary to conclude that, as of now, our Libertarian Organizations are not deserving of that name because, whether by choice or by necessity, its militants are almost exclusively men!"[51]

My own sense, confirmed by interviews with participants, is that the key issue was autonomy. The fact that it was an organization of *women* would not necessarily have been sufficient to deny recognition. After all, the FIJL was an organization of only young people. The Women's Bureaus were set up with an even narrower purview: young women. Where Mujeres Libres truly differed from the FIJL was in its insistence on autonomy. It claimed the right to define its priorities; it would organize its programs not just to mobilize women *[captar]*, but also to educate and empower *[capacitar]* them. Mujeres Libres' demand for autonomy in setting its goals and priorities seems to have been the "sticking point" for other movement organizations.

Despite its frustration with the decision (or, more accurately, nondecision) of the Congress with respect to its status as an organization, Mujeres Libres took the delegates at their word on the question of financial and moral support. In the weeks following, Mujeres Libres corresponded with the regional and national committees of both the FAI and the CNT, reminding them of the resolutions passed at the meeting and requesting financial assistance—requests which apparently met with some success.[52]

It is also clear, however, that even in the aftermath of the Congress

A study of the debate at the congress and of the documents Mujeres Libres circulated before and after it reveals a great deal about the position of Mujeres Libres within the movement, both organizationally and ideologically. Organizationally, Mujeres Libres analogized its situation to that of the AMA in other political movements and to that of the FIJL within the libertarian movement. Mujeres Libres pointed to the support the FIJL was receiving from the CNT and FAI, despite the fact that it was an organization devoted "only" to young people, and argued that Mujeres Libres ought to be accorded comparable support and recognition for its work in mobilizing women. Ideologically, Mujeres Libres insisted that libertarians ought to recognize that the specific needs of women would require particular ideological, as well as organizational, attention.

The analogy with the Juventudes did not serve Mujeres Libres well, at least in part because the status of the FIJL was also ambiguous. At one point in the debate, for example, delegates argued that, since the FIJL was only an auxiliary organization, Mujeres Libres should be considered in the same category. Representatives of the FIJL objected to this characterization, noting that the FIJL had been invited to the congress. Later in the debate, however, others commented that, although the FIJL was present as a result of a fait accompli, there was no reason to "repeat the same mistake" with Mujeres Libres.[49]

In the end, the FIJL and Mujeres Libres were treated very differently. The FIJL had been invited as an organization; its secretary sat as one of the three members of the credentials committee, and its delegates participated with voice and vote in all the debates of the congress. Further, the congress approved a proposal to provide the FIJL with regular and substantial financial assistance. It is true that, even within the debates about that proposal, representatives of the FIJL chafed at what they regarded as insufficient recognition of their own autonomy and achievements as an organization. Nevertheless, FIJL succeeded in asserting its own definition of its mission and goals and received widespread support, both financial and moral, for its activities and for its status as a constituent organization of the libertarian movement.[50]

There was no such support for Mujeres Libres. One after another the delegations indicated that, although they were willing to provide moral and material support to Mujeres Libres, they opposed granting the organization equal status as a fourth branch of the movement. A number of different arguments were adduced: (1) that anarchism (and syndicalism) admitted of no differences by sex, and, therefore, that an organization oriented only to women could not truly be a libertarian organization; (2) that Mujeres Libres was causing confusion because it was engaging in work that should be done by unions; and (3) that Mujeres Libres should not be functioning as an autonomous organization, but should be operating within the unions and cultural centers.

> women opportunities . . . to engage in an apprenticeship in self-determination, accustoming them to study and confront political problems.
>
> Only . . . the independence [of this female force] creates the possibility of its being useful in either an ideological or syndical sense. . . .
>
> This is why Mujeres Libres has insisted on being . . . a movement that is politically autonomous, protecting its ability to determine its own ends, while its Statutes and Declaration of Principles guarantee its libertarian essence."[45]

The delegates, however, did not understand Mujeres Libres' insistence on both membership and autonomy. And the parliamentary situation in which Mujeres Libres found itself did not make the job of explaining it any easier. Officially, Mujeres Libres was attending the meeting only as an "auxiliary" to the movement.

