

WI!RE Women
in Resistance

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PEDAGOGICAL

DOSSIER



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Amb la col·laboració de:



The Project

This Pedagogical dossier is based on the project **Women in Resistance. Reshaping the narratives on Female Anti Totalitarian Resistance in Europe** (2023-2024) which has been funded by the CERV program (Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values) of the European Commission (EU).

The **WiRE project**, *Women in Resistance*, was conceived with the aim of placing the role of women –both as agents and victims– at the core of the current historical narratives of **Resistance in Europe**, thus helping to reshape both the discourse of democratic memory and the values associated with it. The WiRE project not only aims at identifying women who participated in several resistance movements in Europe, but also seeks to reconstruct and make public the memory of **Women in Resistance**. For many of these women, resistance became –in many ways– a living condition. At the same time, WiRE intends to propose **an alternative to the very concept of Resistance** currently ingrained in Europe. Therefore, it seeks to bring forward a narrative that does not necessarily portray the Resistance as an armed or violent movement, and that identifies women as active and conscious subjects, rather than merely victims or heroines.

In the words of the project coordinator **Javier Rodrigo** – Doctor in History and researcher of the ICREA Academy: “The Resistance was not only armed, nor only male”. Thus, the guide you have in your hands intends to introduce this pedagogical objective in the classroom through the lives of 12 resistance fighters. These women, born all around Spain, help us delve into the harsh reality of post-war Spain and the context of World War II through their individual actions.

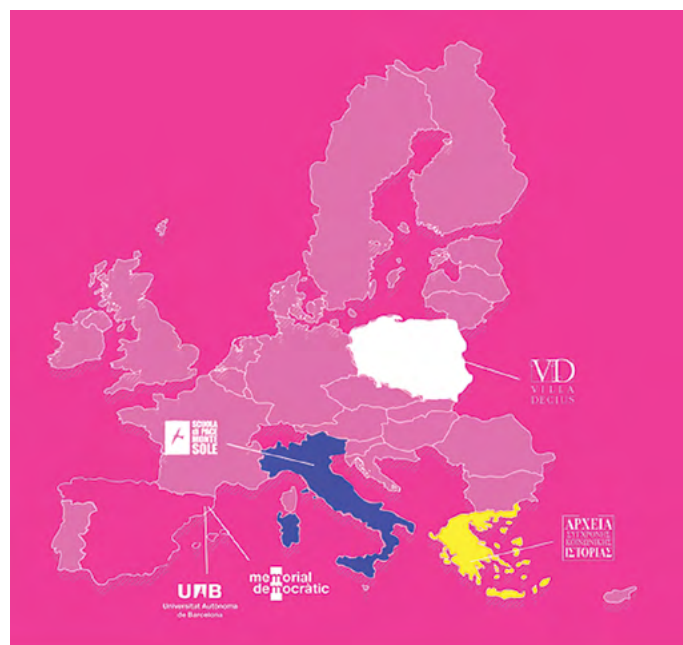
The project aims to visibilize and redeem the role of women in Resistance movements in Europe, so often concealed or belittled in historiography. This feminist perspective is therefore essential to understand the complexity of the historical processes studied below.

The **WiRE consortium** is integrated by the **Autonomous University of Barcelona** (UAB), in its role as coordinator, and **Memorial Democràtic**, representing Spain; the **Villa Decius Association** from Poland, la **Scuola di Pace di Monte Sole** in Italy; and the *Contemporary Social History Archives* (ASKI) in Greece.



For two years, the above mentioned institutions will organise **activities** aimed at drawing a link between academic knowledge in relation to the role of women in Resistance movements and promoting historical awareness among citizens. Women who participated in Resistance movements in Europe will be identified through contributions made by the students participating in the activities around the project, and their memories will be reconstructed and made public in an **online exhibition**.

The aim of the guide below is to share with the educational community the biographies of some of the women who participated in different Resistance movements in Europe.



TEACHING

GUIDELINES

This educational guide is divided into **3 sections** organised so as to begin with general aspects such as the **historical context** using audiovisual materials, and then delve into specific ones by **analysing several biographies of resistant women** –especially developed for this project– and finally doing further research in order to **write new life stories**.

Depending on the time available, teachers can choose to either work on one section, as a one-off exercise, or develop all the proposed sections at once.

SECTION I: Comparative analysis through two documentaries. This section introduces the concept of Resistance through a documentary while proposing insight dynamics using a **comparative approach** (France/ Spain). It invites us to understand the diversity of conditions, contingencies and acknowledgments of Resistance fighters on both sides of the Pyrenees.

SECTION II: Reading biographies and performing a critical analysis on Resistance from a female perspective. This section proposes an in-depth approach to the subject through specific case studies, in particular **through the life stories of 12 women**. This approach helps us gain a deeper insight on the scope and amplitude of the concept of resistant (typologies) while reaching a better understanding on the historical causality of specific events by empathising with real cases.

SECTION III: Researching and writing a biography. This section is conceived as a way of conclusion to the knowledge previously acquired and invites us to engage in **historical research** by working with historical sources, searching for new biographies or creating new ones to introduce new historical figures. It also intends to prompt contact with historiographical research and favour further insight on the phenomenon of the iconization of the Resistance.

In each of the three sections, the activities proposed can be addressed either individually, jointly or in groups. The materials of this guide have been designed for Secondary School (Year 11) and Baccalaureate students (Years 12 and 13)..

CONTENTS AND SKILLS IN

SECONDARY SCHOOL (YEAR 11)¹: GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

¹ Decree 175/2022, of 27 September, on the organisation of the Basic Education Curriculum. Government of Catalonia.

This educational guide intends to bridge with a concrete reality and invites students to gain insight and build on a collaborative and active attitude within the framework of an array of **learning situations** intended to delve into specific skills, particularly:

SDG5. Gender equality. Building gender equality and fostering women and girls empowerment.

Skill 1. To research and process information aimed at supporting the interpretation of both the present and the past by using the procedures of historical and geographical research, particularly the critical analysis of data from analog and digital sources, in order to transform the outcomes into knowledge and communicate them in different formats.

Skill 2. To investigate and put forward arguments on relevant social problems –both local and global– with the aim of developing a critical thinking respectful to differences, able to help build an individual and collective identity, and to bring forward a fairer and more inclusive present and future.

Skill 3. To be able to interpret the changes and continuities of historical processes by developing research projects and using primary and secondary sources in order to elucidate the problems of today's world and make proposals aimed at fostering peace, well-being and sustainable development.

Skill 5. To carry out a critical analysis of the mechanisms regulating the life of societies throughout history until today and of the construction of democratic systems, in order to participate in a respectful and committed way in community activities aimed at promoting coexistence, social cohesion and equity.

Skill 8. To analyse different ways of living and different social facts and phenomena –past and present– from a gender perspective; to commit to equal opportunities, effective participation and shared responsibility of all people in society and the environment; and to overcome stereotypes and reject all forms of discrimination and violence.

The main subject addressed in the present educational guide is intended to provide a general context or framework aimed at influencing the **knowledge** gathered on this particular subject. Knowledge is thus understood as the set of information, skills, values and attitudes that help us develop skill-based learning. In particular:

The main challenges of today's world

- Social science research techniques and methods.
- Global and local.

Societies and territories

- Research in social sciences.
- Reliability of sources.
- Historical awareness.
- Transformation and revolution.
- The construction of democracies.
- Conflicts and violence in today's world.
- Catalonia and Spain in the Contemporary Era.
- Gender perspective.
- Democratic memory.

CONTENTS AND SKILLS IN

SECONDARY SCHOOL (12 YEARS AND 13)²: HISTORY

² Decree 171/2022, of 20 September, on the organisation of the Secondary Education curriculum. Government of Catalonia.

Skill 1. To apply the procedures of historical research by formulating questions and analysing research sources in order to interpret the past; to form one's judgement by contrasting information and developing critical thinking.

Skill 2. To carry out a critical analysis and compare the different political regimes in the contemporary era as well as the development of the rule of law in order to participate in a respectful and committed way in community activities aimed at fostering coexistence, social cohesion and equity, thus enhancing the principles of democracy.

Skill 5. To analyse Spanish society as well as its changes and continuities over time, in relation to the evolution of the population, the different levels and ways of living, working, social movements and conflicts, in order to assess progress and constraints on the way towards equity, justice and social cohesion.

Skill 6. To carry out a critical analysis on the role of beliefs and ideologies in the evolution of social articulation, the use of power and in the development of identities and political projects in order to understand the complexity of the contemporary era and to value and respect coexistence in a plural and democratic society.

Skill 7. To analyse the dynamics of interdependence between different agents in the context of a globalised world to endorse cooperation commitments, promote solidarity and propose alternatives to local and global problems based on the culture of peace and the attainment of a more supportive and sustainable world.

Skill 8. To analyse historical processes and phenomena both from a gender perspective and from research on the feminist movement in order to make women's presence visible in history, promote attitudes in defence of equality and reject any form of discrimination and violence.

Skill 9. To analyse the cultural and material heritage and to value it as an expression of plural, individual and collective memories, contributing to its recovery, preservation and

promotion as a key element in shaping identities and uniting communities.

The main subject addressed in the present educational guide is intended to provide a general context or framework aimed at influencing the knowledge gathered on this particular subject. Knowledge is thus understood as the set of information, skills, values and attitudes that help us develop skill-based learning. In particular:

Historical approach

- To use a variety of historical sources to gather knowledge about the recent past; contrasting and critically assessing different sources of information, including media-produced, on a single fact or phenomenon, by evaluating different solutions and alternatives to problems.
- To analyse texts, interpret and produce maps, diagrams and summaries; to create graphics and to interpret images through accessible digital media.
- To identify the economic, social, political and cultural components involved in historical processes and to analyse the interrelationships that exist between them in order to account for the facts with appropriate explanations; to analyse historiographical interpretations of certain relevant processes and events in the history of Spain.
- To apply research methodologies to the analysis and interpretation of relevant social problems, both individually and in groups, by using a specific historical lexicon; to use historical arguments when interpreting facts and phenomena.
- To apply social science research methods to the problematized and multi-causal analysis of surrounding phenomena and their links with global phenomena; to draw relationships between the general historical chronology and personal, family and community history.

- To assess the role of people, both individually and collectively, as subjects of history and to foster historical empathy, especially with minority groups.

Societies in time

- To interpret changes in the living conditions of different social groups through the lens of gender; to discuss the mechanisms of domination, gender roles, activity spaces and scenarios of women's sociability during specific historical episodes of the surrounding environment.
- To analyse the context of the military uprising and the main phases of the Spanish Civil War; to draw relations with the international situation: the rise of totalitarianism and fascism, World War II and the Holocaust.
- To analyse the situation in Catalonia during the conflict: war, revolution and the situation of the civilian population in the rear; to provide a reasoned account of the war's outcome and the consequences of the conflict: repression, exile and resistance.
- To analyse political, ideological and social repression all over Spain as well as the repression of personal identity; to describe and assess the evolution of the different forms of opposition to the Franco regime and to acknowledge the role of historical memory in relation to the struggle for democracy.

Challenges of today's world

- To debate on the challenges of today's democracy and to address the need for individual and collective commitment to democratic institutions; to acknowledge the values of plurality and equality and to reject discriminatory and violent behaviours identified in the case studies.

Civic commitment

- To identify individual and collective protagonists of women's emancipation and to acknowledge equality policies, progress and unresolved challenges.
- To acknowledge the contributions of women in different areas (social, economic, political, cultural, etc.) as well as in changing mindsets.



INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT ON RESISTANCE

What is Resistance?

The **RAE** (*Real Academia Española*, Royal Spanish Academy) defines resistance as:

3. f.: A group of **people** who, usually secretly, **violently opposes the invaders** of a territory or a **dictatorship**.

The **IEC** (*Institut d'Estudis Catalans*, Catalan Studies Institute) defines it, among others, as:

6. 1. f.: Opposition to the **invading forces** of a foreign power or to the **power established** in one's own country when it becomes **totalitarian and unjust**.

Resistance is certainly a foundational concept for contemporary Europe. This transnational phenomenon acted both as a basis and as a symbolic adhesive for many countries after **World War II**. In Italy, France, Greece or the former Yugoslavia, resistance was a very concrete, symbolic, political, military and national reality, and it later became a founding myth of their contemporary constitutions and states. However, this was not the case in Spain, after the collapse of its political and cultural structures.



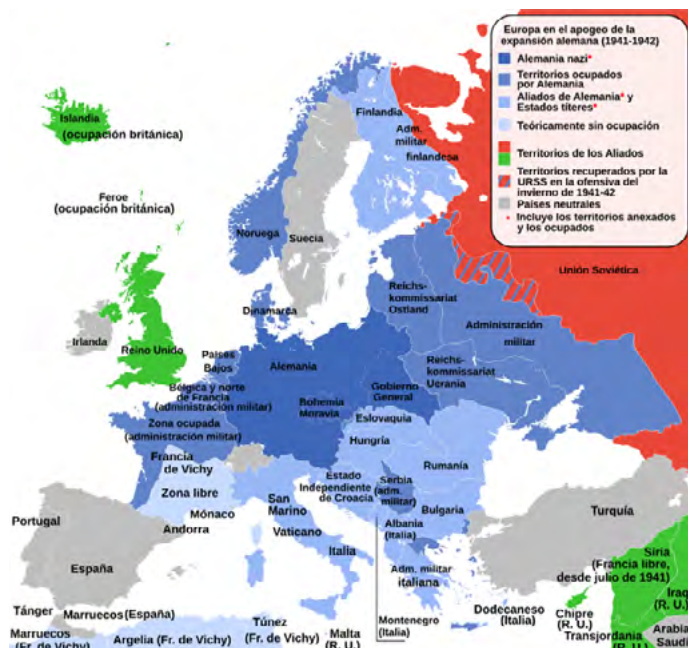
Group of Resistance fighters in Haute Savoie (France).
Source: Wikipedia. CC BY-NC 4.0

When we talk about Resistance we refer to a set of **phenomena related to the opposition to the Axis occupiers**, mostly involving **armed resistance and sabotage, either against invaders** or national collaborationists, and against the backdrop of World War II. Resistance is commonly understood within the framework of **national resistance** against a foreign occupier, notwithstanding the political nature of any collective action, even if ultimately its actions may drift towards individual or group events subject to complex logics and contingent conditions and limits. The Resistance movement should ultimately be **understood as an armed opposition** –in many cases victorious– **against the occupation of the Axis**.



Nazi occupation in Greece.
Source: Wikipedia. CC BY-SA 3.0

Almost all countries in the conflict have examples of groups of **guerrillas, partisans or Resistance fighters** who fought against the forces of the **Third Reich**. Among them were **Yugoslav partisans** (*Narodnooslobodilacka vojska and partizanski odredi Jugoslavije* or People's Liberation Army) under the command of Josip Broz "Tito" (1892-1980); or **Soviet partisans** in the context of the Nazi advance on the Eastern Front; or the Italian partisan **Resistenza partigiana**, that ended up integrated into the *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale* against the occupation; and the *Repubblica di Salò*, the last stronghold of Benito Mussolini (1883-1943). However, these were not the only ways to resist, as shown in **the case of Spain**.



Map the maximum extent of Nazi occupation in Europe (1941-1942). Source: Wikipedia. CC BY-SA 4.0

But first, returning to the concept, in the words of **Javier Rodrigo**³ –and as the most innovative studies on the subject have indicated– **Resistance can be understood not only as a political, armed and military movement against the invader** but also as a multifaceted social process involving a combination of situations, opportunities and, naturally, also individual decisions, in the context of a specific historical contingency to which we will refer later.



Soviet propaganda poster on sabotaging. (Source: Wikipedia)



Italian partisan in Florence, in 1944. (Source: Wikipedia). CC BY-NC 4.0.

The **Spanish case** is particularly interesting, since it began earlier (1936-1939) and it coexisted with the other resistance movements that emerged during World War II. Therefore, not only it influenced but was also strongly influenced by them (1939-1949). Once the war was over, the Spanish resistance movement continued until the fifties (1949-1952) in an **irregular war against the Guardia Civil police force**. Actually, the second part of the RAE definition above tries to do justice to this resistance to the **Franco dictatorship**.

The Spanish case is a fundamental chapter in the context of the **European civil war**⁴ between fascism and anti-fascism. And this chapter begins well before World War II, with the uprising of **July 18 1936**. At first, during the summer months and before the conflict escalated into a total war in November 1936, this “irregular” war led to a myriad of historical and personal experiences that would later have continuity over time, even beyond the Spanish borders. For example, the **International Brigades**, whose international volunteers – fully aware of the consequences of the rebels’ advance and the international alliances of General Franco– participated in the civil war not only in defence of the Republic, but because of what could happen to their own countries as a result of the rise of a certain ideology.



International Brigades flag (Source: Wikipedia)

Far from the sense of triumph prevailing in other countries, **defeat, surviving repression and official silence** marked the Spanish case. Once the war was over, any opposing movement was silenced and classified as a crime of **banditry or terrorism** (public order) by the Franco regime, and over time the idea of resistance in Spain gradually drifted away from its European counterparts. In some places, resistance movements emerged immediately after such places fell into insurgent hands, and the fear of repression caused many people to flee to the mountains in order to survive. Most Resistance networks continued to operate after the Republic fell and were internally and externally reorganised, participating in and drawing from other movements such as the French Resistance.

⁴ More information on the idea of European civil war in: TRAVERSO, Enzo. *A Sangre y Fuego. De la guerra civil europea* (1914.1945). Valencia, Publicacions de la Universitat de Valencia, 2007; and also RODRIGO, Javier. “La guerra civil. La España de 1936 y las guerras civiles europeas (1917-49)” in RODRIGO, Javier. (ed.) *Políticas de la violencia. Europa, siglo xx*. Zaragoza, Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2014. pp. 145- 190

³ RODRIGO, Javier “Ni tan sols armada, ni només masculina: formes de resistència (femenina) a l'Europa d'Entreguerres” in *Temps i Espais de Memòria*, Memorial Democràtic, núm. 08, 2024 (“Not only armed or only male: forms of (female) resistance in Europe between the wars”.



Members of Centuria Errico Malatesta formed by Italian anarchists. (Source: Wikipedia). CC BY-NC 4.0.



The main Maquis operation areas in Spain. Source: Wikipedia. CC BY-SA 4.0

The Spanish case was also strongly marked by **exile**. The idea that, once the Axis forces would be defeated, their defeat could lead to the fall of Franco, encouraged many exiled Spaniards to participate in the Resistance with the hope that, after that, they would be able to return home. Meanwhile, in Spain, while Resistance fighters waited for news from the outside, the regime silenced their actions by censoring the press and masking them as banditry. The Guardia Civil was assigned the task of continuing the “civil war”⁵, although “irregularly”, in order to stop any resistance activities in the form of sabotage in the different locations where the **Maquis** operated.