The resulting situation made Mujeres Libres' task particularly difficult, and it provided many opportunities for parliamentary maneuvering to those who opposed granting Mujeres Libres equal and autonomous organizational status. Mujeres Libres presented cogent and powerful arguments in support of its claims, but these were effectively marginalized in the debate. The assembly never addressed Mujeres Libres' request directly because others argued that the question of Mujeres Libres' status had never appeared on the agenda of the call to the meeting and that, given the rules of the organization (according to which, delegates could only vote on the basis of prior instructions given them by the bodies that had elected them), the assembly was not empowered to make a decision. In the end, the assembly refused to vote on Mujeres Libres' proposition, agreeing instead to a two-part alternative proposal: (1) that since the delegates did not bring directions from their organizations, a proposal should be drawn up which could be circulated to all the national and regional committees and be discussed by the locals; and (2) that since Mujeres Libres was in need of both moral and financial assistance, unions should encourage their female members to join Mujeres Libres and should commit themselves to supporting Mujeres Libres financially, whenever possible. Despite Mujeres Libres' complaint that the proposal solved nothing, it passed unanimously.[46] Mujeres Libres did draw up a two-page summary of its arguments, including a formal request that it be accepted as a fourth branch of the libertarian movement, which was circulated to national and regional committees shortly after the congress.[47] But, because of the rapidly deteriorating war situation, no further plenary was held, and the motion never came to a vote. Mary Nash has written of this meeting that Mujeres Libres' bid for recognition "was rejected on the grounds that a specifically woman's organization would be a source of disunity and inequality within the libertarian movement."[48] Nevertheless, apart from the parliamentary maneuvers, Mujeres Libres' proposal was never formally rejected.

VI

SEPARATE AND EQUAL?
DILEMMAS OF REVOLUTIONARY MOBILIZATION

Given Mujeres Libres' dual commitment to education and activism, we might expect it to have been welcomed with open arms by the CNT and FAI, its "brother" organizations in the libertarian movement. Mujeres Libres shared much with these organizations. Virtually all its militants were also activists in at least one of the others. Mujeres Libres' apprenticeship programs and programs of *formación social* prepared women to assume active roles in production and CNT activities. The anarchist/libertarian orientation of Mujeres Libres' cultural and educational programs addressed many of the goals of the FAI (and of the FIJL).

Nevertheless, these libertarian movement organizations never treated Mujeres Libres as a fully equal partner. In addition, Mujeres Libres' relationships with nonlibertarian women's groups were also strained, due to the greater financial and political power of the Communist party and its affiliated organizations. Examination of Mujeres Libres' relations with women's groups outside the libertarian movement and with other organizations within it can provide insight into the nature of Mujeres Libres' project and the "separate and equal" status it struggled to achieve within the libertarian community.

Relations with Other Women's Organizations

Mujeres Libres' relations with nonlibertarian women's organizations were a product of its attitude toward feminism and of its role in the libertarian movement. As I have argued, Mujeres Libres rejected existing feminist ideology and political organizing. It insisted that women's subordination would be overcome not by a narrow struggle for voting rights, or even for equal pay at the workplace, but only through a movement with clear social and educational goals. In its view, political organizing (i.e., organizing without a social/educational and class di-

mension) would only perpetuate the subordination of working-class women.[1]

One purpose for which Mujeres Libres was founded, then, was to meet those women's needs which existing movement organizations had neglected. Nevertheless, as the civil war within a civil war progressed, Mujeres Libres' activities took on a further dimension and purpose: to compete with socialist organizations for the allegiance of the Spanish working woman. In a retrospective justification of its activities, Mujeres Libres argued to the libertarian movement:

> With the advent of the Republic in Spain, there began a veritable contest of captación among the political parties. . . .
>
> It was then, in view of the danger these events posed for the libertarian tendency and for the society as a whole, that a group of compañeras conceived the idea of creating a journal, managed and directed by our women, that would begin to work among the feminine sectors of our country, introducing among them . . . an inclination toward libertarian tendencies. This journal was the magazine *Mujeres Libres*, which appeared in May 1936.[2]

Of course, some libertarian women's groups (those in Terrassa and in Barcelona, for example) existed even *before* the journal began to be published. Mercedes and Lucía had sent letters to many of those groups in an effort to begin a network as early as 1935. But since those groups were explicitly rooted in the libertarian movement, they may not have fit the broader scenario Mujeres Libres was attempting to sketch out in these memoranda.

In fact, it is not at all clear that competition with socialist organizations was a primary goal at first. However, once the various leftist parties launched women's organizations, the captación piece of Mujeres Libres' agenda intensified, particularly the competition with the AMA.

In the prewar period, most other leftist organizations and parties, while committed in theory to overcoming the subordination of women, had tended to adopt the traditional Marxist perspective that the subordination of women was secondary to the divisions of a class society. Consequently, the most effective way to overcome that subordination was to organize women into working-class organizations to struggle jointly for an end to class oppression. In general, they denied what Mary Nash has termed the "specificity of women's oppression," and argued that "the emancipation of woman would be achieved exclusively through her incorporation into the class struggle."[3] Many of the organizations developed "women's sections," aimed at mobilizing women to participate in their activities.

Left-wing and dissident socialist organizations differed slightly in their orientation. They addressed the need for equality between men and women in the workplace and at home, and actively supported

> The harbors were being bombarded every night, and we were totally illegal travelers on this British boat, which had to sail right by Franquista ships. We were due to arrive the next morning, but as we neared the harbor, we could hear the explosions of the fascist bombing of the port. The captain headed north, and we sailed around all that day and night, finally arriving in Barcelona, exhausted and hungry, on the morning of the 9th. We were tremendously excited, and ready to argue the case for Mujeres Libres on the floor of the congress. But they would not even allow us into the meeting![43]

The delegate accreditation committee (comprised of the secretaries of the three major organizations) brought the issue of Mujeres Libres' attendance to the full congress for decision. Interestingly, in addition to the delegation from Mujeres Libres, there was another person present who had requested permission to join in the proceedings: Emma Goldman, the official representative of the CNT in London. The assembly readily agreed to allow her to sit in on the meetings as an observer, given her "special character." But the matter of the delegation from Mujeres Libres was not so easily resolved. After much debate the assembly agreed that "Mujeres Libres should attend only [the discussion of] that point which affected them directly." Consequently, while some of the would-be delegates were able to stay through the meeting as delegates from other organizations, Mujeres Libres' delegation was present only for the congress's eighteenth and nineteenth sessions (October 25 and 26, 1938), to participate in the discussion of the fifth point of the agenda, "How to assist the work of auxiliary organizations of the libertarian movement."[44]

Mujeres Libres had attempted to lay the groundwork for its attendance and proposal in the preceding months. In January it circulated a document entitled "Some Considerations from the National Committee of Mujeres Libres to that of the CNT about the Political Importance of the Former." In September it sent a nine-page statement to the national and peninsular committees, reviewing its history and accomplishments and emphasizing its work of captación vis-à-vis the AMA.

In its presentation at the congress, Mujeres Libres discussed the particular disabilities confronting women in Spain, the need to counteract "political" forces (that is, the Communist party and the AMA), and the importance of a separate libertarian organization to meet these needs. Its statements repeatedly emphasized both the libertarian character and commitments of Mujeres Libres, and the necessity for its autonomy within the context of the larger movement.

> The only way to serve both aspects of our movement, the syndical and the specific [anarchist], was by maintaining the autonomy of the new organization. That autonomy would permit us to work with the female sector in the pure territory of ideological and professional capacitacion, providing

a sense of frustration with how little the Secretarías had accomplished in the past months. They referred to a number of problems, including the claim that the position of the Secretaría within the FIJL severely limited its freedom of action. It was time, they insisted, either for a recommitment or a reorientation: "Either we recognize 'the special characteristics of women' and create an organism with sufficient independence of activity to address them; or, on the contrary, we deny the existence of 'special characteristics' and stop bothering with this problem any more, dissolving the Secretarías Femeninas."[42]

Thus, despite the organizational competition with Mujeres Libres, the women who participated in the Women's Bureaus apparently had experiences that validated Mujeres Libres' insistence on the importance of autonomy. The Women's Bureaus adopted goals very similar to those of Mujeres Libres, but attempted to achieve them within the FIJL. The Bureaus' complaints about their treatment by other organs of their own movement, the lack of support they received, and their need for greater independence seem to justify Mujeres Libres' own position vis-à-vis the movement as a whole. Nevertheless, the Bureaus never offered public support for Mujeres Libres' view.

The Libertarian Movement Congress, October 1938

After many months of informal approaches to specific organizations and movement leaders for moral and financial support, Mujeres Libres formally requested organizational recognition at the joint National Plenary of Regionals, CNT-FAI-FIJL in October 1938. That congress, which took place in Barcelona and lasted two weeks, was the first national meeting to bring together representatives from the three major movement organizations.

Mujeres Libres had not received an official invitation to attend. In the past, members of Mujeres Libres had often participated in meetings of movement organizations as members of those organizations. But with a few minor exceptions they had never attended *as* representatives of Mujeres Libres. This time, however, Mujeres Libres wished to attend as an organization. It assembled a delegation of fifteen women who presented themselves at the congress, seeking accreditation as delegates of Mujeres Libres and formal recognition of Mujeres Libres as a fourth constituent branch of the libertarian movement.

Pura Pérez Arcos traveled from Valencia to Barcelona to serve as a Mujeres Libres delegate:

> We sailed from the port of Alicante on the afternoon of October 7, in a small English boat. The group included people from Madrid, Valencia, and a variety of places in Andalusia. Our tiny Mujeres Libres delegation was inspired by the great hopes and expectations we had of the Congress. . . . To make a trip in those days was very risky, and we all knew it.

programs of cultural preparation. Nevertheless, their strategy was politically similar to that of PSOE, PCE, and PSUC: both the BOC and the POUM created "women's sections" to attend specifically to the mobilization of women into those parties.[4]

With the advent of the war, the strategy of the Marxist parties changed. They established separate women's organizations, among them Dona a la Reraguarda and the Asociación de Mujeres Antifascistas, and journals specifically oriented to women (e.g., *Mujeres* and *Companya*). These focused not on overcoming women's subordination, but on mobilizing women to contribute to the war effort. In neglecting to address the specificities of women's subordination, these socialist and communist organizations differed significantly from Mujeres Libres.