Spanish republican exiles arriving at the Argelès-sur-Mer camp. (Source: Wikipedia). CC BY-SA 4.0



Areas where the Maquis operated in Catalonia, guerrilla points of action and invasion attempt area of Vall d'Aran. Source: Wikipedia. CC BY-SA 4.0



Image of Sierra Morena, one of the Maquis main hiding places. Source: Wikipedia. CC BY-SA 4.0

⁵ More on this long civil war idea in: FERNÁNDEZ. *La guerra partisana en España (1936-1952)*. Doctoral thesis, UAB (Autonomous University of Barcelona), 2022.

The decision to resist **was not always heroic or politically motivated** but often took (and still takes) many forms. Resistance **can be armed or unarmed, active or passive, politically motivated or not** (linked to an ideology or movement), **and it can certainly be violent or not**. Resistance has often become a form of survival for societies, families and individuals. Therefore, it is not always armed, and it is not always national. Of course the personal experiences of Resistance fighters, whether armed or not, were pervaded with the obvious gender differences that prevail in diffuse movements, variable human geographies, military draft and mobilisation systems, and the access or not to weapons by the subjects of the past. **Resistance must therefore be rephrased as resistances** and –as Rodrigo puts it– these resistances must be read through an imperative and obvious lens: **gender**.



Photo of Simone Segouin (1925-2023), French Resistance fighter. Source: Wikipedia. CC BY-NC 4.0.

In order to understand the variety of approaches regarding the Resistance in Europe, it is of utmost importance **to recognise women as historical actors in their own right**. In classical historiography, resistance usually refers to something men do, and women are often relegated to the background and given a secondary and subsidiary role. In addition, resistance is restricted to armed operations, to mobilisation and military or political organisations. But the reality is that women actively participated, some acting as a **support** to organised resistance movements while others –many of them– were **armed**. The latter were women who, in spite of not being allowed to enlist in the regular armed forces, actively participated in the irregular war, the partisan war that spread across Europe. And of course, as the existing information shows in the case of Spain, Greece or Italy, when the Resistance was **disarmed**, women played a fundamental role –as pointed out again by Rodrigo. However,

it is precisely because the role held by these women was kept away from the focus of direct military operations and was of a clandestine nature –since the purpose of the movement itself was to remain hidden– that they are difficult to find and trace back by current historiography.



Plaque in Paris in recognition of Neus Català (1915-2019) Spanish republican, Resistance fighter and deported. Source: Wikipedia. CC BY-SA 4.0



Young couple members of the Democratic Army of Greece, a partisan army active during the Greek Civil War. Source: Wikipedia. CC BY-NC 4.0.

In **Spain**, only 100 to 150 women are believed to have joined armed guerrillas, but their **role as liaison and support was crucial**. The so-called “New Francoist State” repressed all actions of cooperation with the Resistance, thus forcing these women to put their very lives at risk in order to take part in resistance movements. Furthermore, they ended up filling in a **hybrid space between Resistance fighters and victims**, since most of the women of fugitives and guerrillas suffered illegal detention in police stations or in prisons, and often became victims of sexual abuse or physical and mental torture. However, and due to the specificity of the Spanish case, which is directly linked to the Republican defeat, women were never condemned for being “resistance fighters” but rather for assisting rebellion

or banditry, a circumstance that has often complicated the work of historians.

As regards to the Spanish Resistance, and in relation to women who joined other movements, the prominence of exile stands out, as does the role they played in the French Resistance, a role that was widely recognized after the victory of the Allies.

The present educational guide has tried to address this twofold nature through the lives of **12 Resistance women**. Their experiences allow us to delve into all kinds of different realities: armed and unarmed resistance, active and passive, motivated by actions of a political nature or not; and often unfolding in different countries, sometimes simultaneously or in interconnected actions that give proof of the transnational nature of these movements. These 12 biographies try to bring us closer to many of the concepts previously introduced through different life stories with different origins, ages, motivations and fates, although sharing one thing in common: **the actions of resistance carried out by these women in a variety of ways have inevitably lead us to look for an alternative to the widespread and very concept of Resistance in Europe.**



OBJECTIVES

- To understand the historical framework of post-war Spain and Nazi occupation in France; to identify the main events and factors defining these two periods.
- To research and analyse how women participated in the Resistance, both in Spain and France; to identify the different roles that women took on, whether as fighters, liaisons, logistical organisers or other.
- To analyse and disseminate the lives and Resistance activities of women victims of Franco's violence in the years following the Spanish Civil War.
- To understand the risks and difficulties women faced when joining the Resistance; to identify the specific challenges they faced and finally overcame in this specific historical context.
- To explore lesser-known stories of women who played a significant role in the Resistance, emphasising the diversity of their experiences and roles.
- To develop research and critical analysis skills using historical and narrative sources.
- To encourage reflection on how history has portrayed or ignored women's contributions to the Resistance.
- To analyse the importance of anti-totalitarian female resistance as a way of developing critical awareness with regards to the present times and in relation to narratives inherited from the past.
- To develop oral presentation and communication skills.
- To foster an empathetic understanding of women's experiences in the Resistance.
- To reflect on how all these events have affected the lives of the people involved.
- To promote gender awareness and equality as an integral part of historical understanding.

BEFORE WE GET STARTED.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT IT?

These prior study activities are intended to bring out the knowledge of students in relation to the Spanish Civil War, Nazism, World War II and the Resistance. Depending on their knowledge on the subject, the teacher will intervene to help provide proper context and guarantee that the subject is properly understood.

1. KPSI Grid (Knowledge and Prior Study Inventory)

Concept	I do not know	I understand some of it	I understand it well, but I don't know how to explain it	I know it and I can explain it to a fellow classmate
Civil war				
Francoism				
Francisco Franco				
Exile, Retreat				
Maquis				
Guerilla				
World War II				
Adolf Hitler				
Occupation				
Nazism				
Deportation				
Resistance				
Escape network				

2. Quiz: What do we know about the Resistance?

Concept	I do not know	I understand some of it	I understand it well, but I don't know how to explain it	I know it and I can explain it to a fellow classmate
Have you ever heard about the resistance movements in this period of time? What do you think they were based on? Why did they happen?				
What does being a resistance fighter mean to you? Explain what types of resistance you consider potentially possible.				
What were the living conditions of Resistance fighters such as the Maquis and the guerrillas? How did this influence their decisions and actions?				
Do you think women participated in the anti-fascist Resistance? In which way?				
Do you think they faced specific challenges or dangers compared to men?				
Have you ever heard of any resistance woman?				
What challenges did women face after the end of resistance movements? Were they recognized for their contributions?				

Answer whether you think the sentences below are **True or False**. As for the ones you marked as false, correct them to make them true:

Concepte	True	False
After the Spanish Civil War, resistance against the Franco regime continued, with many republicans continuing to fight from the mountains and through several incursions from France in a guerrilla war.		
The history of the Maquis is well known and contains no gaps, as it has been widely documented.		
The anti-Franco resistance was mainly limited to men, and women did not play a relevant role in this context		
The role of women in the anti-Franco resistance was focused solely on acting as liaisons, couriers and informants, without having any direct involvement in armed activities.		
The Spanish exiles believed that, by helping to defeat Hitler, there was a possibility of ending the Franco regime.		

SECTION I.

Comparative analysis through two documentaries.

1-3 Sessions. 1 for each documentary and 1 to work on them

Next, we propose to explore in detail the crucial role Spanish women played in the resistance movements. To do this, we will use a multimedia approach, focusing on the **viewing of a documentary** (or some extracts) that will offer us an immersive and impactful view on different types of resistance actions accomplished by different women. After watching it, we will explore in depth the roles and contributions of women in these movements, encouraging **reflection and debate** on the part of students.

This activity aims not only to expand knowledge on these periods, but also to highlight the importance of women as active agents in the construction of history, thus challenging historiographical silences and the social and political limitations of their time. The proposed documentaries bring us closer to the Resistance from two different but interrelated contexts:

On the one hand, **post-war Spain** was marked by the consolidation of the Franco regime and by a period of repression and restriction of individual freedoms. In this context several resistance groups known as “Maquis” emerged. They were composed of individuals who fought clandestinely against the so-called Spanish new state or *Nuevo Estado*. Within these movements, women played a crucial role, challenging gender stereotypes and contributing in different ways to the struggle.



Film poster of *508 dies* (2023). Amical d'Antics Guerrillers de Catalunya.

Directed by: Marc Planagumà
Language: Catalan
Year: 2023
Length: 51 minutes

This was the case of **Cristina Zalba** (1909-2001), a woman who, from her own home, only by providing care and without even needing to be armed, fought against the Franco regime. Through the film *508 dies*¹, the **Amical de Guerrillers**, a memory organisation that works in the region of La Garrotxa, brings us closer to the events that happened between January 1945 and June 1946 at *La Sala* farmhouse, where Cristina Zalba lived with her family and where for 508 days they kept a Maquis hidden.

¹ PLANAGUMÀ M. (director). (2023) *508 dies* [Film and video online]. Amical d'Antics Guerrillers de Catalunya <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qL3mCB8YR-KO&t=3s> (Teaser) To obtain the link to access the full documentary write to: educacio.memorialdemocratic@gencat.cat

On the other hand, during **World War II** the Nazi occupation in France created a context of defiance and internal resistance against invaders and collaborationists. The French Resistance was a brave and multifaceted response to German occupation, and women emerged as key figures of this movement. Whether as spies, messengers or directly participating in acts of sabotage, women played crucial roles that ultimately led to success. The exiled Spaniards lived this new chapter as the continuation of their own war and considered the fall of fascism as a mandatory step before being able to return to their country and overthrow Franco. Therefore, their participation in the French Resistance was to be crucial.



Cristina Zalba. Family archive. Photo courtesy of Sònia Sala.



Poster of *Heroínas olvidadas: Españolas en la resistencia* (2023). RTVE.



Fotografía de Conxita Grangé. Memorial Democràtic.

Directed by: Pedro Callejas
Language: Spanish
Year: 2023
Length: 58 minutes

This was the case of women like **Conxita Grangé** (1925-2019), who did not hesitate to enlist in the Spanish internal resistance movement with her family, honouring her commitment even after being deported. Deprived of her freedom, she endured the inhumane conditions of Nazi camps and sabotaged the weapons and materials that the Nazis forced them to manufacture or control in the *kommandos*. The documentary ***Heroínas olvidadas: Españolas en la resistencia***², directed by Pedro Callejas with the co-production of RTVE, tells her story as well as that of other Resistance women who took part in the guerrillas and in the escape or information networks.

² CALLEJAS P. (director) (2023) *Heroínas Olvidadas. Españolas en la resistencia* [Film; online video] RTVE Somos Documentales. You can access it through the link: <https://www.rtve.es/play/videos/somos-documentales/heroinas-olvidadas-espanolas-resistencia/6834608/>

Some questions for further insight after watching the documentaries

- Which were the roles women played in resistance movements, whether in Spain or France?
- How did women contribute in distinct but interrelated ways to the struggle against repression and occupation?
- How was the traditional role of women challenged and transcended in these movements?
- What examples of women who challenged established gender stereotypes during this period of time stand out?
- Who was Cristina Zalba? What did she do? Why do you think she did it? In the context of post-war Spain, in the midst of Francoism, what is your opinion on what she did?
- What unconventional forms of resistance does this story highlight?
- How were the experiences of women like Conxita Grangé in the French Resistance and in the Nazi camps?
- What challenges did these women face and how could they be true to their commitment despite the difficult circumstances they faced?
- How could these women keep their commitment to resistance despite threats and repression? Were they influenced by their families in this struggle?
- How do family dynamics differ or coincide in the Spanish and French resistance movements?
- What were the consequences that women who participated in these resistance movements had to face, either on a personal or social level?
- What lessons can we learn from their courage and engagement in their fight against repression and occupation?
- How are post-war Spain and World War II in France different and similar contexts in relation to women's participation in the Resistance?
- How do you think this topic has been dealt with in History? Are there differences between Spain and France? What do you think about the recognition of these women in our present society?

Group work proposal

The aim of this **group work** proposal is to encourage collaboration, discussion and research when delving into the topics addressed by the documentaries on female resistance in post-war Spain and World War II in France. The proposal is designed to work in groups of three to four students and includes several activities that will allow participants to thoroughly explore the contents of the documentaries.

Step 1: Viewing and initial discussion:

- 1. Watching the documentaries:** First, the students are invited to watch the two documentaries proposed above on women's resistance. Each documentary can take up one class session or it can be divided into two sessions, depending on its length. Another possibility is to watch them through previously selected cuts.
- 2. Group discussion:** After the viewing, students will get in small groups to discuss their initial impressions on the topics addressed in the documentaries, and will note the most relevant points, giving a particular attention to female resistance in post-war Spain and World War II in France.

Step 2: Comparative analysis:

- 1. Identifying common themes and differences:** following the synthesis the students will have prepared in the previous point, as well as the answers to the questions proposed after the viewing, each group will prepare a document listing the similarities and differences between the female resistance movements in post-war Spain and World War II in France. Each point must be supported with examples, biographies and stories. Finally, they will be asked to propose a suggestive headline as a way of conclusion to the debate on the topic addressed (resistance in post-war Spain and World War II in France).

Step 3: Group discussion:

- 1. Questions and discussion:** Each group will present to the rest of the class the headline chosen and will explain it using as a reference the document on similarities and differences previously drafted. Then a group debate will be held where the whole class will reflect on the answers, headlines and approaches of each group.



**Do you want to pursue research
on this topic?** ●●●●●●●●

Step 4: Pursuing research:

- 1. Choosing a research topic:** Each group will choose a specific topic related to women's resilience that they wish to explore in more depth. Topics may cover issues such as the role of women in propaganda, their influence on the preservation of historical memory or their contribution to escape networks.
- 2. Research and preparation of presentations:** During one or two sessions, groups will conduct detailed research on their topic and prepare a presentation to share with the class. The presentation may include graphics, images and relevant quotes from the documentaries.

Step 5: Presentation and discussion:

- 1. Presentation of results:** Each group will present their research to the class. Time will be allocated for questions and comments from the rest of the class.
- 2. Discussion:** After the presentations, time will be set aside for students to reflect on their own research and learning process as a group. Each group will briefly share their impressions of how their perceptions of women's resistance have changed after exploring the chosen themes.

SECTION II.

Reading biographies and conducting a critical analysis on women's resistance

1-2 sessions

Reading biographies and working with images will allow students to connect with the personal stories of **twelve women** who participated in the Resistance in one way or another and who played different roles in resistance movements both in Spain and France.

The activity proposed below provides an enriching opportunity to **explore little-known histories and give a greater visibility to often overlooked contributions** to resistance movements through reading, working with images and promoting discussion, thus developing a deeper understanding of gender roles in the historical contexts examined.

Each biography or excerpt can be assigned to a group of students to encourage their participation and discussion. Students will have to point out the motivations, challenges and contributions of the women they have researched on. What parallels and differences can they identify in their roles, challenges and impacts? What learnings and understandings have they gained about the role of women in these movements?

Another interesting activity may be to produce a **map** with the locations and connections between the different women studied and their roles in the resistance movements they were part of. This activity may contribute to adding a spatial and geographic dimension to the understanding of resistance.

Educational guide:

Objectives: To introduce students to the concept of resistance and the diversity of its manifestations; to foster historical empathy and to seek connections between the past and the present.

Proposal: Using the biographies attached to this guide as a starting point, students are asked to read and analyse them thoroughly while simultaneously answering the questions below (the following template can be expanded or reduced depending on the time available or the objectives defined):

- **Introducing the Resistance fighter: Name, date and place of birth**
- **Description of the historical context**
- **Description of the resistance actions she carried out**
- **What are the main highlights of her actions?**
- **Why do you think she can be considered as a Resistance fighter?**
- **Did she receive the recognition she deserved?**

Finally, each group will present the chosen biography to their classmates. They can use a poster, a presentation, a podcast, a drawing... whatever each group considers most appropriate. It can also be decided to prepare an exhibition in class and even organise guided visits to other groups, teachers or families.



Interesting elements that can be found in all biographies:

Carme Casas	Civil War, Exile, Resistance (FR), Repression, Resistance (ES).
Carme Gardell	Resistance (FR), Repression, Deportation, Death.
Conxita Grangé	Resistance (FR), Repression, Deportation, Resistance in the camps.
Cristina Zalba	Repression, Resistance (ES).
Elvira Ballesté	Repression.
Enriqueta Otero	Civil War, Resistance (ES), Repression, Guerrilla.
Esperanza Martínez	Resistance (ES), Guerrilla, Repression.
Generosa Cortina	Resistance (FR), Guerrilla, Repression, Deportation, Resistance in the camps.
Hermínia Puigsech	Exile, Resistance (FR), Guerrilla.
Julia Herмосilla	Civil War, Exile, Resistance (ES).
Manuela Díaz	Resistance (ES), Guerrilla, Repression.
María Castelló	Exile, Resistance (FR), Repression, Deportation, Resistance in the camps.

As we can see above, some of the women above participated directly in the **Spanish civil war** (and even before, in the case of Julia Herмосilla). They all suffered in their own skin **repression** of many kinds (physical, economic, social). Some took part in armed guerilla warfare, and others in different forms of **resistance** both in Spain (ES) and France (FR) for better or worse (as liaisons, couriers, smugglers).

Some of them were subject to **deportation** and ended up being sent to different camps. But despite this, they continued to carry out actions of **resistance from within workers' commandos**. One of them died in Ravensbrück Camp, while the others had more or less long lives, committed to memory and struggle (publishing and disseminating through their experience) either anonymously or having received the recognition of the French government or, more recently, of the Government of Catalonia.

To read the biographies and access the supplementary bibliography see Appendix I.

Questions for reflection:

1. What struck you most about the stories of the women you have learned about in this activity?
2. How important do you think it is to highlight the role of women in resistance movements?
3. What types of resistance could you identify?
4. Comparing the women who were involved in Spain to the ones in France, what similarities and salient differences can you identify in their roles and experiences? Were some of them active in both countries?
5. In what ways did women challenge the gender stereotypes of their times, whether through their participation in the Maquis or as liaisons or caregivers?
6. How do you think the individual experiences of these women reflect the social and political dynamics of post-war Spain and World War II?
7. To what extent has this activity changed or enriched your understanding of the Resistance and the role of women in the historical contexts examined?
8. What learnings have you gained about women's history in these movements?
9. How might these stories inspire or inform current discussions about gender equality and women's rights?
10. What topics or questions do you feel that are left unanswered after this activity? What entices you to continue exploring?