The AMA, in particular, represented itself as a nonpartisan organization, concerned with mobilizing women for the struggle against fascism. Its formal objectives were (1) to contribute to the struggle against fascism and in favor of peace, (2) to defend culture and women's right to an education to overcome their enslavement to ignorance, (3) to defend civil rights and equal justice, and (4) to incorporate women fully into the political and social life of the country.[5] Despite this stated concern with cultural subordination, however, its war-related activities soon overshadowed these gender-specific goals.

It was in this context that Mujeres Libres took issue with the AMA. Mujeres Libres was deeply committed to the *revolutionary* struggle: not just to winning the war but also to societal transformation. The AMA marginalized that struggle, downplaying both women's particular subordination and issues of broader social transformation. It focused instead on mobilizing women for work. In Mujeres Libres' view, the political effects of this supposedly nonideological mobilization effort were clear: it would reinforce the ideological dominance of the group already holding effective political power, the Communist party.

A concern with the political implications of the AMA's alleged nonpartisanship was at the forefront of Mujeres Libres' dealings with that organization. These implications were perhaps clearest in the syndical context. Over and over again, in circulars and letters to the CNT, Mujeres Libres emphasized the dangers of the AMA's "winning the battle" at workplaces. As male workers (most of whom, at least in Barcelona, had been members of the CNT) went off to the fronts, they were increasingly replaced by women. But would these women be affiliated with the CNT and continue the anarcho-syndicalist tradition in the workplaces? Or would they be "nonpolitical" women, trained in Generalitat programs, who, in joining the workforce as unaffiliated workers, would undermine, if not reverse, the gains made by generations of CNT organizing?[6]

In short, Mujeres Libres interpreted AMA's "nonpartisan" work as

deeply political and as a direct challenge to the unions. Mujeres Libres saw its own programs of apprenticeship and capacitación as efforts to compete with AMA at the workplace: "The primordial preoccupation of Mujeres Libres was to preserve the syndical strength on which our libertarian movement rests."[7] The aim was to develop a revolutionary social consciousness that would enable women to join in the union-based struggle at the workplace and withstand the ideological influence of the Communist party in technical training programs.

This competition with AMA for the loyalties of women in factories, however, formed only a small part of Mujeres Libres' broader concern with developing a female force that was oriented toward revolutionary social transformation in all its dimensions. The other major context in which the competition revealed itself was in Mujeres Libres' response to the AMA's calls for the "unity" of all women and women's organizations (including republicans, socialists, and communists, along with Mujeres Libres) under the umbrella of the AMA.

Consistent with the position of the larger libertarian movement, Mujeres Libres vociferously opposed all calls for "feminine unity" that denied the important ideological and political differences among the groups. It insisted on the need to maintain an independent *libertarian* women's presence in a true coalition, in which each group would maintain its identity and autonomy. Such a coalition could draw strength from the variety of perspectives, rather than attempting to present a unified—and not coincidentally nonrevolutionary—common front. From the first, Mujeres Libres expressed deep distrust of the motives and intentions of the AMA and other "unity" organizations, emphasizing the political and ideological context in which these calls for unity were taking place. For example, in response to an invitation to attend the congress of the "Unió de Donas de Cataluña" in November 1937, Mujeres Libres issued a critique of the congress's statement of goals. I reproduce part of that response here, to provide a sense of its tone and intensity:

> 1º *To contribute to antifascist unity:*
> Response: End the persecutions against antifascist organizations that are not represented in the government. . . .
> 2º *To work for equality of salary with men:*
> . . . the problems of working-class families will not be resolved by equality of salaries. . . .
> 5º *To save our country from the fascist invasion.*
> From the two invasions: that which is being fought at the fronts, and that which is operating in the rearguard. . . .
> 6º *To emancipate women for work, teaching them new skills.*
> For Mujeres Libres, this is a fact that has been a reality for some time, and not a point to attract people to a congress.[8]

that the Secretarías Femeninas would simply be duplicating its work and draining the movement's scarce resources.

The Secretariado was well aware of this sentiment, and apparently devoted as much energy to discussions of how to deal with Mujeres Libres as it did to dealing with the AJA and other Communist-affiliated youth organizations. Relations with Mujeres Libres were strained, at best. The Secretarías frequently referred to Mujeres Libres as a "young" or "immature" organization, one with little success in organizing women—although they did acknowledge that Mujeres Libres' "weakness" might be due to its precarious financial condition. They were well aware of Mujeres Libres' opposition to the existence of the Women's Bureau: "Its position with relation to our Secretariats is of opposition. They believe that they should be the only ones in the libertarian camp to win over *[captar]* women—and the ones to distribute the activists they don't need to their sister organizations."[38]