You can find below some **examples** of reflections and questions for students to work on after reading each biography. They may prove useful to better explain the biographies before or after having distributed them:

Carme Casas Godessart

1. How did Carme Casas academic training influence her political commitment and activism from her young age?
2. What challenges did Carme Casas face when returning to Spain after the war and how did she continue to take part in the Resistance amid Franco's repression?
3. How did Carme Casas adapt her strategies and actions in the different contexts of France and Spain?

Carme Gardell García

1. What were the main factors in Carme Gardell's life and environment that led her to become actively involved in the Resistance, and how did her role evolve within the context of World War II?
2. To what extent was the Cabanats farmhouse important as a logistical centre for the Resistance, and how did the participation of Carme and her daughter Sabina influence the network?
3. How did Carme Gardell face the difficulties and dangers of the Resistance, especially after being arrested and imprisoned, and what was the impact this experience had on her contribution to the anti-Nazi struggle?

Conxita Grangé i Beleta

1. What was the role of Conxita Grangé and her family in the Resistance against the Nazi occupation, and how did they face threats and torture?
2. What was her experience as a deportee to the Nazi death camps, and how did she survive the horrors of Dachau and Ravensbrück?
3. After her release, how was Conxita Grangé's readjustment to everyday life, and how has she contributed to the preservation of historical memory and to the fight against oblivion?



Cristina Zalba Rodis

1. What role did Cristina Zalba Rodis play in the anti-Franco resistance, and how did she end up involuntarily cooperating with the Maquis for over 500 days?
2. How did Cristina face the adversities and dangers of protecting a wounded guerrilla, and what tactics did she use to avoid being detected by the Guardia Civil?
3. What stands out about the courage and determination of Cristina Zalba according to the witnesses, and how did she influence the life of the guerrilla Antoni Figueras Cortacans?

Elvira Ballesté Naval

1. How did Elvira Ballesté Naval experience the events of the Spanish Civil War and how was she directly affected by the repression of the Franco regime against her family?
2. What courageous actions did Elvira accomplish, especially when faced with the fine imposed by the Franco regime on her parents, and how did she defend the truth about her father's death despite pressure?
3. How does Elvira Ballesté's determination and courage stand out, and how does her story embody Resistance and the fight against Franco's repression during the post-war years?

Enriqueta Otero Blanco

1. How did Enriqueta Otero Blanco's life evolve after her training as a teacher and her commitment to culture?
2. What were her contributions and responsibilities in both the cultural and military fields during the Spanish Civil War? How do you think she performed her duties as hospital commander and coordinator in the midst of the fight against fascism?
3. How did Enriqueta Otero experience Franco's repression and how was her transition to underground and later to resistance in the Maquis? How was her experience in prison and how did she cope with the years of detention?

Esperanza Martínez

1. What was the reaction of her daughters when they learned the truth and how did they decide to cooperate with the Resistance?
2. What were the details of Esperanza Martínez's participation as a liaison for the AGLA (*Agrupación Guerrillera de Levante y Aragón*) and how did her involvement in the armed resistance evolve until she joined the guerrillas with her family?
3. What was the trajectory of Esperanza Martínez after the defeat of the guerrillas, especially during her capture, imprisonment and prison sentence? How did she manage her life during her years in prison, and what role did she play in initiatives such as the *Movimiento Democrático de Mujeres* of Zaragoza after her release in democracy?

Generosa Cortina Roig

1. How did Generosa Cortina Roig's role evolve from her participation in the SOL line to her capture and imprisonment in Ravensbrück? How did she cope with the hardships of the death march and what was her experience like as a POW?
2. What was Generosa Cortina Roig's contribution to the Resistance during World War II, especially in her role as an information agent and coordinator of the SOL line?
3. After her release and repatriation to Toulouse, how did Generosa Cortina Roig continue with her life? What recognition did she receive for her work in the Resistance and what was her later life like?

Hermínia Puigsech

1. How did the events Herminia Puigsech lived through during the Spanish Civil War and the bombings in Mataró influence her decision to go into exile in France? How was her adaptation to the refugee camps and her subsequent participation in the resistance against the German occupation?



2. What role did Hermínia Puigsech play as a member of the *Agrupación de Guerrilleros Españoles* (AGE) and as liaison to the 3rd Brigade in Ariège? How did her responsibilities and her involvement in sabotage and resistance operations evolve during World War II?
3. What specific challenges did Hermínia Puigsech face as a woman in the Resistance and how was she perceived by her fellow guerrillas? How was she recognized and honoured by the French Republic for her participation in the Resistance, and what was her life like after the war and until her death in 2013?

Julia Hermosilla

1. What was the participation of Julia Hermosilla Sagredo during the Spanish Civil War as an anarchist militawoman? How was her experience on the Otxandio front and what impacts did it have on her life, including the bombings she endured?
2. How did Julia Hermosilla's involvement in the anti-Franco struggle evolve after her exile in France and her return to Catalonia? What obstacles and challenges did she face as an anarchist activist in the resistance against Franco's dictatorship?
3. What were the details of Julia Hermosilla's involvement in the assassination attempts on Franco, particularly with regards to the operation with the plane bought in France and the planned attack on the Ayete Palace in 1969? What was her life like after Franco's death and until her own death in 2009?

Manuela Díaz Cabezas

1. What circumstances and motivations led Manuela Díaz Cabezas to join the anti-Franco guerrillas known as Los Parrilleros in the mountains of Córdoba after the repression against the vanquished during the Spanish post-war period? What was her role as a liaison to the group, particularly in providing resources and information?
2. How was Manuela Díaz Cabezas' daily life as a guerrilla in the Cordoba mountain ranges and other regions, particularly concerning the difficulties and dangers she

faced? What about her decision to join the group along with her brother Alfonso?

3. What were the events that led to the arrest and subsequent summary trial of Manuela Díaz Cabezas, her brother Alfonso and other members of Los Parrilleros? What was her experience in prison, in particular concerning the tortures inflicted on her and the way she was treated? Finally, how was her life after prison and until her death in 2006?

María Castelló Ibarz

1. What were the key events that led María Castelló Ibarz and her family to take part in the Resistance against the Nazi occupation and to cooperate with the Spanish guerrillas in the southern region of France during World War II?
2. What was the specific participation of María Castelló Ibarz in the escape networks? How did her involvement in this clandestine activity develop over time?
3. What were the circumstances of her arrest and deportation to the Nazi concentration camps? What were the conditions that María Castelló Ibarz endured in the concentration camps of Dachau and Ravensbrück, in particular concerning the experiences she went through and the abuses she endured?



SECTION III.

Researching and writing a biography

1-5 Sessions

Researching and writing biographies allow students to approach historical research through historical sources and objects, and contributes at the same time to the development of their writing and information organisation skills.

Objectives:

- To develop research skills.
- To improve writing skills.
- To promote the organisation and synthesis of information.
- To produce a class exhibition, a mural or a compilation book with the different stories and biographies the students have been working on, photographs, etc.
- To compare resistance women of this particular period with other women we may consider resisters.

This activity can be developed by the teaching staff freely, working with different formats in order to create a **final product showcasing the students' efforts and outcomes**. The final format may be chosen depending on the group. We will list below the basics on how to write a biography, and we will also make some suggestions in order to adapt the task to each teacher's own approach.

We can either decide to work individually, in small groups of 3 to 5 students, or with the whole class.

If we decide to work individually or in small groups, **we can pre-select a choice of biographies** that may help us explain some of the concepts related to the Resistance. The women chosen can either be historical figures or family members we may consider resisters, or else contemporary women that may help us explain the concept of resistance beyond the specific historical events of the mid-20th century. As teachers, it is important to guide the students at all times when working upon the figure of their choice, especially given the complexity of finding fluent information about the chosen period, particularly on women.

After completing the selection, the following section will instruct you on the main steps to write a biography. We believe, at this point, that the option of including **women from present world movements** could be quite interesting in order to connect historical processes of the past and the present with the concept of Resistance. We can then approach the biographies as short texts presenting the key concepts arising from the previous reflections, and after having addressed the chosen biographies in Section 2 and the documentaries in Section 1.

This may be a preliminary step towards finally working on the task from a global perspective with the whole class. This may involve exposing and commenting on the work done, or grouping the different biographies in a **book-collection**, or presenting them in **podcast** format or in a small **exhibition** with images and maps about the women researched in class. The idea is for the whole class to be able to see the work done by each group in an entertaining way.

The exhibition can be designed in any way you choose. A singular proposal would be organising a tribute in a format similar to a **Stolpersteine**¹ (but focused on the Resistance) with a short sentence and some adjectives defining the biography in question. Another option –given the difficulty of researching on real people– would be to approach the target concepts in a short fiction story based on a chosen biography (whether real or not).



Stolpersteine of Sally and Julia Mendel in Saint Agatha's church in Dülmen, Germany. Source: Wikipedia. CC BY-SA 4.0 DEED

¹ The **Stolpersteine** are small monuments (paving stones) created by the German artist Gunter Demnig in memory of the victims of Nazism. The artist's goal is to make pedestrians stop as they read the person's name and learn about their fate. What was their name? When were they born? When did they die? When did they live? Where and when were they deported? Each cobblestone is unique and made by hand in a special way, precisely as a gesture of respect and humanity intended to contrast with the industrialised extermination of the Nazis. If you want to know more: <https://memoria.genclat.cat/ca/que-fem/stolpersteine/>

Once the two previous sections will be completed, we can ask the students to either create or integrate their own resistance figure in a conflict of their choice (whether current or not).

With regards to the main keys on how to write a biography, the steps could be the following:

- 1. Choosing a historical or family figure:** Allow students to choose a historical figure that interests them. It can be a political personality, an artist, a scientist, an athlete or any other relevant figure. We can also **propose specific women in relation to the topic we intend to address** and have the students choose among different proposals (that should have been previously covered by the teacher in order to probe ease-of-access to information).
- 2. Researching:** Provide students with resources such as books, articles and online resources for them to research the life of the person of their choice. Encourage them to look for information about the chosen person's childhood, education, important events and significant contributions.
- 3. Organising the information:** Help them structure the information into categories such as: timeline, key events, influences, etc. They can also use tools like geolocated maps or diagrams to better visualise the information.
- 4. Initial draft :** Hem de redactar un esberrany inicial de la biografia utilitzant la informació recopilada. Podem fer-ho individualment o en grup. Fomenta la inclusió d'anècdotes interessants per donar vida a la narrativa. Revisem plegats els escrits, per donar peu a la retroalimentació constructiva a través del debat.
- 5. Final version and oral presentation:** After completing the biographies, they can be presented to the class. If the task has been completed with the whole class, the biographies can be distributed according to the different stages of the chosen figure's life, the key concepts addressed and what was the process to get there. If working in groups, the students have the opportunity to know and learn about more figures. Any of the formats proposed above may be equally instructive

Biography structure

The structure of a biography may vary depending on the purpose and context, but in general it usually follows a logical sequence that narrates the person's life in an understandable and interesting way. Finding information for a biography can be a fascinating and educational task. Below is a basic structure that might be of use:

- 1. Introduction:** An opening paragraph to win the reader's attention. It may include information about birth, place of birth and other relevant details.
- 2. Childhood and youth:** This section explores the early years of the person's life, including details about his/her childhood, family and environment. What factors influenced his/her training and development?
- 3. Education and training:** The main highlight of the person's education and training years. Where did he/she study? What were his/her main academic interests? Did he/she have significant mentors or influences?
- 4. Key events:** This section presents the most important events in the chosen person's life in chronological order. These events can either be professional achievements, important changes or decisive moments of his/her life.
- 5. Contributions and achievements:** A section should be dedicated to present the person's major contributions or accomplishments. What were the chosen person's most remarkable successes or advances?
- 6. Challenges or adversities:** It includes information about the challenges and adversities the person faced throughout his/her life and how he/she overcame them.
- 7. Legacy and Impact:** It examines the person's legacy and how it influenced his/her field of activity or society in general. What impact did that person have and how is he/she remembered?
- 8. Conclusion:** A final summary outlining the highlights of the person's life that may also include a reflection on their significance.
- 9. References:** If specific sources have been used, include a bibliography section to credit the information.

- 1. Searching in books and articles:** Information can be found in biographical books, monographs or articles written by expert authors who have thoroughly researched the life of the person in question.
- 2. File consultation:** Historical archives, specialised libraries and research centres may contain relevant documents and materials about the person and can be reviewed to look for documents or photographs on the subject of interest.
- 3. Searching for witness interviews:** The search should focus on interviews with direct witnesses or people who lived through the period in question and who can provide valuable details, in this case, about the Resistance.
- 4. Watching documentaries and films:** Some biographies have been adapted into documentaries or films, and can thus offer visual information and interviews to complete the research.
- 5. Visiting the spaces related to their lives:** If the person lived in a specific place, you can visit it to get more information and gain a better understanding of the historical and cultural context in which they lived.
- 6. Contacting memory associations:** To obtain further support and information, groups or organisations dedicated to historical memory and research on anti-fascist resistance can also be contacted.
- 7. Using online resources:** Databases, history portals and web pages of academic institutions can also be made use of to obtain information accessible via the Internet.



GLOSSARY

Resistance: In a historical context, resistance refers to movements or groups that actively oppose an occupation, an authoritarian regime or oppression. During World War II, for example, the Resistance was crucial in several Nazi-occupied countries, such as France, where members of the Resistance fought clandestinely against the German occupation. It also emerged in other conflicts and situations, such as the anti-Francoist Resistance in Spain or other resistance movements in countries under authoritarian regimes. Resistance can take many forms, including guerrilla tactics, sabotage, and civil protest actions.

Gender: this concept refers to the relationship between men and women based on identity, conditions, functions and responsibilities –as they have been constructed and defined by society and culture– assigned to one sex and the other. Therefore, gender is not static or innate, but acquires its meaning in relation to a sociocultural basis over time.

Maquis: The “*Maquis*” were guerrillas who were part of the anti-Franco armed resistance in Spain during the post-war period (1939-1952). This clandestine rural guerrilla operated mainly in mountainous areas and forests, using guerrilla warfare tactics against the Franco regime. The Maquis carried out sabotage, surprise attacks and other actions to oppose the dictatorship. Many members of the Maquis had previously fought in the Spanish Civil War and continued to resist the regime’s repression until they were dismantled in the mid-1950s.

The term “*Maquis*” was also used to describe French guerrillas who operated during and after World War II, particularly during the German occupation and the resistance against Nazism. These French maquis remained underground, especially in rural and mountainous areas, and carried out acts of sabotage, intelligence collection and other guerrilla activities to oppose the Nazi occupation. Their resistance was crucial to the liberation of France and contributed to undermining the German occupation during this period.

Libération or Liberation: this term literally means setting free, but in the historical context, especially during and after World War II, it refers to the process of liberating territories occupied by enemy forces, especially the liberation of France from Nazi occupation. Within the specific framework of the French Resistance, “*Libération*” refers to the period during which Resistance efforts and allied actions led to the liberation

of occupied cities and regions, marking the end of the German occupation of France and the restoration of French sovereignty. This period is remembered as a crucial moment in the history of World War II and anti-Nazi resistance.

The **French Resistance guerrillas** were fighters who participated in the armed resistance against the Nazi occupation during World War II. These guerrillas, also known as Maquis, carried out sabotage operations, intelligence collection and guerrilla activities in areas occupied by German forces. They operated secretly and came together to form resistance groups that played a crucial role in the liberation of France. Their bravery and sacrifice contributed significantly to the defeat of Nazism in Europe.

Guerrilla groups: The anti-fascist guerrilla during the Franco regime was composed of fighters who, after the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), continued the fight against the Franco dictatorship through guerrilla activities and clandestine opposition. These guerrillas operated mainly in rural and mountainous areas, seeking to undermine the regime’s authority and to promote anti-fascist resistance. They used tactics such as concealment, propaganda, and occasionally armed action. Their struggle lasted until the 1950s, when the regime’s repression intensified, leading to the arrest or execution of many of the anti-fascist guerrillas.

Partisans are members of an armed resistance or guerrilla movement fighting a military occupation, an authoritarian regime, or an invading force. This term gained popularity during World War II, when the partisans emerged as resistance fighters against the Nazi occupation forces in several countries in Europe.

The term “partisan” has also been used in other historical contexts, such as resistance movements during the Cold War or other international conflicts. Partisans are considered as defenders of freedom and independence, fighting forces that try to subjugate or oppress their communities.

AGE: The *Agrupación de Guerrilleros Españoles* (AGE) was an anti-fascist guerrilla organisation active during the Spanish post-war period. Formed by guerrillas who continued the resistance against the Franco regime, the AGE operated in rural and mountainous areas. This group developed guerrilla tactics to fight against oppression and dictatorship. Aiming to restore democracy and lost freedom, the AGE faced

repression until the 1950s, when many of its members were arrested or executed. The organisation's struggle embodies the persistence of anti-fascist resistance in Spain.

AGLA: The *Agrupació Guerrillera de Llevant i Aragó* (AGLA) was a guerrilla organisation that operated during the Spanish post-war period. Formed by members of the republican forces that fought against fascism, AGLA continued the underground resistance after the Civil War. Operating in the mountainous areas of Levante and Aragon, its members fought against the Franco regime with guerrilla tactics. The AGLA played a significant role in the anti-fascist struggle until the 1950s, when it was strongly repressed by the regime with arrests and executions, mainly by the Guardia Civil.

Deportation: Deportation refers to the forced transfer of people from one place to another, usually for a specific purpose and often under harsh or coercive circumstances. During World War II, deportation was used by the Nazis as part of their policy of persecution and extermination. The Nazis deported millions of people, mainly Jews, to concentration and extermination camps. This brutal act was part of the Holocaust, one of the darkest episodes in history, where many people were subjected to inhumane conditions and often killed. Deportation has also been used in other contexts to suppress political or ethnic opposition..

Collaborationists: In a historical context, collaborationists or collaborators are people or groups who collaborate with an occupying force or regime hostile to their own country or interests. During World War II, the term was used to refer to those who cooperated with the German and other Axis forces that occupied several European countries. This collaboration could take different forms, from direct participation in collaborationist governments to taking part in the repression of the Resistance and the identification of persecuted communities.

The Vichy Regime refers to the collaborationist state that was established in France after its defeat by Nazi Germany in 1940, during World War II. The regime was headed by Marshal Philippe Pétain and his administration, and the capital city was set at Vichy. The Vichy government collaborated with the German occupation and implemented anti-Jewish and authoritarian policies. The Vichy Regime lasted until the liberation of France in 1944. After the war, Pétain was convicted of treason.

The so-called “**columns**” that fought in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) were mobile units of militiamen and militiawomen formed from several political and union organisations to join the fight against the insurgents. These columns were flexible, had a decentralised structure, and were mobilised from different regions to go to the front to oppose the military coup. The columns burst with ideological diversity including communists, anarchists, socialists and other groups. These units played a key role in the republican resistance against the Francoist forces until the creation of the popular army.

Escape networks, also known as **escape lines**, were secret operations during World War II that helped fugitives escape Nazi-occupied areas. This network involved various routes and points of contact managed by Resistance members and allies that helped evaders cross borders into free territories. In addition to helping downed Allied soldiers, escape lines also saved civilians persecuted by the Nazi regime, including Jews and other persecuted groups. People who participated in this risky task were known as helpers or guides.

The term “**liaison**” or, literally, “**link**”, refers to a person who acted as a link or connector between different groups or members of a resistance organisation. These individuals, known as “links” or “couriers”, were given the responsibility of transmitting information, coordinating operations and establishing communication between different cells or resistance units. They were essential for maintaining cohesion and effectiveness within the resistance movement, ensuring the secure transmission of information and facilitating the coordination of covert activities. Their task was particularly dangerous, as they could be targets of espionage and repression by enemy forces.

A **courier** (in French, “**courrier**”) was a person in charge of bringing messages, documents, or other materials to and from different members or groups of the Resistance. The courier was responsible for delivering the information safely and efficiently, maintaining the secrecy and security of all communications. This task was particularly dangerous, as couriers could be the victims of espionage or end up captured by enemy forces, thus jeopardising the information and security of the entire resistance movement.

The term “**chantier**” can either mean “workshop” or “workplace”. In this context it was generally used to refer to clandestine places where members of the Resistance carried



out activities such as writing propaganda, printing documents, preparing explosives and other covert operations. This terminology reflects the use of codes and euphemisms to preserve the security and covert nature of Resistance activities from German occupation forces and French collaborationists.

Exile: The Spanish Republican exile started after the defeat of the Republic during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the establishment of the Francoist dictatorship under the command of Francisco Franco. After the war, many Republican sympathisers, intellectuals, activists and others fled Spain to avoid political repression and persecution. These exiles scattered around the world, with destinations such as France, Mexico, the Soviet Union and other countries, seeking refuge and continuing their struggle against the dictatorship from the outside. The exile left a deep mark on the Spanish diaspora and on the history of the 20th century.

Refugee camps: After the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), many Spaniards who fled the Franco regime went to France in search of refuge. Republican Spaniards and other groups affected by the Franco dictatorship were forced to leave Spain. In France, many were confined to refugee camps, where they lived in precarious conditions. This situation intensified during World War II when the Nazis occupied France, and many Republican Spaniards were arrested and interned in camps. After the war, some decided to stay in France, while others continued their diaspora to other destinations. This period saw the difficulties and struggles of the Spanish exiles who sought refuge in France.

World War II: This war, also known as Second World War, was a global conflict that took place between 1939 and 1945. It involved the vast majority of the world's nations, including all the great powers, organised into two alliances or main sides: the Allies and the Axis. The causes of the conflict originated in the political, economic and territorial tensions of the interwar period. The conflict was triggered by the German invasion of Poland in September 1939. As the war unfolded, it set off a chain of dramatic events, including the German Blitzkrieg, the Nazi occupation, the Holocaust, the Battle of Britain, the Pacific Theater, and the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It ended with the unconditional surrender of the Axis in September 1945. World War II was the largest military conflict in history, with millions of deaths and long-lasting consequences in world geopolitics.

Gestapo: Nazi secret police force created in 1933. Controlled by Heinrich Himmler from 1934.

Concentration camps: Nazi concentration camps were detention facilities established during World War II by the Nazi regime in Germany and the occupied territories. These camps were used to detain, exploit, and in many cases exterminate groups deemed "undesirable" by the regime, such as Jews, Roma, homosexuals, the disabled, and political dissidents. Conditions were inhumane, with forced labour, deprivation of basic rights, and mass executions. Auschwitz, Dachau and Bergen-Belsen are well-known examples of Nazi concentration camps, symbolising the brutality and horror of the Holocaust.

Francisco Franco (1892-1975) was a Spanish military man and dictator who led Spain from the victory of the insurgents during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) until his death. Supreme Commander of the State, he established an authoritarian dictatorship that lasted until 1975. Franco centralised power, repressed regional identities, and imposed a conservative regime. His death led to the restoration of the monarchy and the establishment of democracy in Spain.

Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) was the leader of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi) and governed Germany between 1933 and 1945. He led the Third Reich and established a totalitarian regime. Hitler promoted racist and anti-Jewish ideologies, leading the German military expansion that resulted in World War II (1939-1945). His genocidal policy resulted in the Holocaust, with millions of victims. The Nazi defeat in 1945 led to his suicide in Berlin.

Philippe Pétain (1856-1951) was a French military and politician who gained notoriety during World War I as the French commander-in-chief. However, he went into infamy as a collaborator under the Nazi occupation of France during World War II. After the French defeat in 1940, Pétain established a collaborationist government at Vichy. His administration cooperated with the Nazis and implemented anti-Jewish policies. After the war, he was convicted of treason.

CNT: The *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* is a Spanish anarcho-sindicalist organisation founded in 1910. It was a prominent actor in political and union life during the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939) and the Spanish Civil War

(1936-1939). The CNT defended the abolition of state and private property and promoted workers' self-management. During the war, the CNT actively participated in the anti-fascist resistance, but faced important tensions with other republican forces. After the war, it was heavily repressed by the Franco dictatorship, although it continued to exist clandestinely.

PCE: The *Partido Comunista de España* (PCE) is a Spanish political party. Founded in 1921, it played a prominent role during the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939) and the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). The PCE was part of the Republican forces that opposed the military coup led by Francisco Franco. After the Civil War, the PCE continued to exist clandestinely under the Franco dictatorship until its legalisation in the Spanish Transition. This party has also been a relevant actor in Spanish politics, especially in the post-Franco democratic context.

PSUC: The *Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya* (PSUC) was an active political party during the 20th century in Catalonia. Founded in 1936, during the Spanish Civil War, the PSUC was a coalition of anti-fascist forces, including communists, socialists and republicans. It played an important role in the resistance against fascism and the Franco dictatorship. After the war, it continued to operate underground until the Spanish Transition, when it was legalised. PSUC was also an important actor in Catalan politics, especially during the post-war period and the period of transition towards democracy.

FAI: The *Federación Anarquista Ibérica* (FAI) was an active anarchist federation in Spain during the Second Republic and the Civil War. Founded in 1927, the FAI championed anarchist principles and had a significant influence within the anarchist movement. Despite not being a mass organisation, the FAI took part in direct action and influenced the labour movement and anti-fascist resistance. This organisation was a relevant actor in the political and social arena of that time.

UR: *Unió de Rabassaires* was an agricultural and trade union organisation created in Catalonia at the beginning of the 20th century. Founded in 1901, it aimed to defend the rights of farmers and to improve their living and working conditions. This organisation was a pioneer in the struggle to achieve collective land ownership and it promoted the redistribution of agricultural property. The *Unió de Rabassaires* was an important part of the Catalan labour and agrarian movement before the Spanish Civil War.



SUPPLEMENTARY

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ANNEX

12 BIOGRAPHIES AND LIFE STORIES OF
SPANISH RESISTANT WOMEN



Carme Casas Godessart

(1921-2013)

“Maria Elisa”



Source: Fundació Cipriano Garcia

Carme Casas Godessart was born on 25 April 1921 in Alcalà de Gurrea (Huesca). A few months later, her family moved to Ayera, a nearby village. At the age of 13, she moved back to Almacelles as her father, who was a teacher, had been transferred there. Both her father's profession and the republican ideology of her family led her to grow up in direct contact with the principles of modern school, her father being her first teacher. In 1935 she started her baccalaureate studies at a secondary school in Lleida. And it was also there where, at 15 years of age, she became an active member of the Joventuts Socialistes Unificades (Unified Socialist Youth, JSU). She continued studying until the third year, but could not start the fourth year due to the outbreak of the civil war, two months before the start of the school year. At that time Carme was in Almacelles with her family, where they were staying during the summer.

Shortly after the outbreak of the civil war, she began her war nurse studies, which were organised by the Generalitat de Catalunya. However, under pressure from her mother, she had to interrupt them. Unable to practise as a nurse, she signed up for a program of the *Joventuts Socialistes Unificades* in which they would visit and accompany the young sick and injured patients in Lleida hospital. She also took part in the program *Padrines de Guerra* (War Godmothers) which, through epistolary correspondence with young soldiers destined for the front, sought to give soldiers some comfort and keep their morale high.

In September 1937, academic activity was reactivated and she was able to return to Lleida. In March 1938, due to the advance of the insurgent troops, the family moved to Vilanova i la Geltrú. Carme's father, Jesús, was appointed by the Generalitat to the head of a children's colony in Girona. Not long after that, his wife Nieves and two of his daughters, Consuelo and Montse, also moved in with him. Carme stayed alone in Vilanova with the idea of finishing her studies. As Franco's troops gained control, the family, which was separated, set out on the road to exile.

Carme had to leave with her classmates and other students, fleeing from Manresa to Figueres, completely alone and with almost nothing to wear. *“The train was already full from far back the line, and we had to make room for all the people who were going to Figueres, we travelled like this... like sardines in a tin, with no luggage, with no friends, not knowing where*

we were going and thinking: ‘Where are my parents? Where will I go?’ And also thinking, ‘If you leave, you can come back, but if you stay, will you be able to get out...?’”

In her daughter's words: *“There, she lost contact with her travel companions and lost her suitcase, her luggage, everything. And she found herself on a train to France alone. When she arrived in France she was taken care of by the French. She lived in different places and got involved in the kind of political activities that were taking place at that time”*. She got as far as Arras, in the French department of Aube. There, and thanks to the French Communist Party, she was found by her father. Carme managed to reunite with her parents and sisters, who were interned in the camp of Saint Chely d'Apcher. But they stayed there for quite a short while, since the French government, as a result of the World War, had decided to get rid of some of the existing refugee camps and wanted to regroup the Spanish refugees in fewer locations. In accordance with these regulations, all the members of the Casas family were transferred to the Langogne camp, where they stayed until February 1940. When Jesus was recruited by the French government and was sent to work at the Maginot Line, the women of the family also left the camp and looked for a flat in town. While Carme, her mother and her sisters strived to survive, Jesus managed to dodge the fate of a German arrest at the front and was reunited with his family.

From that moment on –it was already 1941– all the members of the Casas family began to cooperate in the political reorganisation of the Spanish refugees in France. According to Carme's daughter: *“When she was there she met my father, who was a member of the PCE. My father went back to Spain to reorganise the communist party and the whole maquis struggle and all of that. And my mother came back in 1944, if I remember correctly, because she was being persecuted by the Gestapo”*.

Leandro Saún, who was in charge of organising guerrilla groups in the south of France, went to Langogne one day with the intention of meeting with Jesús Casas and analysing the existing organisational possibilities in the area

of La Lozère, Gard and Ardèche. Shortly after that visit, Carme was given the task of reorganising the youth in the area, an activity she made compatible with that of liaison to the resistance. Both activities involved several meetings with Leandro, who would end up being her life partner. During the German occupation, Carme became one of the youngest leaders of the reorganisation against the Nazis in the Languedoc region. Known by the nickname of **Maria**, she was targeted by the Gestapo.

In September 1943 Leandro crossed the border into Spain while fleeing from the Gestapo and Carme did not receive any more news from him after that. She continued her work as liaison to the resistance in France. One day in April 1944, her mother alerted her that they were going after her. She left Langogne as quickly as possible, arrived in Nîmes and from there she set out on a journey to the mining area of Gardana, with the Gestapo on her heels. Then the party sent her back to Nîmes to go from there to Perpignan and then back to Spain.

On midsummer eve 1944, Carme crossed the Pyrenees and entered Spain under the false name of *Elisa* with a group of nine people. Upon arriving in Figueres, the group was spotted by the Guardia Civil, arrested and taken to the Girona prison for a month. Once released Carme tried to contact Leandro or find out where he was.

She was then told that Leandro was “working in Torrero”, which meant that he had been arrested and was serving a sentence in the Provincial Prison of Zaragoza. Carmen didn’t think twice about it and decided to move to Zaragoza to look for a job and take care of Leandro. As at that time they still did not have a legal relationship, in order to go see him in prison she pretended to be Consuelo Saún, Leandro’s sister. Carme then took it upon herself to prevent the execution of his death sentence. She travelled to Madrid, lodged appeals and tried to find people with influence who could help him.

Due to her clandestine activity in the country, fostered by contacts she made in prison when she went to visit Leandro, “*Elisa*” had become a woman much wanted by the Political-Social Brigade and was finally arrested, tortured and imprisoned for high treason, freemasonry, espionage and communism. During her stay in Madrid, she and more than 100 comrades were betrayed. She spent almost two years in the *Prisión Habilitada de Predicadores*.

In June 1945, Leandro was transferred to Tarragona prison to be tried in that city. So when Carme was released in 1948, she travelled to Tarragona. There she would begin again her activity with endless visits to the prison, sending letters relentlessly to ecclesiastical and military authorities with the aim of softening her companion’s sentence. In the meantime,

she continued to work and began to study nursing. This allowed her to start working in Dr. Monegal’s clinic.

On May 3, 1953, Leandro requested permission from the warden of the Tarragona Provincial Prison to marry Carme in this establishment, permission which was granted on May 29. Thus, when Leandro was released, their relationship was already legalised. After he was released, they had two children, Rosa Nieves and Leandro. Carme was one of the few female militants who helped to reorganise the PSUC during the hardest years of the clandestinity with Leandro. In 1967, while working as a nurse at the Joan XXIII hospital in Tarragona, she took part in the founding of the trade union Comisiones Obreras.

In the 1960s and 1970s, while working at the Joan XXIII hospital in Tarragona, she acted as a trade union liaison. After Franco’s death, Carme Casas maintained close ties with the PSUC and CCOO and ended up as a member of Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds (ICV). She devoted the final years of their life to disseminating democratic memory among the youth, and she was one of the founders of the association *Les dones del 36* (Women from 1936). In 2002 the Generalitat de Catalunya awarded her the Medalla al Treball President Macià (President Macià Medal for Work). Carme died on November 26, 2013, aged 92.

Carme Gardell García

(1891-1945)

“Carme Bartolí”



Source: Amical de Ravensbruck
Archive Miquel Peralts

María del Carmen Gardell García was born on 6 May 6 1891 in Setcases (Girona). She is the daughter of Carola García and Jaume Gardell. She married Joan Bartolí, with whom she would end up having four children: Jaume, Sabina, Josep and Hermínia. Due to the family's economic difficulties she had to emigrate to Valmanya (France), a town with a strong mining sector.

With the outbreak of World War II, she and her daughter Sabina Bartolí, who was in her early twenties, began to support different local resistance movements against the Nazi occupation. The mountainous environment around the house where they lived –the *Cabanats* farmhouse– was especially convenient for the Maquis and there they were able to shelter, feed or cure guerrillas when necessary. The owner of the farmhouse was the military man and politician Abdon Robert Casso, who lived in Paris. In September 1940, he joined the French resistance. In addition, his daughter Sabina was married to Jovino González García “Cubino” who not only was a good friend but also the right-hand man of René Horte, the town's teacher and communist militant. In 1941, Abdon Casso and Horte created the *Sainte Jeanne* evasion network, which helped evade Belgian citizens who wanted to cross to Spain. So it is of no surprise that he was linked to local resistance movements such as *Combat*, *Franc-tireur* and *Libération Sud*.¹ In the words of his daughter Sabina, “People say that we were in the Resistance [...] Our arrest, together with that of the owner of the house in which we lived, a Frenchman, a French gentleman, was motivated by an attitude that seemed so natural to my mother and me that it didn't even occur to us that we were taking part and collaborating with the French Resistance against the Nazi occupier.”

At first, the family was only involved in feeding, housing or hiding some of the resistance's members, but over time the *Cabanats* farmhouse became a crucial logistical meeting point for criminals, fugitives, Maquis and information agents of the *Cometa* network. “In addition to the convenient conditions of our house and of our material support, well, we also fed them with our poor resources so they could concentrate on their own tasks and organise the armed

struggle in the Pyrenees mountains. They would hide men from the Maquis; they gave them food and tended their wounds if they were injured. And these women did all this just because, naturally and spontaneously, they went without hesitation, they collaborated with those who they felt were right. They had not given any name to their actions, they just did it” wrote Montserrat Roig in *Els catalans als camps nazis* (Catalans in the nazi camps). Casso's daughter, known as Sabine Gonzalez by her married name, became increasingly involved and finally joined the *Darius* and *Sabot* networks. She even went as far as joining the *Armée secrète* organisation.

René had managed to escape a raid against him in June and had since settled in *Cabanats*. But among all this activity, an anonymous complaint caused the Vichy police to raid the farmhouse. At the time the two women were arrested, in the farmhouse there were René Horte –a French teacher–, a Belgian anti-fascist and a Spanish republican. As Montserrat Roig recounted: “Both women confronted the Vichy police and stood in front of the main door, preventing them from entering the house. They were severely beaten but managed to help the three resistors escape through a back door.” The police took Carmen and Sabina and left Hermínia with the girl Raimunda.

The two women were taken to the Amelie-les-Bains prison where they were separated from their husbands. From there, they went through different French prisons such as Arles, Perpignan and Compiègne, and were subjected to harsh interrogations. On 31 January 1944, they were sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp, along with Louise Horte, wife of the French teacher, in one of the most massive transports of Catalan resisters. Among them were also Neus Català and Alfonsina Bueno. The conditions on the train were inhumane as there were no windows. There were more than eighty people in each wagon and no toilets, and they only ate once in almost four days. Finally, on 3 February 1944, they arrived in Ravensbrück and were registered under their

¹ The United Movements of the Resistance (MUR, Mouvements unis de la Résistance) is the unification, in January 1943, of the three major Resistance movements that operated in the southern part of France during the Nazi occupation. *Combat*, *Franc-tireur* and *Libération Sur* would unite under the command of Jean Moulin.

married names. Carme Bartolí was registered with number 27,046 and Sabine González with number 27,156.

Shortly after, due to the intense resisting activity of the town, an exemplary punishment was imposed by the occupation forces. On 2 August 1944, the event known as the Valmanya massacre took place. The entire town suffered Nazi revenge and was completely destroyed. The inhabitants who could not flee were killed or deported.

Meanwhile, the harsh conditions of the camp –hunger, all sorts of abuse, and the extreme cold– undermined the prisoners’ health. Carmen would end up dying of typhus on 15 April, 1945, only fifteen days after the liberation of the camp by the Red Army. In Montserrat Roig harsh words: “No one over 40 years old could survive deportation”. At that time Carme was 53. She managed to resist for a year and two months. “As she was dying, they threw her on top of a pile of corpses that they had laid out between two barracks. Some bodies were still moving. Two French women recognized her and, at night, under the light of the searchlights and in spite of the danger of being discovered, dragged her to her barrack. There, amidst the darkness and in deep silence, she passed away in the arms of another Catalan woman, Coloma Seró from Lleida. Upon hearing screams in Catalan coming from the pile of corpses, Coloma had approached to help her, but seeing that it was too late she stayed by her side and kept talking to her to make her feel closer to home.”