Of course, Mujeres Libres did not see its role as "distributing excess militants" to other organizations. It saw itself as preparing women to participate in whatever libertarian movement organization they might choose. What these passages and other documents reveal is a strong sense of organizational rivalry.[39] Mujeres Libres saw the creation of the Women's Bureaus as redundant. The Women's Bureaus, for their part, wanted Mujeres Libres to become a "dependent" organization of the Libertarian movement: "all of us orient its [Mujeres Libres'] work, and we should have the responsibility for its development and activities and for providing it with economic means."[40]

In October 1938, the Secretariado Femenino prepared a report of its activities for presentation to the National Plenary of the FIJL, in which it reiterated earlier claims that Mujeres Libres was acting improperly in attempting to incorporate both young and adult women in its programs, and raised with the congress whether it might wish to bring to the forthcoming joint congress of the libertarian movement a resolution that Mujeres Libres be an organization for adult women only. Further, the report revealed that the Peninsular Committee had experienced considerable difficulties in convincing some of its own regional committees of the need for a Women's Bureau. Apparently, both the Local Federation of Barcelona and the Catalan Regional Committee had rejected the proposal for a bureau, arguing that "a number of the tasks we set out were being addressed already by Mujeres Libres, and that there was no reason for us to put ourselves in competition with them."[41]

The report may be even more important, however, for what it revealed about the frustration of the Secretaría with its position in the FIJL. Despite the earlier claims that Mujeres Libres had been largely ineffective in achieving its goals (and that the Women's Bureaus were much better placed to engage effectively in this work), what is evident is

> was named delegate from my Juventudes group to the Local Federation of Juventudes. . . . So, I had to go to the meeting and announce that we accepted the proposition. But I decided then (and told them) that, since it seemed to me counterproductive that the FIJL should have a Secretariado Femenino, I was leaving, and from then on, I would carry on my militancy in Mujeres Libres.[35]

The Secretaría was meant to counter the efforts of the Communist-sponsored Asociación de Jóvenes Antifascistas, the Asociació de la Dona Jove (young women's organization), and the Unión de Muchachas (girl's union) to engage in propaganda and political work among young people and, further, to provide programs of captación and capacitación for young women.[36]

Pepita viewed the creation of a special women's section in the FIJL as an abandonment of what she took to be the longstanding anarchist principle that struggles should be carried on jointly. She also saw it as a negation of the work Mujeres Libres was already doing. Why create a special women's department in the FIJL, she wondered, when there was already a libertarian group devoted to educating and preparing women of all ages?

Pepita's concerns were shared by others, both within and without Mujeres Libres. In the months after the decision was taken, the Secretariado Femenino sent out a stream of announcements addressing these concerns—explaining its goals and insisting that it meant neither to deny the significance of, nor to compete with, Mujeres Libres. However, since it defined its purpose in almost exactly the same terms as Mujeres Libres—the capacitación and education of young women—and since the activities it proposed to undertake—schools, apprenticeship programs, journals, discussion groups—were virtually identical, the argument was a difficult one to sustain.

Its *Circular no. 3* of November 1937, for example, argued that "there is no duality of functions, nor is there any basic competition between Mujeres Libres and Juventudes Libertarias." Mujeres Libres, the document asserted, was valuable as an organization, but one directed to the needs of *adult* women. The Secretariadas Femeninas, on the other hand, would address *young* women, challenging their marginalization and assuring that there would be women in the organization to replace the men who were constantly being called away. The language is virtually identical with that of Mujeres Libres, the sole difference being the claim that Mujeres Libres addressed adults whereas the Secretariado Femenino would be oriented to young people.[37] But since so many of the activists in Mujeres Libres were young people (Pepita, Soledad, Sara, Conchita, and many of their friends were in their mid to late teens at the beginning of the revolution), it seemed to many in Mujeres Libres

Many of the critiques Mujeres Libres circulated could have been meant for the education of its own agrupaciones (local groups) and CNT unions as well as for the AMA. After it had been rejected repeatedly by the national and regional committees of Mujeres Libres, the AMA began approaching individual agrupaciones to participate in its conferences and activities. A circular from Mujeres Libres' national committee to locals, dated May 23, 1938, warned them specifically not to be taken in by AMA propaganda.[9]

Mujeres Libres insisted that true unity must recognize diversity.[10] As Lucía Sánchez Saornil wrote, in response to an invitation from the AMA: "Mujeres Libres is not interested in 'feminine unity,' because that does not represent anything. We have called a thousand times for political and syndical unity, the only kind of unity that truly contributes to the cause . . . As long as differences [of politics and strategy] among the tendencies exist, a fusion of groups is impossible, because it is incompatible with human variety."[11] It was important that each organization should retain its "character and personality" and continue its work to further the war effort, the revolution, and women's emancipation. "Women's interests," Mujeres Libres argued, were neither so "clearly defined nor so universally agreed upon that, in themselves, they could form the basis for a single organization." True antifascist unity would require not the merging of all into one, but a recognition of the diversity of political views and a willingness to accept the autonomy of perspective and action of all the groups in the coalition. Mujeres Libres was not about to sacrifice its principles of direct action and spontaneous order to some vague and counterrevolutionary notion of "feminine unity."

The Libertarian Movement

This insistence on autonomy and on the recognition of diversity among women's groups paralleled Mujeres Libres' claims for organizational autonomy and the recognition of diversity within the larger libertarian context. Mujeres Libres had been prepared for a struggle with women's groups allied with other organizations, but it was not prepared for the resistance it encountered within the libertarian movement. Though aware of the sexism of men in movement organizations and of the failure of those organizations to deal adequately with women and women's issues, Mujeres Libres planned to work closely with both the CNT and the FAI on the local, regional, and national levels. It expected to be welcomed into the libertarian "family." On the local level, this expectation was partially fulfilled, but at the level of national organizations, Mujeres Libres was consistently disappointed.

Part of its disappointment may, in fact, have been a consesquence of the confusion evidently generated by its simultaneous insistence on inclusion and autonomy within the larger movement. Until its establishment as a national federation in August 1937, Mujeres Libres had consisted of a series of more or less independent agrupaciones. Mercedes Comaposada recalled that, at various times during the first half of 1937, she and Lucía had traveled to Valencia (the seat of the national government and the national committees of libertarian movement organizations) to request official recognition and support for Mujeres Libres.

> One time I had with me all sorts of pamphlets and records of all the different kinds of work we had done. I asked Marianet, "Why don't you recognize us as an organization?" And he said, "How can we recognize you as an organization? We know what you're doing, and you're doing it well. But until you come to us with an *organization*, that is, committees, regional committees, a national committee, people who are ready to serve in positions of responsibility, etc., there is nothing we can do."[12]

That conversation and others like it provided an impetus for calling a first national conference in August 1937, which brought together representatives of ninety local groups and established Mujeres Libres as a national organization.

The conference established a federal structure with provincial, regional, and national committees, a form of organization designed to provide maximum flexibility. Not coincidentally, it was a form based on the model of the CNT and the FAI, with which the members of Mujeres Libres were thoroughly familiar. In addition, the conference followed "accepted federal procedures" as these had been developed over the years in the CNT and the FAI. For example, rather than naming specific individuals to particular tasks, the conference named delegations (by locality), and the delegations, in turn, designated the individuals who would participate in the particular committee.[13] These practices clearly located the organization within the larger libertarian community.

Mujeres Libres identified itself ideologically with the goals and methods of the CNT and the FAI. At the same time, it jealously guarded its autonomy. Its initiators chose "Mujeres Libres" (free women), rather than "Mujeres Libertarias" (libertarian women), as its name, for example, to make clear that it had ideological connections to the libertarian movement, but was not a subsidiary organization.[14] The tension was also evident in the debate over the design for what was to be Mujeres Libres' membership card. After some discussion of the compañeras' "special fondness" for red and black (the colors of the CNT and FAI), it was agreed that the membership card should carry those colors—but not the letters "CNT-FAI." Although "we are a related organization, we

Communist women not only receive aid, but are also collecting money outside the country from women in factories. . . . Mujeres Libres is being left behind on all fronts."

> You must know that I have struggled for the emancipation of women for some years, so it is natural that I should be interested in Mujeres Libres. I am very surprised that our organizations CNT, FAI, and even the Juventudes have done so little to help them, and have shown so little interest. Don't you think, dear compañero, that it would also be in the interest of the CNT and of the FAI to assist Mujeres Libres as much as you can?[33]

Vázquez was quite defensive in his response, insisting that the CNT was "just as concerned about Mujeres Libres as you are" and that the libertarian movement had provided whatever assistance it could to Mujeres Libres—although, since it did not have the backing of a strong international organization, its financial capabilities were far inferior to those of the Communists. "I must, therefore, reject totally your claim that the CNT has not done everything possible for Mujeres Libres. It is true that the CNT has not been able to give it [Mujeres Libres] the millions that other organizations and parties can give to their women's organizations. And we have not done so, because we don't have them [the millions of pesetas]."[34] The CNT's resources *were* inferior to those of the Communist party. Nevertheless, as we will see, budgetary considerations were not the only factor in these decisions. The question of the autonomy of Mujeres Libres seems, in fact, to have been much more significant.