Sabina González survived her and was to undergo two more transfers: to the Flossembürg camp and to the Helmbrechts labour camp, where she was forced to work manufacturing ammunition and parts for the German army. Coloma Seró², the woman who had helped Carme Gardell have a “good death” kept her wedding ring and later gave it back in person to her family.

Carme’s death was to be later turned into a song when Montserrat Roig recounted it to her friend, the singer and composer Marina Rosell. This song has since become an anthem and it is currently sung every year at the different tributes of the Amicale and other associations for democratic memory such as the Amical of Ravensbrück.

² Coloma Seró Costa (1912-1996) was a republican teacher, first councillor of the Vilafranca del Penedès City Council. In exile she went through Argelers and fought in the Resistance. She was deported to the Ravensbrück and Bergen-Belsen camps, from where she would be released in 1945.

*The camp was a sip of night,
far from everything, sunk between ridges.*

*Carmen is dying;
Her wail is lost forever.*

*The camp was a sip of night:
in the north, smoke; to the south, ashes.*

*—I don’t want to die like this,
far from the skies, far from the groves.*

*Coloma, having heard her,
quietly slides to her side,
and as she holds her tight,
she whispers sweet words in her ear.*

*The camp was a sip of night,
far from everything, between ridges,
far from everything, between ridges,
so far, so far.*

Conxita Grangé i Beleta

(1925-2019)

“Conxita Ramos”



Source: Conseil departamental de l'Haute Garonne

Conxita Grangé i Beleta was born on 6 August 6 1925 in Espui (Lleida). The daughter of Maria Beleta and Josep Grangé, she was the seventh of eight siblings. Due to her mother's illness, her parents took her to France when she was only two years old. Once there, her maternal uncles, Jaume Beleta and **Elvira Ibarz**, who had emigrated with their daughter **Maria Castelló** due to economic problems in 1925, took care of her.

Upon the outbreak of the civil war, when she was barely eleven years old, her uncle and her aunt returned to Catalonia. Her cousin Maria stayed with them for a year before returning to France. Back in Catalonia, Conxita's uncle, who had gained experience as a builder, started working mainly in maintenance tasks in the military airfields of the Republic, particularly fortifying the airfields of Tortellà and Balaguer. After the defeat and fearing repression, they set out on the road to exile. Conxita and her aunt Elvira were separated from her uncle and taken to the refugee camp of Pas de Calais. They were then allowed to return to the south, to Gudàs, and finally to Varilhas, where Maria was living with her husband Joseph Ferrer and their three children. There, the family was finally reunited. Conxita was 14 years old.

Once they were in France, and as the Nazi invasion advanced steadily during the Second World War, Conxita's uncle –Jaume Beleta– decided to put himself at the service of the French resistance. At that time the resistance was getting organised in the south of France in guerrilla groups with a military structure. Although all political tendencies were represented, the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) was the one in charge of organising secret guerrilla groups under the name of the 14th Spanish Guerrilla Brigade (the name of the brigade that had participated in guerrilla warfare during the Spanish civil war). The brigade was first led by Jesús Ríos, the first national leader of the Spanish guerrillas. The different brigades and sections were placed under the Higher Command. The 3rd Brigade was the one operating in the Ariège region.

Conxita's uncle, who had then joined the resistance, managed to open a logging business in Col du Py. From 1941 on, this business was the ingenious solution the PCE came with to camouflage its members and prepare them for military operations. In these “logging companies”, the party's members would live along with their families while they

worked as loggers or charcoal burners, thus concealing their real political activity. All these places ended up becoming the main logistical support centres of the guerrillas. And those who engaged in this activity were called *chantiers*¹. Conxita refers to this situation in these words: “*In the Ariège, in April 1943, the collaborationists could see what was going on and they knew that there were maquis in the area; there were organised groups in Rieux de Pelle-Port, in Ariège; and 4 km away, in Varhiles, we had a chantier called “La Caramille”, and further up another one called “Le Baulou”, and later the one in Col du Py.*”.

In April 1943, when her uncle was exposed and had to flee to Andorra, pursued by the Gestapo, the women of the family became even more involved in the resistance and in the 3rd Brigade. “*For a while everything was disorganised and then, after some time, they came to ask us if we could continue the fight that my uncle had led. We helped all the comrades who got there [...] and we became part of the 3rd Brigade of guerrillas. My aunt Elvira, my sister Maria [this is how she refers to her sister, with whom she grew up from the age of 2] and me. We were called the Beleta family.*”.

They continued with the logging business, acting as liaison to the Col du Py guerrillas. From their home in Peny they took care of the allied soldiers, helping them escape across the Pyrenees, carrying parcels and making contacts between the different guerrilla groups. Conxita mentions it in her testimony: “*Maria and I joined the Maquis as liaison, especially in Col du Py; me and my cousin, we were always at the Beleta's farm; there, we received reports and information, occasionally also letters, and also mission orders, which we relayed to the Maquis leaders.*”.

¹ The *chantier* were the camouflaged Maquis in the *tajos* (workplaces) that harboured weapons, supplies or people.

At 9 o'clock in the morning of 14 May 1944, after a raid by the French Militia² and a shooting at their home, the two women were arrested. At the time, they were giving shelter in their own home to a group of guerrilla fighters who were to flee across the border. Among them was Jesús Ríos, who was seriously injured. The Beleta women were harshly interrogated at the Foix prison, and then handed over to the Gestapo at the Saint Michel prison in Toulouse. Conxita recalled the tortures: *"The Germans beat us with sticks to make us talk [...] they used a whip to subject us to terrible interrogations [...] My main concern was to not be too badly tortured so that I would not talk, because, although they knew the first two Maquis, they ignored the one from Col du Py; my ass was as black as a liver"*. Despite the tortures, neither of the three women revealed any information about their activities and companions. The pain and the threats of execution went on for two long days, but the three women kept to the version they had agreed to when no one could hear them: the guerrillas had come to their house to have their clothes cleaned and mended; none of them knew anything or anyone. On 30 June 30 1944 they were transferred from Toulouse to Bordeaux where they were deported on board the so-called "ghost train".

The so-called "ghost train" was one of the last transports to take its occupants to the Nazi concentration camps. And there began a journey that, according to Nazi plans, was intended to reach the Dachau concentration camp in three days. The train began its journey by transporting the prisoners in trucks from the Vernet d'Ariège camp to Toulouse. Once there, they were joined by prisoners from the Saint Michel prison and by approximately twenty women from nearby camps, among whom there were also other Spanish women. The train left Toulouse on 3 July 1944 with 750 deportees, 221 of whom were Spanish, and finally reached Dachau on 28 August 1944, 54 days after its departure. The relentless bombardments by the Allies, combined with the attempts of sabotage by the Maquis to free the prisoners, slowed down the journey, hindered by a constant back and forth in deplorable conditions. The prisoners were besieged by hunger and thirst, the conditions in the train were inhuman and got even worse when the train stopped for days as the summer heat hit hard. The wagons had no air vents and were overcrowded with people who had no place to relieve themselves or to sit, and had almost nothing to eat or drink. In addition to that, due to constant attacks which managed to block the train in some sections, the prisoners had to endure long walks and continuous train changes under the harsh repressive conditions already imposed on them.

² The French Militia (*Milice Française*) was a paramilitary organisation, converted into an official army, created on January 30, 1943 by the French government of Vichy with the support of Nazi Germany, with the aim of fighting the French Resistance and thus unburden the *Schutzstaffel* (SS) and the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) in their actions.

On 26 August 1944 they finally entered Germany, and five days later, France was liberated. On 28 August 28 1944 they arrived at Dachau, where Conxita was registered in the camp with serial number 93.887. The women aboard the train were the only women registered in the Dachau repressive system, as the Nazi commanders did not know whether they would end up being transferred to the Ravensbrück concentration camp. A week later, they set off again and finally, on 9 September 1944, they were interned in Ravensbrück, in Barracks 22, where they were not separated because they were registered under their married names. Conxita was assigned number 62.480. In her own words: *"Unlike the Dachau camp, which was a bit more cheerful, with bands of flowers –even if I did not get to see the inside of the camp, I actually only saw the entrance and the officers' mess– in Ravensbrück everything was sinister: the stone road, the black field, the huge eagle... We arrived at about 18 o'clock in the evening. When we got off the train, we were received by two rows of SS sitting in wicker armchairs staring at us. All in all, they examined our teeth, and two or three times they performed the same ritual, bareback everybody."*

Among the extremely harsh conditions of the camps that she recounts, Conxita would also refer to a specific episode: *"We had a terrible outbreak of dysentery, caused by spoiled food; it struck everyone. You need to understand the situation we were in: 500 women with terrible diarrhoea and only four toilets. There was faeces everywhere. Many of them did not have time to get out of bed, because they were on three-story beds, so the faeces would drip to the floor or on top of the deported women. This happened twice, only ten days apart. It was the only time that the barracks were cleaned thoroughly [...] On the rest day, the bedding was changed. But we had barely any rest, for they had us spend endless hours at Appellplatz, or they left us outside the barracks with the excuse of disinfection. And in the meantime, those who were supposed to do it spent all day hiding, laughing, and when we got back in we found the same dirt as before"*.

Shortly after, the Beleta women were again sent to a *kommando* in Oberschöneweide, a suburb in Berlin, where they were forced to work day and night with other women. They shared the *kommando* with **Generosa Cortina**. They were in charge of manufacturing and inspecting aviation material at the Henkel factory, but they took advantage of any opportunity to sabotage it: *"I was supposed to control the parts, but we sabotaged them. We all did it. I was caned a lot and they shaved my head. Out of 650 women, at the end there were only 115 of us left"*.

Conxita ended up having to separate from her sister, who fell ill and was sent back to Ravensbrück. When the factory was bombed, 80% of the *kommando* was killed and they took the opportunity to escape. They enjoyed a brief moment of freedom, and Conxita experienced the unspeakable

pleasure of tasting again what she thought was a great delicacy: a piece of bread with margarine and cold meat. But the SS got hold of them again, and as the barracks were destroyed, they were locked up for three days. All the survivors were kept in a filthy cellar, without light or ventilation and with water dripping from the walls, from where they could only get out for a few minutes a day. Afterwards, on April 14, date that she recalled in her testimony, they were transferred to the Köpernick *command*, where they worked digging trenches in Sachsenhausen, a mixed camp where the former president of the Spanish Council of Ministers, Francisco Largo Caballero, was imprisoned.

As the allied troops approached, the SS began one of the so-called death marches, in which any prisoner who could not keep up the pace was killed on the spot. One night, before escaping, the SS shot on sight all the deportees they found. Conxita, Elvira and a group of friends that had taken refuge under a tree saved their lives. *“Out of the 85 women who left the camp, only 22 of us were left”*. They wandered until first the Soviets, and then the Americans helped them. *“We realised that we were alone and that our executioners had escaped”*. Both the Soviets and then the Americans returned them, not without difficulties, to France, after passing through Holland, Brussels and Lille.

There Conxita was to be reunited with her cousin Maria's family and her uncle Jaume, who had returned from Andorra. Finally, thanks to a telegram, they were able to locate Maria in Paris, shortly before her death. Conxita would recall that moment with extreme harshness: *“She was completely unrecognisable [...] she was a living skeleton [...] she had been poisoned by the waters of the Bergen-Belsen camp. Because of all the piles of corpses lying around, typhus broke out. In the last days, the water of the camp became poisonous. In spite of her condition, she retained all her clarity”*.

On Christmas 1946 Conxita married Josep Ramos, whom she knew from her time as a guerrilla fighter. This is the reason why she was also known as Conxita Ramos, her married name. Conxita Grangé has received several distinctions from the French Republic, such as the Legion of Honor and the Medal of the Resistance. Conxita devoted the last years of her life to the priceless task of sharing her experience with young people, as well as guiding groups

around the *Musée Départemental de la Résistance et de la Déportation* (Museum of the Resistance and Deportation) of Toulouse. In 2019, after Neus Català's death, she became the last Catalan survivor of the Nazi extermination camps. On 26 July 2019 she was honoured for the first time in Catalonia. The tribute was organised by the City Council of Torre de Capdella, her hometown, together with Memorial Democràtic and with the participation of the Amicale of Ravensbrück. She died in Toulouse on 27 August 2019, at the age of 94.



Cristina Zalba Rodis

(1909-2001)

“Cristina Delòs Solà”

Cristina Zalba Rodis was born on 7 May 1909 at the Hospital Clínic in Barcelona (Barcelona). The following day, she was abandoned and taken to the Casa de la Maternitat, where a judge gave her a family name. At first, she was taken in by a family from Setcases (Girona) whose mother breastfed her and looked after her until she was five years old. But then her adoptive mother died and the family could no longer look after her. The town's rector managed to have her taken in and finally adopted by the Delòs-Solà family of Sant Joan de les Abadesses (Girona). After a few years, the Delòs-Solà couple had a biological daughter, Rosita, and Cristina went from being the baby of the house to being the maid. Some years later, when she was 10 or 11 years old, Rosita died from complications from appendicitis.

In 1922, at the age of 13, Cristina started working at the Llaudet textile factory, also known as the Pagès factory, in Sant Joan de les Abadesses. There, she had her first experience with trade unionism and joined the CNT. In 1934, at the age of 25, she married Enric Sala Planella from Sant Pau de Segúries (Girona). Joan, their first child, was born in March 1935.

With the outbreak of the civil war, Cristina's husband was sent to the front to fight in the Battle of Ebro with the Republican Army, and she had to face hardship alone. She managed to make the most of her knowledge of herbal remedies and ointments to help her neighbours, especially in the interruption of unwanted pregnancies, while still working in the Colònia Llaudet. Her granddaughter Sònia Sala portrays her as: “a very unconventional woman, very decisive and strong-minded. She was not submissive in the least to her husband and had a mind of her own. She was used to having a voice and a vote at home”. She worked in the factory until 8 February 1939 when, as the Republican troops retreated, it was set on fire and blown up.

After the war, her husband Enric was severely repressed and imprisoned in the Igualada concentration camp, from where he was released at the beginning of 1940. When he returned to Sant Joan les Abadesses, he had a hard time adjusting to the work in the textile factory and so, in October 1940, he went to work as a tenant farmer on the Mas La Sala farm, in the town of Oix (Girona). Cristina also moved in and lived there with her husband, her three children, her adoptive parents and a labourer. The labourer was Joan Camps Solà,



Source: Family archive Delos-Solà

Cristina's brother, who had returned to Catalonia after his exile in France as a member of the PSUC under the false name of Joan Solà Pujol. In this new isolated bordering location, further events led Cristina to give her support to the Maquis and to the anti-Francoist resistance.

On 31 December 1944, at Mas Puigvert (Sant Iscle de Colltort, Girona), the Guardia Civil ambushed a group of guerrilla fighters looking for provisions. As a result of the confrontation, a Maquis known as Palau was killed whilst another Maquis, a guerrilla called **Crispín**, was shot in the leg, on his right knee. Although nothing has ever been found out about the third member of the group, everything leads us to believe that he succeeded in escaping and crossed the border into France. *Crispín*, despite his injury, managed to escape to the mountains. The three Maquis were members of the 19th group of the AGE (*Agrupación de Guerrilleros Españoles*), the *Bordoy* group, and they had been infiltrated in a mission to organise armed resistance in Catalonia. *Crispín* was actually the war name of the 25 year old leader of the *Bordoy* group, Antoni Figueras Cortacans.

On 13 January 1945, *Crispín* arrived at the hermitage of Santa Bàrbara de Pruneres. In the afternoon he went to La Sala farmhouse by foot –it was 5 or 10 minutes away from the hermitage– determined to get some food and water and gather some strength to cross the border. He himself wrote in his report to the PCE: “*The night before it had snowed, and the storm had left 30 centimetres of snow. It was very cold and I had not eaten anything for five days, not even an ounce of bread*”. At La Sala he would meet Cristina who, seeing his wounds, did not hesitate to tend to his injuries so that he could continue on his way. As he himself goes on to say: “*Once I had eaten and they had my right knee treated*

and put some oil on me, I asked them if I could stay and rest that afternoon; they accepted and took me to a pen where they had rabbits on a straw bedding, the pen was under the threshing floor of the farmhouse”.

The following day, when *Crispín* was supposed to leave for the border, his condition had significantly worsened and he could not walk. Cristina’s family, led by her husband, tried to talk her out of having *Crispín* stay in the pen, as the farmhouse was on a border crossing and often received visits from the Guardia Civil. It was really dangerous to hide a *Maquis* there. At that time they had two children, 10 and 2 years old, whose lives were also being put at risk. But Cristina remained firm. Despite her husband’s opposition, and with the sole support of her cousin Joan Camps, she allowed *Crispín* to stay a few more days.

Not only were they in a highly guarded border area, but Cristina and her family were totally unaware of the fact that they were already under surveillance by the regime. In fact, as unveiled by recently discovered reports, in 1946 the Guardia Civil had registered them as “*sympathisers of left-wing groups; it is presumed that rebels passed through that spot, and on a certain occasion, in a mountain near said farmhouse, several rucksacks were found, but its inhabitants do not seem to be willing to cooperate with the security forces*”.

For the first eight days, they kept *Crispín* hidden in the pen. On the ninth day, following an urgent notification announcing the visit of a group of soldiers from Franco and the Falange, they decided to hide him in a nearby abandoned farmhouse, *La Canova*. In his report, Figueras recalls how Cristina defended him during this period, trying to bring him back to the La Sala farmhouse: “*When I was in La Canova, she kept telling her family that they had no right to abandon me, that I should be cared for and protected by them. And then she said these words to the whole family: ‘Don’t forget that the Maquis struggle is for our own good, to free us from the cruel terror of Franco and fascism’*”. She ended up convincing her husband Enric with these words: “*If tomorrow your two children find themselves in a situation like the one this man is in, wouldn’t you thank the people who looked after them?*” And as Enric nodded, she added: “*They are risking their lives for us. We might as well risk ours for them*”. Finally, Cristina added: “*Don’t forget, Enric, that I’d rather be a hero’s widow than a coward’s wife*”. By reasoning in these terms, Cristina managed to have Antoni Figueras come back to the farmhouse three days later. From that moment on, Cristina and Antoni got on so well that the guerrilla fighter would later describe her as a “true warrior’s mother”.