The Women's Secretariats of the FIJL

Questions of autonomy and inclusion came clearly to the fore in Mujeres Libres' relations with the FIJL. When the FIJL established a *Secretaría Femenina* (women's bureau) at the end of 1937, Mujeres Libres found itself in a directly competitive relationship. Pepita Carpena, who had long been a member of both Juventudes and of the CNT, and who had originally refused to join Mujeres Libres on the grounds that she saw no need for the separation of men and women in the struggle, described her reaction:

> I was active in the Juventudes. . . . They called a meeting and put forward the proposition to establish a Secretariado femenino inside the FIJL. It seems that the compañeros had this idea from the Communists, who were becoming quite powerful, and had established "women's sections" everywhere. Now, I had been committed to the emancipation of women from the beginning. But I accepted the prevailing view that the struggle should be carried out equally by men and women. So I didn't like this business of a "women's bureau" in the FIJL at all. . . . I said that I was totally opposed. Nevertheless, even though my group accepted the proposition, I

sessions in workshops and factories. But the CNT did not respond positively. Consequently, many training opportunities were taken over by the government, and the AMA and socialist unions were taking ready advantage of them. Mujeres Libres later requested that women identified by Mujeres Libres as potential militants be allowed an hour and a half off with pay, a few times a week, so that they could attend classes in "general culture and social preparation." This arrangement, they argued, would be in the interest of the movement, as well as of individual women, and would help to counter the effects of government (and communist-dominated) programs.[28] At this same time, the secretariat of the UGT in Barcelona was attempting to pressure its local unions to be more accepting of women workers trained in the Generalitat-sponsored institute.[29] Mujeres Libres' concern that other organizations were taking better advantage of the training programs thus seems well founded.

Mujeres Libres repeatedly requested financial assistance at both the regional and national levels. Noteworthy is a March 1937 letter to the Peninsular Committee of the FAI, in which Mujeres Libres identified itself as "Agrupación Mujeres Libres, FAI." The letter detailed some of its goals and activities, reporting that it had five hundred members, but was in desperate financial need. The Catalan Regional Committee, however, writing in response to this letter, met Mujeres Libres' request for eight thousand pesetas with a grant of only five hundred pesetas to support its work.[30] Three months later, Mercedes Comaposada, writing for the Secretariat of Propaganda of Mujeres Libres, again addressed the Peninsular Committee of the FAI, noting that Communist-sponsored organizations (all of which were receiving substantial financial assistance from both the Party and government ministries) were "making headway among women in the UGT and even in the CNT." In a statement that reveals a great deal about the way Comaposada thought Mujeres Libres was being perceived by the libertarian movement, she concluded, "Mujeres Libres arose in opposition to this, with the aim of educating the women our movement is so in need of—and not, as some compañeros misunderstand us, with intentions of separatism or of feminist agitation."[31]

Mujeres Libres frequently compared its position in the libertarian movement to that of AMA in the communist camp. One circular noted that, in addition to offering substantial financial support, a UGT transport workers' union had even presented a car to the AMA's Sección de Propaganda. "Comparing this with our own economic impotence brought tears of rage to our eyes. What we could do with even half of what they have! Just with what they spend on posters!"[32]

Emma Goldman took up the cause during one of her visits to Barcelona. Since Mujeres Libres had refused to dissolve itself into AMA, she wrote to Mariano Vázquez: "They receive no aid whatsoever, while the

are not a dependent of the others." Similarly, the official banner would be blue (for "optimism") with white letters, but would also carry a black-and-red stripe.[15]

The complexity of Mujeres Libres' own goals with respect to autonomy and inclusion was apparent. At the first meeting, the assembly voted to invite the relevant committees of the CNT and the FAI to send delegates to meetings of the regional and national committees of Mujeres Libres—in a nonvoting capacity—and to request that Mujeres Libres be permitted to send delegates (again, with no voting privileges) to meetings of the parallel committees of the CNT or FAI. The conference decided *not* to request that representatives from Mujeres Libres be accorded voting rights in the meetings of these other organizations because (a) they already had influence in those organizations through membership in unions (in the case of the CNT) and participation in anarchist agrupaciones (in the case of the FAI and FIJL); and (b) they did not want to run the risk of being bound by decisions taken by those organizations with which they might disagree. The scenario the conference discussed was: "Let us suppose, for example, that the CNT National Committee—which we would belong to—should decide, in opposition to our opinion, that our organization had lost its reason for existence and agreed, by majority vote, to dissolve it. What would be our position?"[16] In short, Mujeres Libres wanted to be included in congresses and in the deliberations that took place during them, but not to lose its independence.

Over the course of the next eighteen months, while insisting that it was "an integral part of the libertarian movement," Mujeres Libres continually asserted its autonomy. "Mujeres Libres," one statement argued,

> could have converted itself into an appendage of the union movement with respect to feminine preparation, transforming women into a receptacle of anarcho-syndicalism. . . . It could have converted itself into an annex or a "Women's section" of the FAI . . . but it didn't do this either. . . .
>
> Since those of us who were its "prime movers" were anarchists, we could not accede to a situation in which, within this specific organization, there would be individuals without a social formation; nor could we, as anarchists, convert those individuals into blind instruments [in the service of the movement] without contradicting our own anarchist principles.[17]

Despite its frustrations with movement organizations, Mujeres Libres continued to communicate its expectations for support and acceptance. It invited the FAI and CNT to send representatives to its congresses, hoping to demonstrate its membership in the libertarian community and to win legitimacy within it.[18]