During the following months, Cristina tended to Antoni’s injuries and looked after him in different rooms of the

farmhouse. She would keep him safe, shielded from nosy neighbours and from the Guardia Civil or Franco’s patrols, who often stayed for lunch and spent the night at the farmhouse: “*When I felt that the tricorns and soldiers or a neighbour were coming, I would hide in the hay, and until they left I wouldn’t come out of my hideout*”.

Figueras faced great difficulties trying to regain full mobility of his leg. In his report he recounts how Cristina “*All the time I was ill, the one who always looked after me, relentlessly and with great courage, with the affection of a true mother, was Mrs Cristina. Every night she would go to bed one or two hours later than everyone else, not without first having looked after my knee and done everything I needed*”. During this time, Cristina took it upon herself to travel to Granollers (Barcelona), where Antoni’s relatives lived, to tell them that he was still alive. Antoni’s father, who was closely watched by the police because he had his three children exiled for having fought on the Republican side, tried to obtain false identity papers for him, but never succeeded. Antoni’s father’s second wife and their son visited Antoni on two occasions at Mas La Sala.

This situation lasted for 508 days, during which he was able to partially recover. In June 1946, he decided that the time had come to leave the country and cross into France for good. Once again, it was Cristina who helped him, guiding him to the border without her husband’s approval. On 7 June, after a long non-stop night walk during which they walked fifty metres apart from each other in case one of them was captured, they reached the border. There, and according to Antoni’s report, she said to him: “*One day you will return and this day will be the day of the glory and the freedom of the Spanish people*” and she added: “*You guerrillas are the best sons of Spain*”. They departed after locking each other in a long embrace. They were never to see each other again. Once in Lamenère (France), Figueras kept writing to the family for a few years, but due to Cristina’s husband repeated refusals, he finally gave up; he also kept corresponding with Joan Camps, the labourer with whom he had built a strong friendship.

He was fully aware that he would never have survived without Cristina’s determination and help, and he wanted this to be recorded in his PCE reports, where she portrayed her as a true heroine: “*Mrs Cristina Delos, her real name Cristina Zalva Rodiz, 37 years old, was born in the Maternity Hospital in Barcelona. During our war of independence she was affiliated to the CNT. She is a woman of great courage, with strong humanitarian feelings and a great mother’s heart, very brave and courageous, like all our glorious women, such as Agustina de Aragón, Aida Lafuente and Lina Odena and others; she has done everything in her power to save my life*”.



*Wedding Cristina Zalba and Enric Sala
Source: Family archive Delòs-Solà*

As for the Sala-Zalba family, they lived at the farm until 1954 when they moved to Castellfollit de la Roca (Girona) to help meet the education needs of their children –a question that was very important for Cristina.

Cristina died on 21 August 2001 at the age of 91 and her story of heroism and commitment has remained unjustly forgotten.

In the spring of 2021, the *Amical d'Antics Guerrillers de Catalunya*, following the discovery of Antoni Figueras' report, contacted her family. Cristina's children and grandchildren were unaware of her story. She had only mentioned it in passing, at the end of the 1980s, to her granddaughter Sònia Sala, but without giving any details or further explanations. She asked her to never tell anyone that they had kept a Maquis hidden at their home, as they could come get them.

In 2022, after this discovery, the *Amical Antics Guerrillers de Catalunya* started the documentary project *508 dies* (2023) which will tell the story of Cristina, "a story of great courage, starring a woman who fought her own fight against Franco's regime, in her own home".

Cristina's granddaughter and great granddaughter, Sònia Sala and Iona Pujol, discovered the story and tried to find Antoni Figueras descendants. They wanted to find out if they were aware of these events and tell them about the documentary project. This resulted in the reunion of two unknown families united by a strong bond that has crossed borders and has also brought Antoni Figueres' daughters and sons the acknowledgement of their father's courage.

Elvira Ballesté Naval

(1928-2009)

“Elvireta”



Source: Family Archive Ballesté Naval

Elvira Ballesté Naval was born on 30 November 1928 in Albelda (Huesca). The daughter of Elvira Naval and Roque Ballesté, she had two brothers Roque and Antonio, and one sister, Pilar. As she was the youngest, she was always called by the diminutive of her name, Elvireta.

The outbreak of the civil war turned her family life upside down. Elvira was 8 years old. At that time her brother Roque was doing the military service in Jaca but decided to go over to the Republican and join the Durruti Column. As the war progressed, the Column was reorganised into the 26th military Division under the command of Ricardo Sanz. Her brother Anthonio also decided to enlist after having been called up. Elvireta's sister Pilar was entrusted with the direction of a colony of orphans in Llançà.

Meanwhile, Elvireta continued to live in Albelda with her parents, and they lived there until Franco's troops arrived at their place. In Albelda, as in most places in Republican Aragon, the power vacuum that followed the uprising, together with the arrival of militia troops from Catalonia, led to the introduction of collectivism. With the dissolution of the *Consell d'Aragó* in August 1937, the collectivist structure of the region was dismantled. Regardless of his sympathies towards this revolutionary movement, Roque Balasté – Elvira's father– felt compelled to join the local collectivity. Both his sons were fighting on the front, so he could not count on their work, and he could not replace them either with temporary labourers for the very same reason.

Fearing repression, in March 1938 most villagers left Albelda for Catalonia. Elvireta and her parents moved to a nearby town past Albelda, Castillonroy, as her brother Roque had warned them about the danger of escaping to Catalonia because of the constant fascist bombings. But soon after, Castillonroy was also taken by Franco's troops. Since they were already on the rebel side, and afraid of having their properties looted, they returned to Albelda.

After the Republican Aragon was occupied by Franco's troops, the repression against the defeated began. At 11 am on 26 July 1938, the Guardia Civil showed up at their home to arrest Elvireta's father. Although her uncle, José Ballesté, was the first Francoist mayor of the village –thanks to his connections with Falange and the Catholic Centre–, he could not do anything to prevent Roque's arrest. The following

morning, as her wife was about to bring him some food, she saw a body leaving the police station. She recognized his shoes: “I came to bring lunch to my husband, although I think it will not be necessary after all since I recognized his shoes, my husband's shoes, the man you have murdered”. Although the authorities told her he had committed suicide in his cell, the ceiling was not high enough, the body showed signs of have been beaten up and it was covered in blood.

Elvireta's mother was totally devastated, so the then ten year old girl became the family's main pillar. At that time she started going to school, as they had decided to move in with one of her uncles. Soon after, her mother fell ill. The repression continued and, this time, it hit Elvireta's mother, who was arrested for allegedly acting as a liaison to the Republican army. Apparently, the Francoist authorities had found a letter addressed to her from her children, who were still on the battlefield. She was later tried in a court-martial in Tremp, where she was sentenced to prison. There, Elvireta provided for her mother's needs through a woman in Lleida who brought food to the prisoners. With the help of her uncle, Elvireta tried to secure the little help she could provide and walked all the miles it took to reach Lleida.

With the fall of Catalonia, her brothers went into exile. Her sister Pilar immediately travelled to Figueres to look for Antonio, who had been injured in the war. He had been abandoned in the hospital, and Pilar managed to rescue him and take him to the French border using a cart to transport him. And then she returned to the colony and was transferred with all the orphans to the camp in Pas-de-Calais. With the occupation of France by the Nazis, the colony was dismantled and Pilar was transferred to Argelès-sur-Mer. Later, she reunited with her brothers.

In 1939, Elvira was practically alone. And in addition to that, she had to face a 15,000 pesetas fine imposed on her father in accordance with the recently adopted Act of Political Responsibilities for sympathising with the Republic. And so Elvireta, who at that time was only 11 years old, had to go to the Civil Register in Tamarit to settle the matter. In order to have the fine cancelled, she engaged in a lengthy

institutional claim in which she acted as a plaintiff although she was still a minor. The role played by the two officially accredited registering bodies, both on the part of the Town Council and on the part of the local parish, was particularly repressive. First, they refused to issue a death certificate for Elvireta's father, and without the certificate she could not cancel her father's debt and all his remaining assets were at risk. The village's chaplain, Juan Fusté Vila, proposed as a solution to issue a death certificate stating that the death should be attributed to "natural causes" and that he had been found dead in his cell. This way, the debt could be cancelled. But although she was only 11, Elvireta refused to sign such a lie. Her father had not died, he had been beaten up to death. Elvireta refused to sign, claiming that she was still a minor. Finally, after a long and lengthy procedure and several interrogations at the Tamarit court, the penalty was cancelled and she was able to keep her father's assets.

Elvireta had to leave school again in march 1942 after her mother became seriously ill. Severely weakened by her time in prison, she died of a stroke in 1942, a year after her release. Elvireta was barely 14 years old when she became an orphan. Overwhelmed by the pressure caused by the repression of the defeated, and unable to manage with her uncles their heavily taxed estate, she fought the authorities for a tax rebate.

At the age of 16, she decided to resume studying at the Dominiques of Lleida, where she stayed for two years. Since she was under strong surveillance and the regime knew she had relatives abroad, she had to set up a plan with the nuns, who certified that she was staying with them throughout the year so the authorities would let her go to Andorra to visit some friends. Once in Andorra, she crossed the border and was reunited with her brothers.

After that, she went back to Albelda and waited for her brothers to return. They returned after having asked for the pardon granted by Franco to the fugitives. Roque returned in 1947. Pilar also returned to divide the property equally among them, although she ended up going back to Paris to her family. Antonio, however, never wanted to return.

Elvireta passed away in 2009 at the age of 81 in complete anonymity. Maria Antònia, Elvireta's niece, wrote this poem in her memory:

*I just want to open
that silence of yours
-that long forgetfulness
of the memoirs
that you secretly
share with your soul.
Uncover the truth
without fear.
Make justice to your
that belongs to everyone.
Give back its colour
to the universe
to feel the dawn
and the sunset.
Miserly those who tore
your childhood dream.
What was left between the hands
of those who murdered
your father?
They don't even deserve a word.
I shall sing to you;
to your strength.
I shall sing to you.
You, who survived the holocaust
and populated the future
with smiles and roses.
I want to raise the flag
of the love you inspire in me.
Praise your pain,
this pain that
is now my heritage
and show it to the children
of the Earth.
I shall sing to you.
I want the world to know you,
Elvira.
I want to sing the shadows
to revive the flight
of your lights.*

Enriqueta Otero Blanco

(1910-1988)

“Maria Das Dores”



Source: Private Archive Carmen Pérez

Enriqueta Otero Blanco was born on 26 February 1910 in Castroverde (Lugo). She came from a wealthy rural family. Her father was of *hidalgo* origin (nobleman) and had a reputation of being a tyrant, whereas her mother, good-natured, died shortly after giving birth to nine children. Thanks to her uncle, who was a priest, she started her education quite early. She completed her high school studies at *La Milagrosa* secondary school and then graduated in Primary Education. The first time she worked as a teacher was in San Cosme de Barreiros (Lugo).

She showed a special vocation for culture and knowledge and she founded a theatre company (*O Punteiro do Carriño*) with the aim of bringing culture to villages and rural areas, and did so by touring Fonsagrada, Corcoesto, Vilagarcía and Pontevedra. During this first stage, she became deeply involved in and committed to a variety of cultural activities in which she acted as a teacher, actress and theatre director. Once she passed the government teaching exams, she moved to Madrid to continue her training in Education, particularly as a specialist in the deaf-mutes. She later married in Madrid.

The atmosphere of the capital city, and Madrid culture in general, so different from the small rural areas of Galicia, shook her intellectually. She got involved in the cultural atmosphere of the Republic and, strongly influenced by the political debate and the different forums for the exchange of ideas, she ended up joining the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) in 1936, in pre-war times.

After being a direct witness of the coup d'état in Madrid, she did not hesitate to join the popular militia in the column led by Valentín González González “*El Campesino*” (“The Peasant”) in the 5th Regiment. From December 21, 1936, this column, whose members were mainly communist militants, was integrated in the popular army known as the 1st Shock Mobile Brigade and, later, as the 10th Mixed Brigade. Once in the army, she eventually attained the rank of Major and was later to be known as the militiawoman of culture. “*Culture is not about knowing how to read and write. Culture is something broader, it is knowing how to govern oneself according to the laws of morality and ethics, to be able to conduct oneself in all the events of one’s life, without wandering around, without needing others to guide us on our way. Some people –the fascists– are interested in not*

letting the immense majority think for themselves so they will go wherever they want them to. This is always their inference: leading for the good of the few and the unrest of the many. But when a people knows their rights and duties, when they know how to discern the just from the unjust, when it is well educated, then criminal exploitation is not possible. This is our ideal, and that’s why we make a call to all anti-fascists to go to school. Let’s all educate ourselves, comrades. Let’s be humble, which means being great”.

Parallel to that she worked as a coordinator with Doctor Mariano Gómez at the Carabanchel hospital, where the injured militias were sent. In Alicante, she took part in the creation of school-hospitals, and she also organised nurseries for the children of soldiers as well as arranging the accommodation for the widows and companions of the fallen soldiers. She even came to work as the secretary of *La Pasionaria*, **Dolores Ibárruri**.

After Casado’s coup, she was arrested and imprisoned in Las Ventas. There, she organised a riot and a prison break demanding to be allowed to continue the fight. Once the war was over, she was arrested again, first in Las Salesas with 2,600 other women and later in Las Ventas. Again, she organised a riot, this time with hostages, and managed to escape again from prison. After wandering in Madrid on the run, she decided to return to Galicia posing as a Francoist.

In Galicia, a priest who was a friend of the family (Manuel Gómez Díaz) kept her hidden. But Enriqueta did not want to live as a defeated and decided to join the Maquis. Once there, she articulated and structured “*La terra dos fuxidos galegos*” (“The land of Galician fugitives”) as part of the Resistance, together with Benigno Andrade “*Foucelhas*”, José Castro Veiga “*the Pilot*”, Ramón Vivero, Julio Neto or Marcelino Rodríguez “*Marrofer*”. She then adopted and used the war name **Maria das Dores**. They continued the fight against the Guardia Civil, constantly moving for seven years, although once the Second World War ended, the possibility of an international intervention in Spain began to fade away.

In 1942, the police made a new attempt to arrest her. She had begun to establish links with the fugitives and with the anti-fascists of Becerreá, where she helped to put in place a primitive guerrilla structure. Without contact with the PCE until 1944, her political and organisational work in an important part of the province of Lugo had a strong influence in the subsequent political and guerrilla growth of the province.

In 1944 she joined the Provincial Committee of Lugo, and the following year she established direct relations with the PCE. In February of that year, she was appointed at the head of finances and organisation. Despite the fall of some cadres, the party came to count throughout the province with a hundred militants and a dozen and a half guerrillas.

From the end of 1945 to the beginning of 1946, the surveillance on the Communist Party of Lugo and on Enriqueta Otero intensified. In January of this year the fall of several people jeopardised the entire provincial structure; in February, up to fifty people linked to the resistance fell.

On February 14, 1946, a leak to the police about her location led to an ambush and to her arrest. She was injured and taken to the hospital, where she had to receive emergency surgery. But this did not prevent her from being brutally tortured until her trial, which she had to attend on crutches. She was sentenced to death by the Military Court of the 8th Military Region. Due to international pressure and to the attempt by the regime to adapt to an increasingly changing world context, her sentence was commuted to 30 years in prison.

For 19 years she went through different state prisons such as Amorebieta, Segovia, and Guadalajara -in 1951. Some months after being sentenced she was sent to Alcalá de Henares. In October 1946 she was transferred to the prison of Amorebieta, and at the end of November to that of Segovia, where she spent five years in dreadful hygienic, medical, sanitary and food conditions which led her to participate in the 1949 strikes demanding improvements to the prison. In October 1951 she was admitted to the Guadalajara prison and months later she was locked up in Alcalá de Henares, where she was released on parole in 1960. The final sentence still had to wait until 1965.

She was finally released in 1966 and returned to her village. When she got out of prison she recovered some of the seized family property, although she lost part of it and had to survive without being authorised to work as a teacher. The Francoist authorities had revoked her teaching certificate and was not allowed to work in education. She then lodged a long administrative complaint for her restitution as a national teacher, which she finally won in October 1974.

In 1975, a year before retiring, she was appointed to a school in Fontarón. During her brief reinstatement in the education system, she launched an educational project called *O Carriño*, which consisted of transferring university degree knowledge to all those who, due to lack of means, could not access university education. The headquarters of this travelling initiative was in a *palloza* in the park Rosalía de Castro in Lugo.

In the constituent elections of 1977, she decided to run in the elections to the Congress for the Communist Party of Spain (PCE), although she was not elected as a deputy. Over time, she would end up distancing herself from the party.

Enriqueta died at the age of 79 on 31 October 31 1988 in Lugo. She was buried in a Republican flag and has since been recognised as "*the last Galician guerrilla, a Pasionaria do pobo galego*".

Esperanza Martínez García

(1927)

“Sole”



Source: Historical Archive of PCE

Esperanza Martínez García was born on 27 April 1927 in Villar del Saz de Arcas (Cuenca). The daughter of a politicised left-wing family, she had four sisters: Amancia, Prudencia, Amada and Angelina. The siblings were mainly raised by their father, Nicolás Martínez, as their mother, Matilde García, had died giving birth to Angelina, shortly before the end of the civil war.

She spent her childhood in the *Caserio Atalaya* farmhouse, where her father worked the land. She had to walk 4 or 5 km to get to and from school, and that long distance, together with her father's difficulties in looking after her sisters, made her drop out of school. Her family was republican and voted for the Popular Front, and once the war was over, she decided to join the Resistance.

As Esperanza recounts, at first they thought that their father had a mistress he kept secret. *“Every morning, my father's pillow looked sunken on both sides. Mum had died in childbirth and the girls suspected he might have a mistress. Food was also missing, so it was clear that someone else was sleeping under our roof”*. Soon they discovered that it was not a woman but a guerrilla who was living in their house. His father had decided to help the Resistance and was using the house and the barn as guerrilla hiding places. Although at first he tried to prevent his daughters from knowing it for fear of repression, once they knew the truth, they also decided to help.

Then Herminio Montero, a Republican enlisted in the guerrilla, contacted Esperanza's father and he decided to help him. Shortly after, the house became a logistical point for the AGLA (*Agrupación Guerrillera de Levante y Aragón*). It was 1947 and the dictator Francisco Franco had just approved the Decree-Law on Banditry and Terrorism aimed at combating the guerrilla struggle of the Maquis, which had increased since 1945 due to the Allied victory in the Second World War.

Esperanza was 19 years old. At that time, she was acting as a liaison and, as she told in her own words: *“The guerrillas would order things from me and I would go to Cuenca to buy what they asked and bring it home; they often stayed at home, but sometimes they would pick it up and leave. Whenever they came to our house, they always asked me to go buy them things and I always went to Cuenca and bought*

them what they needed. I rode on a donkey, because back then we had no cars or anything else like that.” Esperanza walked more than 15 km a day to go shopping in Cuenca or other towns, where nobody could question her as to why she bought so many things.

Herminio's sister was Remedios Montero, who was a close friend of Esperanza's, but she had never talked to her about these questions for fear of repression and informers. Remedios herself was surprised to find out that her friend was doing the same as she was, as there were several families that helped the guerrillas: *“Esperanza was a good friend of mine. She had never said anything to me about helping the people up in the mountains, and had I had said nothing to her either. My surprise was that, one day, when we were talking, we found out that we were both doing the same thing: they were also helping them at home”*.

Once they were aware of the reality they were sharing, they decided to help each other with their errands. *“Knowing this did us a lot of good, because we came to an agreement and together we could do more things. We looked less suspicious”*. They began a family collaboration as members of the AGLA in the hardest period of repression of the Guardia Civil against the Resistance.

Despite the secrecy of their actions, the pressure was getting worse by the day. The Guardia Civil disguised themselves as guerrillas and went to the farmhouses pretending to be escaped prisoners trying to communicate with the guerrillas. Esperanza resisted until 1949, when the harassment they were subjected to by the police became too hard to endure.

The whole family was fully aware of what it would mean to be arrested, so they had no choice but to flee to the mountains and join a guerrilla group that was almost dismantled due to the repression. Their lives were in danger. Her father Nicolás, would be Enrique. Her brother-in-law, Hilario, would be Loreto. Amada, would be Rosita. Angelina, would be Blanca. Her friend Reme, would be Celia. Herminio, Reme's brother, who had been the first to leave, would be Argelio.

And Esperanza would be Sole. The Martínez Montero family joined the AGLA together. In Esperanza's own words: "I was forced to flee to avoid being arrested and shot, but when I joined the guerrillas, they were about to disband [...] My mission? To save my life and to resist until the end". So she went from being a liaison to becoming a Maquis.

Esperanza refers to those years as extremely hard times due to the living conditions and the persecution. This is how she recounts them: "Those times were extremely hard [...] No matter what people may say, the mountains cannot be portrayed. We would go from one place to another and, when we least expected it, the camp was attacked and we had to flee the persecution rushing for cover and hiding in the pine trees. It was terrible." From 1949 onwards, "It was all about resistance. At other times it had been about keeping active, going to the villages, campaigning here and there, and there was a lot of guerrilla activity, but at that time, in 1949, it was more about guerrilla evacuation, and if by chance there was an attack on the camp that caught us unawares, we could only give a defensive response, but we could not attack, we could never fight back. Although that happened only that year. Before, we could fight back, but not then. I once found myself in the middle of an attack on the camp we were staying in and there was a lot of shooting and a lot of things happened. A couple of the Guardia Civil accidentally ran into the camp and everyone started shooting at each other... One of us got wounded and some of them got wounded too, and one was also killed, a death which they later charged us with in our criminal record. Half an hour later the place was packed with Guardia Civil officers... Then we took refuge in a thicket –under the sun, because it was June or July; nobody could imagine that we were in the thicket, it wasn't a bush or anything–, until night came and, after communicating with the guerrillas, we regrouped at an assembly point. There was always an assembly point so that, if something happened, we could meet there... It was quite complicated, you know..."

Reme talks in her biography about the way she dealt with the guerrilla men: "Our life in the mountains was the same as theirs, the rucksack always on our backs and the weapon ready in case we needed it. Fortunately, we never had to use it. We were not treated differently or discriminated against for being women. We had good teachers and we gave classes on cultural training, politics and anything else that could cultivate us more and better."

The guerrilla women were in charge of providing the information, supply and care needed for the survival of the resisters, and at the same time they received training. "Our life consisted mainly in reading, studying, participating in meetings and political discussions, and informing ourselves about the situation whenever we could get some information through the radio, because there was a lot of interference..."

But in all of that, and the points of support people used to supply the guerrillas, women never went anywhere to supply. The Guardia Civil was not supposed to know where we were, so we didn't go anywhere to supply, but the men did it, and through the points we always received news and information that was later discussed in the camps. It was difficult, it was complicated: sometimes there was food, sometimes there wasn't. You had to live in the pine trees, in the forests, only like that".

Esperanza became increasingly politicised and joined the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) in 1950. "I immediately joined the party because I had read documents, I had listened to a lot of information about the guerrilla struggle and the reasons for defending the Republic. It all caught my attention and I wanted to be part of that fight, I wanted to feel complicit in all that". Her sisters learned to read and write.

In 1951, her father and brother-in-law died in an ambush by the Guardia Civil. She and Reme managed to escape and went into exile in Paris, at the home of French communists. There, they received orders from the PCE, for which they continued to work as a liaison. Their mission was to evacuate guerrillas who were still in Spain. "The party sent me to pick up guerrillas and I came [to Spain] to do it [...] Of course I don't regret it. I wasn't tricked into it, I did it of my own free will. I joined a cause, I defended it and I continue to defend it". And she did, she joined it, although the plans went askew. During a train journey to Salamanca, her guide ended up being an infiltrator. She was arrested in 1952 on the outskirts of Miranda de Ebro, and Remedios also fell.

After being tortured, she was tried in two court-martials in Valencia and Burgos. She was sentenced to five years and one day for "banditry and terrorism" and to twenty-three years and four months for "espionage and communism". She ended up spending 15 years in the prisons of Burgos, Madrid, Valencia and Alcalá de Henares, where she would meet with Reme and her sister Amada. During her time in prison she worked making uniforms for the police to have her sentence reduced. She was released from prison in 1967 and ended up marrying Manuel Gil in 1970, in the prison of Zaragoza. It was the first civil marriage in prison under Franco's regime. She was strongly involved in the Democratic Women's Movement of Saragossa.

Once under democracy, she never stopped fighting for the memory of the Resistance and the anti-Francoist struggle, and she participated in several associations and lectures on this subject. Her life inspired the book *La voz dormida* by Dulce Chacón, which was later brought to the big screen by Benito Zambrano (*El Silencio Roto*, 2001).

Generosa Cortina Roig

(1910-1987)



Source: Memorial Democràtic.

Generosa Cortina Roig was born on 19 April 1910 in Son (Lleida). She was the daughter of Bàrbara Roig and Jaume Cortina. In 1925, at the age of fifteen, due to her family situation, she had to emigrate to Granges-sur-Lot (France) where her sister Antònia was already living. There she met Jaume Soldevila Pich, also from Escart (Lleida) whom she married in 1931. After their marriage, the couple settled in Toulouse, where he worked as a mechanic.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the border and in order to cope with the economic hardships of the post-war period in Spain, her husband's brothers went to Andorra to work as smugglers. Ricardo and Joan Soldevila had taken part in the war. Joan had enlisted as a volunteer in the Carabiner Corps and Ricardo in the air force. But on one of their journeys they were caught smuggling by the Guardia Civil and were imprisoned in Lleida. While in prison they met a man from Saint-Girons (Ariège, France) whose activities and skills with the smuggling networks helped them enter a network of couriers. Months later, as the Second World War unfolded, they joined the Belgian *De Jean* network that passed data and information on behalf of the Allies across the French border (Toulouse-Barcelona). Generosa and her husband became agents of both networks: the *Françoise* evasion network and the Belgian *De Jean* information network.

In 1943 they organised what was to be known as the SOL line. The network connected the cities of Barcelona and Paris passing through Toulouse with the help of Generosa and Jaume. The SOL line name referred to the first three letters of the courier's name (Soldevila), who was at the end of the line and was the person in charge of collecting and delivering the parcels to Barcelona. This line operated as an allied information and evasion network which, during the Second World War, linked Toulouse with Barcelona, and was managed by four members of the same family.

These networks were responsible for the escape of thousands of people who were persecuted by the Nazis from different European countries occupied by the Germans. Fugitives took a great risk trying to sneak across the Pyrenees border: an arrest could lead to deportation or expulsion. The destination varied depending on the person who escaped: on the one hand, there were the Consulates of the Allies in Spain and Portugal, while others, such as the Jews or young French fugitives, had a much harder time. Another example were

the British and North American airmen, who were transferred down to Gibraltar itself. These networks were organised and subsidised by the allied secret services, which also provided weapons, forged papers and even radio transmitters to the evasion channels. In the summer of 1943 the network was fully operational.

It is easy to deduce from the description that the SOL Line was part of the Pat O'Leary Line, one of the most important organisations in terms of evasion, information and mail in the service of the Resistance and the Allies between 1940 and 1944. The Pat O'Leary network was organised by the secret services of the United Kingdom and specialised in the evasion of Allied airmen who crash-landed in occupied France.

The SOL line operated on different routes. First, Ricardo "José" travelled to Barcelona to pick up the parcels at the Belgian consulate. Then, he took the parcels from Barcelona to Cerdanya and left them in a house that was used like a mailbox. There, Jaume "Pablo" would pick them up and take them to Toulouse, where Generosa delivered them to another member of the network, a woman whose identity was unknown.

Once the route in Cerdanya became too dangerous, they moved it to the Pallars Sobirà. Again, Ricardo would smuggle the parcels to Escart while Joan "Rodrigo" covered the route from Escart to Couflens. In Couflens, Joan would leave the parcels in a trusted house where they were collected to take them to Saint Girons. Once there, Jaume took them to Toulouse where Generosa would deliver them.

In April 1944, the Belgian government, in exile in London, launched the Roch mission, the aim of which was to evacuate secret agents and particularly important people. The person in charge of the mission, the Belgian air captain Charles de Hepcée, was supposed to enter France with the help of the Soldevila brothers.

Ricardo was in charge of taking him from Barcelona to Pallars Sobirà. There, the brothers had planned to hide him in a house in Son (Lleida) until Jaume arrived to take him to Toulouse. But

for fear of being exposed and denounced by a local man they had the misfortune of running into, they decided to continue the journey straight away.

Upon Hepcée's arrival in France, a contact was supposed to guide him on French territory, but he abandoned him as soon as he crossed the border. Hepcée was intercepted in Ariège by a German patrol. On 22 April 1944 he was brutally interrogated, and subsequently imprisoned and executed.

This led the authorities to dismantle the SOL line. A month after Hepcée's arrest, on 15 April, the Gestapo broke into Generosa and Jaume's home. On 3 July she was deported on board the so-called "ghost train".

The so-called "ghost train" was one of the last transports to take its occupants to the Nazi concentration camps. And there began a journey that, according to Nazi plans, was intended to reach the Dachau concentration camp in three days. The train began its journey by transporting the prisoners in trucks from the Vernet d'Ariège camp to Toulouse. Once there, they were joined by prisoners from the Saint Michel prison and by approximately twenty women from nearby camps, among whom there were also other Spanish women. The train left Toulouse on 3 July 1944 with 750 deportees, 221 of whom were Spanish, and finally reached Dachau on 28 August 1944, 54 days after its departure. The relentless bombardments by the Allies, combined with the attempts of sabotage by the Maquis to free the prisoners, slowed down the journey, hindered by a constant back and forth in deplorable conditions. The prisoners were besieged by hunger and thirst, the conditions in the train were inhuman and got even worse when the train stopped for days as the summer heat hit hard. The wagons had no air vents and were overcrowded with people who had no place to relieve themselves or to sit, and had almost nothing to eat or drink. In addition to that, due to constant attacks which managed to block the train in some sections, the prisoners had to endure long walks and continuous train changes under the harsh repressive conditions already imposed on them.

On 26 August 1944 they finally entered Germany, and five days later, France was liberated. On 28 August 1944 they arrived at Dachau, where Generosa was registered in the camp with serial number 93.882. The women aboard the train were the only women coded and registered in Dachau, because the Nazi commanders did not know whether they would end up being transferred to Ravensbrück. A week later they set off again and finally, on 9 September 1944, they were interned in Ravensbrück, in Barracks 22. There, Generosa was registered again, this time with serial number 65,475, written on a bracelet that she kept all her life.

During her captivity, she was forced to work as slave labour in a German war factory. More specifically a *kommando* in

Oberschöneweide, a suburb in Berlin, where they were forced to work day and night with other women. She shared the *kommando* with the Beleta women, Elvira, Maria and Conxita. They were in charge of manufacturing and inspecting aviation material at the Henkel factory, but as Conxita explained, they used any opportunity to sabotage it: "*I was supposed to control the parts, but we sabotaged them. We all did it. I was caned a lot and they shaved my head. Out of 650 women, at the end there were only 115 of us left*".

When the factory was bombed, 80% of the *kommando* died and they took the opportunity to escape. It was a brief moment of freedom, but soon the SS got hold of them again, and as the barracks were destroyed, they were locked up for three days. All the survivors were kept in a filthy cellar, without light or ventilation and with water dripping from the walls, from where they could only get out for a few minutes a day. Then on 14 April, they were transferred to the Köpernick *kommando*, where they worked digging trenches in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, a mixed camp where the former president of the Spanish Council of Ministers, Francisco Largo Caballero, had been imprisoned.

Between 19 and 21 April 1945, as the Allied troops approached, the SS began one of the so-called death marches, in which any prisoner who could not keep up the pace was killed on the spot. Generosa was one of the weak prisoners who were unable to keep up with the march, but thanks to the support of two other Spanish women, she was able to survive the long walk.

One night, before escaping, the SS shot on sight all the deportees they found. Generosa, Conxita, Elvira and a group of friends that had taken refuge under a tree saved their lives. "*Out of the 85 women who left the camp, only 22 of us were left*". They wandered until first the Soviets and then the Americans, helped them. "*We realised that we were alone and that our executioners had escaped*". Both the Soviets and then the Americans returned them, not without difficulties, to France, after passing through Holland, Brussels and Lille.

Generosa was finally repatriated to Toulouse where she reunited with her husband. She lived there for the rest of her life and opened a restaurant. She received many awards from the French and North American governments in acknowledgment for her work in the Resistance. In 1947, the President of the United States awarded both her and her husband the Medal of Freedom, and in 1962 Generosa was decorated with the Croix de Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur. Generosa died on 30 December 1987.

In 2020, the Generalitat de Catalunya paid tribute to Generosa Cortina in her hometown by inaugurating the signposting of the network of Memorial Spaces of Memorial Democràtic at the house where she was born, the Casa Moreu.

Hermínia Puigsech Puig

(1926-2013)

“Hermínia Muñoz”



Source: Family Archive Muñoz-Puigsech

Hermínia Puigsech i Puig was born on 19 September 1926 in Mataró (Barcelona). She was the daughter of Hermínia Puig and Ramon Puigsech. She spent her childhood in a farmhouse in Blanes. The school she went to, in Tordera, was coeducational and secular and followed the model of Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia's rationalist schools.

She was only 10 years old when the war broke out. Between April 1937 and January 1939, the city of Mataró was bombed and shelled nine days in a row by the Italian legionary aircraft and the German Condor Legion, based on the island of Mallorca. The attacks killed eight people and more than fifty were injured. The town was also bombed on one occasion by the Republican Air Force, resulting in two deaths and several injuries. As the months went by, their lives were increasingly at risk because of the bombings. Fearing repression, they finally went into exile. On 6 February 1939 Hermínia arrived in France with her brother Ramon and their mother.

In France they went through several refugee camps, first in Aude and then in Haute-Marne. Finally, they were authorised to leave and could finally reunite with their father. **Ramon Puigsech** had been the mayor of Tordera from 16th October to 14th December 1936, after the uprising, during the restructuring phase of republican institutions that took place on the principles of anti-fascist unity. He was elected mayor in representation of the PSUC, and was also a former member of the *Unió de Rabassaires*. He was also a member of the committee that had been set up in town and in which all the political forces that were part of the Central Committee of the Anti-fascist Militia. But he ended up resigning from this position due to political differences with the representatives of the CNT and FAI, which at that time were the most dominant forces in town. After his time as mayor he still played an important role in local politics, particularly in the analysis and defence of tenant farmers in front of landowners¹.

In France, Ramon Puigsech lived in a farmhouse in Dalou (Ariège). The house was one of the bases of the Maquis in the region, an environment with a rugged geography, difficult to access, with a large wooded area which made it the ideal place to set up guerrilla bases. Many of these bases consisted of logging exploitations, known as *chantiers*, where

the militants would live with their families and work there as loggers or charcoal burners, thus concealing their real political activity. These logging camps ended up becoming important logistical support points for the guerrillas.

A large part of the Spanish resistance that moved to France was organised after the occupation around the Spanish National Union (UNE). Later, in the concentration camps, the Communist Party of Spain (PCE), the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSUC) and its youth wing, the Unified Socialist Youth of Catalonia (JSUC), began to reorganise.

Although all political tendencies were represented, the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) was the one in charge of organising secret guerrilla groups under the name of the 14th Spanish Guerrilla Brigade –the name of the brigade that had participated in guerrilla warfare during the Spanish civil war. The brigade was first led by Jesús Ríos, the first national leader of the Spanish guerrillas. There were different brigades and sections under the Higher Command. The 3rd Brigade was the one operating in the Ariège region.

At the beginning of May 1944, the UNE decided to change the name of the 14th Guerrilla Command to *Agrupació de Guerrillers Espanyols* (AGE), in order to make clear its independence from any other Resistance movement. Around mid May, the AGE was directly linked to the French Forces of the Interior (FFI). The collaboration consisted above all in establishing a crossing route across the Catalan border and organising escape networks.

Hermínia, who was 17 years old at the time, would make herself useful by helping, like many other women in the Resistance, to provide food, medicines, supplies, clothing and information, as well as moving packages and weapons between the different points of support, such as the *chantiers*, for example. Without these support tasks, it was quite impossible for the Maquis to survive in such adverse conditions, especially with Pétain, the German and Gestapo militia chasing them. The 14th Guerrilla Brigade of the Ariège recruited her into the 3rd Brigade to act as a liaison between its three battalions and as a courier between the other

¹ The spokesman of the *Unió Socialista de Catalunya* (USC) published two articles in *Justícia Social* on 19/03/1932 and 16/04/1932, corresponding to issues 37 and 41 of the magazine.

brigades of Haute-Garonne, Aude and Pyrénées-Orientales. She would say of herself : *"I became a little soldier, available 24 hours a day"*. The 3rd Brigade from 14th July 1943 until 11th November 1943, was responsible for 40 sabotage attacks on the railway lines, 60 on the high voltage lines and for the paralysis of industrial production in the areas of Pamiers and Tarasco. On 1st May 1944 the aluminium factory of this town was sabotaged, and four days later, the attack was repeated.