The struggle for full organizational recognition was relentless. Representatives of Mujeres Libres often joined representatives of CNT and FAI when a car went out to the countryside on propaganda trips, marking shared goals and purposes in a symbolic way. Mujeres Libres further insisted that when the libertarian movement held rallies, a speaker from Mujeres Libres should be on the podium, along with those from the CNT, FAI, and FIJL. Announcements of such rallies in the press indicate that they were often successful. In preparation for the events commemorating the first anniversary of the death of Durruti, for example, the national committee of the CNT sent a circular to all the regional committees with instructions that, at each event, there should be five speakers, one from Mujeres Libres, one from SIA, one from FIJL, one from the CNT, and one from FAI.[19]

Nevertheless, I could find no other circulars from the National Committee following up on this one nor any documents of those organizations that mentioned either Mujeres Libres or SIA along with FAI and CNT as *equivalent* organizations. Further, Sara Berenguer Guillén reported that, when plans were announced for the second anniversary commemoration, there were no representatives from Mujeres Libres on the list of speakers. According to Sara, Soledad Estorach raised a fuss with the Catalan regional committee, demanding that representatives of Mujeres Libres also take part in the meetings. She succeeded in convincing the committee, but then they had to come up with speakers to go to rallies in towns and cities throughout Catalonia. Sara and Amada de Nó were among the young women who represented Mujeres Libres at some of these gatherings. Sara was to go Hospitalet and Granollers, though she was not able to speak at the former because the highway had been cut by fascist bombs and the event was cancelled. Amada went to Gerona. To deal with her nervousness, she memorized an article Soledad had written for a newspaper and recited it en route.[20]

Within this complex and often confusing context, Mujeres Libres did receive some recognition and support from other movement organizations. Much of the anarchist press seems to have been at least supportive, and at times enthusiastic, about Mujeres Libres' work and accomplishments. *Acracia*, the anarchist daily in Lérida, referred to the work of Mujeres Libres with some regularity, usually in the most laudatory of terms.[21] *Tierra y Libertad*, *Solidaridad Obrera*, *Tiempos Nuevos*, and a variety of other periodicals also made frequent reference to the work and activities of Mujeres Libres.

Locally, Mujeres Libres received help from individual CNT unions. Many locals participated actively in the apprenticeship programs and readily opened the doors (and temporarily stopped the assembly lines) of collectivized factories to Mujeres Libres' teams of speakers. There were also examples of direct support. When Pepita Carpena's compañero was killed at the front, the metalworkers' union, of which he had been a member and with which she had been involved since her youth, paid his weekly salary to her, so that she could continue her work with Mujeres Libres. Some local unions and many soldiers at the front also sent regular contributions to Mujeres Libres in support of its work.[22] At least in some communities, Mujeres Libres seems to have achieved the recognition it desired: being included *as an organization* as part of the larger libertarian movement. Minutes of meetings of the local federation of ateneos libertarios in Madrid, between July 1937 and April 1938, for example, report the attendance of Mujeres Libres, the local FAI, the local federation of CNT unions, and the local federation of the FIJL.[23]

Mujeres Libres sent a steady stream of requests for financial and other substantive assistance to the CNT and FAI at the national and regional levels. It appealed to them as "one more member of the libertarian family" in need of financial support to carry out work that was critical to all libertarian organizations. Mujeres Libres requested financial support and facilities for regional congresses (one held in Barcelona in February 1938, another held there in October 1938), for publications and propaganda work, for maintaining offices, and for salaries for members of the regional committee. Both the CNT and the FAI, particularly in Catalonia, seemed quite prepared to provide meeting space, food, and support for these conferences. In addition, between July and October of 1938, both the Catalan Regional Committee of the FAI and the National Committee of the CNT offered small but regular subventions to Mujeres Libres, which subsidized the printing of issue no. 13 of *Mujeres Libres*.[24] While the financial contributions usually fell short of what Mujeres Libres had requested, rarely was the organization turned away empty-handed.[25] Although little of the correspondence among the organizations indicates that Mujeres Libres was treated as an *equal* member of the libertarian family, it was certainly treated as a member, even if as a younger and perhaps immature sister.

Mujeres Libres nevertheless expressed frustration at not being treated with respect and seriousness by members of these organizations. All too often, individual compañeros referred to Mujeres Libres in sexually degrading or derogatory ways: calling them Mujeres Liebres, for example. ("Liebre" means hare; the term was obviously one of opprobrium, implying that they jumped from bed to bed like rabbits. This labeling of female activists as sexual deviants was not unique to Spain.)[26] Mujeres Libres repeatedly appealed to both the regional and national committees of the CNT and the FAI, asking them to "rein in" the hostility of their local groups and encourage them to provide direct support.[27]

Mujeres Libres also sought support from regional and national organizations of the libertarian movement. For example, in 1937, Mujeres Libres requested of the National Committee of the CNT that local unions regularly allow women time for extra apprenticeship training