These were all very dangerous tasks, especially due to the strict German control and the extension of the area, and Hermínia had to travel up to 80 km by bicycle or train to transport weapons. She was also supposed to take people from train stations to safe points. All these women were extraordinarily brave and courageous. They travelled the whole of the Ariège by bicycle with messages hidden in their saddles or in their handlebar tubes. Despite the danger, they never hesitated in their mission. In her own words: *"Séraphine and I cycled there and back on the same day because we also liaised with the guerrilla group in Toulouse. The papers were normally hidden in the handlebars."*

In 1944, she even transported two dismantled machine guns from Toulouse to Verniolle, each in a cardboard suitcase. *"On that day, it was raining heavily, the cardboard was wet and the suitcases yawned, exposing their contents. There was no one at Varilhes station to meet with the Maquis, who were due to arrive but had been blocked by a landslide on the road. So we hid the suitcases in the bushes."*

In addition, she would go to pick up young men who wanted to join the fight and she had to guide them with very specific codewords in order not to be exposed. She recalls that, on one occasion, her companions suspected that the meeting with one of the young men was being watched by the Germans. They warned her and she decided to proceed regardless, knowing that there was a risk of being arrested –with everything that was involved– or killed by her own companions, who were watching them from a distance with grenades in case they were caught. If that happened, their order was to finish them all off, including her. *"Two guerrillas were hiding in a bush at some distance from us. In case the Germans caught me, their job was to throw grenades to kill them, and me with them, to avoid torture so that I couldn't talk"*.

Hermínia was directly involved in two military actions during the Liberation. Although she always carried a gun, she never had to shoot. And she always considered herself as an equal to all the other guerrillas. *"She was a fighter like the others, there was a real brotherhood between us, she was their equal"*. During the combats of 19 July 1944 for the liberation of Foix she fought in the 1st Battalion attached to the 3rd Brigade, which was led by commander Fernando Villajos (Tostado). The battle began at 4:30 pm and lasted more than 4 hours. At the end, 152 Germans were captured out of a total of 250 that made up the garrison of the city, including two senior officers and 25 officers, and three Maquis were killed in the confrontation. The second battle was at Castelnau-Durban on 22nd August 1944, when the German army capitulated in Ariège.

The French Republic decorated her for her participation in the resistance with the Cross of the Legion of Honour in 2009. That same year, her adopted town, Vernhola (Ariège), decided to name the town's elementary school after her in recognition of her fight against fascism and in the defence of democracy and human rights. Hermínia was married to Crescêncio Muñoz, so she was also known as Herminia Muñoz. Her husband was also given the same recognition. The couple had two children, Luzbel and Numen. She died at the age of 87 on 17 February 2013 in Vernhola.

Julia Hermosilla Sagredo

“Paquita” (1916-2009)



Source: Private archive of Felipe Espílez Murciano

Julia Hermosilla Sagredo was born on 1 April 1916 in Sestao (Vizcaya). She was the daughter of Carmen Sagredo and Juan Hermosilla, a farm labourer and active member of the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT). This fact probably led her to become politically involved quite early and she joined the CNT when she was only fourteen years old. Her involvement consisted mainly in distributing libertarian press, joining the young members of *Juventudes Libertarias* and participating in the *Grupo Artístico Confederal* of Santurtzi (Vizcaya). Her partner, **Julián Ángel Aransáez**¹, also came from a family known as Los Aransáez who had a strong anarcho-syndicalist tradition.

In 1933, when she was only seventeen, she helped the insurrectionist farm tenants of La Rioja cross the Pyrenees border. One year later, in 1934, she showed strong support to the October Revolution, as well as to Vicente Cuesta and the Aransáez family.

At the beginning of the civil war, she enlisted as a militiawoman in one of the anarchist battalions and was sent to the Otxandio front (Vizcaya). She was then entrusted with the mission of going into rebel territory to rescue Dr. Isaac Puente, but unfortunately he ended up being arrested and shot before she could even rescue him. Then, on 22 July 1936 began the bombing of Otxandio, killing 61 people on the first day in what is considered to be the first European Guernica. As a result of the bombing, which did not stop until the fall of the city, her eardrums were sclerosed and she was deaf for some time.

In spite of this, she never ceased to be involved in libertarian culture, and in 1937 she began cooperating with the *Grupo Artístico Confederal* of Santurtzi (Artistic Alliance Group of Santurtzi). When Euskadi fell into the hands of the fascists, she managed to escape with her family and they set out on the road to exile to France. After two months there, she came back to continue fighting from Catalonia and joined the war front.

When Catalonia fell, she went back into exile, crossing the Pyrenees and going through different refugee camps. After the end of the Second World War, she went back to Bayona

¹ He was the son of **Saturnino Aransáez** (1893 – 1959), an outstanding militant of the CNT-AIT born in La Rioja. During the revolutionary events of October 1934, he took an active part alongside his son Ángel and Vicente Cuesta. During the Civil War he was part of the CNT Reserve Battalion.

to reunite with Julián Ángel Aransáez and pursued her political engagement with the CNE from a more “collaborative” perspective, cooperating with the Government of the Republic in Exile.

As for her involvement in the fight against Franco, she liaised with Home affairs on various missions in Spain. In 1948, together with a group led by Laureano Cerrada, she took part in an attempted anarchist-led attack to kill the dictator. Their plan was to bomb Franco’s yacht, the Astor, from the air using a plane bought in France.

Laureano realised that it would not be easy to attack their target on the road or to mine El Pardo. Any of these projects would have required a great deal of preparation, money and manpower, none of which they had. Moreover, Franco was under tight surveillance and it was impossible to get to him. The only way that occurred to them to overcome these obstacles was to attack from the only place that was unprotected: the air.

Franco was in San Sebastian, where we had gone to attend the second day of the regatta. Thousands of people gathered around La Concha beach, eager not to miss the show. The anarchists had been planning the magnicide for months. Their cover was a travel agency that had been created especially for that purpose under the name *Empresa de Transportes de Galicia*. It was supposed to operate as a transport company and it even managed to make some profits.

Cerrada found an aircraft dealer in Paris and he bought the Nord 1202-Norécrin II aircraft, with a maximum speed of 280 kilometres per hour. On one of the trips that the company organised to San Sebastián, Cerrada’s henchmen took a close look at La Concha beach and drew a plan of the outworks. Although the police ended up dissolving the company for suspicious activities, the mission to kill the dictator was not aborted. Nevertheless, when the day of the attack came, all their meticulous preparation was to no avail. They came within a hair’s breadth of exploding the device and bombing the

Astor with incendiary bombs and shrapnel. What happened was that, at the last moment, the anarchists were surprised by military aircraft from the Air Force which made them desist.

Julia took part in a second attempt to kill the dictator on 19 August 1969 on the road leading to the Ayete Palace. Some time ago, her companion Ángel Aranzáez had met Julen Kerman de Madariaga, one of the founders of ETA, in prison². Ángel later contacted Kerman to send him explosives –the ones that had not been used in the first attack– as the ETA members’ idea was to commit an attack against the official retinue with which Franco was travelling, just as he was about to enter his residence in San Sebastián. According to Hernández Gavi, the main obstacle the terrorists faced was that Franco was spending his holidays between Catalonia and the Basque Country and it was very difficult to know when he would return from Meirás.

Julia, who had been sent to Donostia as an observer, was in charge of studying the terrain and decided to place the explosion’s remote control on Mount Urgull, at Paso de los Curas, a spot with good visibility and without interference from electromagnetic waves. In her own words: “*Well, you see? We placed the bomb under the bridge, I think now there is a hotel there [...] No, no. It was in the palace of Ayete, on the way up*”. However, if they wanted to place the bomb on the access road to the Palace, they had to do it well in advance so that the escorts could not locate it, but then the device’s battery may malfunction or end up dead.

Everything was ready for Franco’s arrival. But when the convoy passed by, ETA did not activate the device. Apparently, nothing had gone according to plan. Only Carmen Polo – Franco’s wife– was there. And nobody knew where the general was. He had managed to avoid his assassination at the last moment. By chance or not, he had delayed his arrival in Ayete. In Julia son’s words, “*it didn’t work out because the batteries were dead. The remote control didn’t work [...] So they sent my mother to get it, lest it explode and make innocent victims*”.

Afterwards, Julia still continued to be involved in the struggle against the dictatorship. During the 1970s, together with Julián Ángel, she joined the group that published the newspaper *Frente Libertario* and attended the annual meetings that they held in Narbonne. After Franco’s death, she helped rebuild the CNT in the Basque Country. On 10 November 2001, her companion Angel Aransáez passed away in Anglet (Basque Country), where they lived. On 18 June 2006 she received a tribute in Artxanda together with other anti-Francoist fighters.

Julia Hermosilla died on 10 January 2009 at the Hospital de la Côte Basque of Bayona (Basque Country) at the age of 92. Her testimony was collected in Aitor Azurki’s book *Maizales bajo la lluvia. Testimonios de los últimos gudarís y milicianos de la Guerra Civil en Euskadi* (2011) in which she recounts her adventurous life and defines herself as “*always a rebel, always CNT, always Aransaez*”.

2 Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA): Founded in 1958 by various members of Ekin, a radical organisation banned by the youth wings of the Basque Nationalist Party, its aim was the creation of a socialist state in the Basque Country and its independence from Spain and France. The terrorist group went through different phases until the end of its armed activity in 2011.

Manuela Díaz Cabezas

(1920-2006)

“La Parrillera”



Source: Archive of Francisco Gómez Moreno

Manuela Díaz Cabezas was born on 11 December 1920 in Villanueva de Córdoba (Córdoba). The daughter of Ana María Cabezas and Francisco Díaz, she was the eldest of six siblings. Of humble origins, she never went to school as she was expected to help her family in the fields. Although her family did not stand out politically, they were quite class-conscious and were associated with communist militants. Manuela married Miguel López Cabezas, known with the nickname of *Moraño* or *Parillero* because his great grandfather used to make the gridiron grates labourers used to cook directly on the ground, both in the fields and at home.

She was soon to be a victim of the harsh repression against the defeated. Her husband was one of the first to be arrested and tortured, as were many others who were also imprisoned or forced to join forced labour battalions by reason of their links with communist militants. Although her husband was released after a month, in 1939, fearing being arrested again, he left for the mountain range north of Cordoba. There, together with Juan Álvarez and other companions, they created a guerrilla group known as **Los Parrilleros** which was later joined by locals from different villages around the mountains of Sierra de Madrona, namely José Antonio Cepas “*El Lobito*” and Inocencio Bernabé “*Borríca*”. For some time they were also linked to Julián Caballero’s group¹.

At that time, and for almost two years, Manuela had to take care of her home, her children Juanito and Adela, some of her younger brothers and sisters and her own mother. She combined her work as a housekeeper with her anti-Francoist activism acting as a liaison to her husband’s guerrilla group. Her work as a liaison consisted in providing food, supplies, clothing and all the equipment and tools needed to survive in the hostile environment of the mountains, as well as to relay all the information she could to *Los Parrilleros*.

Finally, in 1942, in an alleged theft attempt when trying to provide for her husband, she was intercepted by the Guardia Civil. She was taken into custody and brutally tortured to make her reveal her husband’s hiding place. They shaved her head so that everyone could identify her as a collaborator of the Maquis. And then she was tortured, forced to drink salt

¹ **Julián Caballero Vacas** (1894-1947) was an outstanding Maquis from Córdoba. He was elected Mayor of Villanueva de Córdoba in the elections of February 1936.

water and to endure uncomfortable positions for hours, and even to hold bricks in her hands with her arms outstretched while she was being severely beaten. But she never said anything. She was aware that the life of her husband and of his whole group depended on her silence. She herself described the tortures she suffered at that time: “*They shaved my head, they beat me up to death and put me on my knees with a brick in each hand and another one on my head. But I wouldn’t say where my husband was*”. After eleven months of pre-trial detention in Pozoblanco and Córdoba, and in order to limit her mobility and keep her under control, she was forced to go to the Guardia Civil’s barracks three times a day until her final sentence.

All these tortures, in addition to being stigmatised, the absolute control of all her movements, and the fear of being sentenced –although the judgement finally resulted in acquittal–, led her and her brother Alfonso –who, by reason of his family left-wing tradition, also tried to escape from Franco’s military service– to join *Los Parrilleros* on 20 March 1943 in order to survive. They travelled by train to Fuencaliente (Ciudad Real), and from there by foot through the Sierra de Madrona mountain range to La Solana del Chorrillo, leaving their two children in the village, in the care of their mother.

They moved all over Sierra Morena, from Córdoba to Jaén, and through Ciudad Real. They would set up camp in Mañuelas, Cardeña, La Víbora and the Alcúdia valleys. Their life in the mountains was marked by persecution and the permanent danger of being denounced or running into the Guardia Civil. And then, there were also their precarious living conditions, the lack of food and supplies, and the harshness of living out in the open air exposed to the cold, wind and rain. They fed on what they could steal from the farmhouses and on raw chickpeas. As she herself mentioned in an interview: “*We lived very poorly, with a blanket on the ground and little more. We couldn’t make a stop anywhere so that we wouldn’t be discovered*”. During that time, unlike other guerrilla fighters and because she was a woman, *La Parrillera* never carried weapons; her companions would not let her.

In the middle of 1943, Manuela became pregnant again. She had to give birth all alone in the first months of 1944 on the banks of a river, while the rest of the squad stood guard nearby. In her own words: *"I tied his belly button myself and cut it out. I also washed and tended him."* Barely 8 days after giving birth and concerned about their chances to ensure the baby's survival in the mountains, without food and in constant movement, they had to abandon him. They left him at the Molina Fernández farmhouse with a handwritten letter from his husband. But in the end, they decided to hand him over to the Guardia Civil. He later died in hospital before his first birthday.

On 27 February 1944, while trying to get some food at the El Tibio farmhouse (Ciudad real), her husband was fatally shot by the Guardia Civil. They had shown up in broad daylight, desperate and starving to death, unaware that a detachment of the Guardia Civil was inside the farmhouse. According to historian Francisco Moreno, *"Alfonso 'El Parrillero' entered the farmhouse and found the guards playing cards. He had no choice but to stop them and order them to raise their hands. The guards pretended to obey, but one of them threw a stool at Alfonso, while the others ran to grab their rifles. The assailants fled, but on the esplanade of the farmhouse, covered with snow and with no natural defences, Miguel 'El Moraño' or 'Parrillero' was shot down by enemy fire, while his companions, in desperation, run into the thick of the forest."* Manuela, together with her brother Alfonso and *"El Lobito"*, continued to be part of the group, now under the leadership of Inocencio *"Borríca"*, although they participated occasionally. Others, such as *"Álvarez"*, *"Coqueo"* and Pablo González, decided to leave the band.

In December 1944, they were ambushed again by the Guardia Civil, who had been warned of their presence in the area after having been spotted trying to get some food from the *Los Herraderos* farmhouse. There, they were put into siege, and Manuela broke her arm when they tried to escape. Finally they surrendered. Only *"Borríca"* managed to escape, and in 1945 he ended up going into exile in France. Once arrested, they were exposed to public view on their way to the summary trial.

In the Court Martial of 16 December 1945, they were accused of having killed a local hunter during their activity as bandits. As for José Antonio Cepas, he was accused of

"participating in arrests in 1936, who were later executed". His brother Alfonso was accused of being a communist and a deserter from military service, and Manuela of being a "concubine" and a member of the Communist Women group of Villanueva de Córdoba. All three were sentenced to death, although her sentence was commuted to 30 years in prison without reduction. At the time, she was 25 years old. On 21 February 1946, *"Lobito"* and her brother were executed, along with 12 other prisoners, in the shooting range of the Carabanchel prison.

She ended up spending time in different prisons of Franco's regime such as Alcalá de Henares, Segovia and Guadalajara. During this period, her eldest son Juanito died of tuberculosis. In prison she learned to read and write while trying to work to help support her mother. She was pardoned after 17 years in prison on 5 August 1961 at the age of 41

Manuela Díaz lived in Villanueva de Córdoba until her death in 2006 at the age of 86. Her story inspired the documentary *La Parrillera: una maquis por amor* (2009) by director Miguel Ángel Entrenas with the participation of the *Forum for Historical Memory*.

María Castelló Ibarz

(1914-1945)

“Maria Ferrer”



Source: Amical de Ravensbruck

María Castelló Ibarz was born on 6 January 1914 in Mequinenza (Saragossa). She was the daughter of Elvira Ibarz and Antoni Castelló, who died shortly after her birth. Her mother later remarried Jaume Beleta, whom she had met while working in a hotel in Pobla de Segur (Lleida) and with whom she had returned to Mequinenza after he finished his military service. In 1925, due to the mining crisis in the area, the family had to emigrate to Haute-Garonne (France).

Upon the outbreak of the civil, her parents, who were both politically committed, returned to Catalonia together with their niece, **Conxita Grangé**¹. Maria stayed with them for a whole year, but ended up returning to France. In Catalonia, her stepfather, who had experience as a builder, started working mainly in maintenance tasks in the military airfields of the Republic, particularly fortifying the airfields of Tortellà and Balaguer. After the defeat, her family set out on the road to exile and returned to France to reunite with her. Her mother and her cousin were sent to the Pas-de-Calais refugee camp until they were allowed to go south to Gudàs and finally to Varilhes, where Maria lived with her husband Joseph Ferrer and their three children: René, Iolande and Serge.

Once they were in France, and as the Nazi invasion advanced steadily during the Second World War, his stepfather –Jaume Beleta– decided to put himself at the service of the French resistance. At that time the resistance was getting organised in the south of France in guerrilla groups with a military structure. Although all political tendencies were represented, the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) was the one in charge of organising secret guerrilla groups under the name of the 14th Spanish Guerrilla Brigade (the name of the brigade that had participated in guerrilla warfare during the Spanish civil war). The brigade was first led by Jesús Ríos, the first national leader of the Spanish guerrillas. The different brigades and sections were placed under the Higher Command. The 3rd Brigade was the one operating in the Ariège region.

Maria's stepfather, who had then joined the resistance, managed to open a logging business in Col du Py. From 1941 on, this business was the ingenious solution the PCE came with to camouflage its members and prepare them for military operations. In these “logging companies”, the party's members would live along with their families while they

¹ Conxita, eleven years younger than María, had lived with them in France when she was a child.

worked as loggers or charcoal burners, thus concealing their real political activity. All these places ended up becoming the main logistical support centres of the guerrillas, and those who engaged in this trade were called *chantiers*².

Soon after they settled in the village of Pény (France) – following the Gudàs route to the north, near Col du Py– and Maria and Josep began cooperating with resistance groups. They were much closer to the guerrillas than to the clandestine border crossing post. In the testimony collected by her sister, Maria explains how her husband forged their identity documents without her knowing it. The evasion networks were the most obscure and little-known part of the Resistance, as all guides and *passeurs* used false names.

Unlike the guerrillas, who were much better organised under the influence of the PCE, both the anarchists and the POUM were also strongly involved in these activities. All these networks helped escape thousands of people who were persecuted by the Nazis from different European countries occupied by the Germans. Fugitives took a great risk trying to sneak across the Pyrenees border; an arrest could lead to deportation or expulsion. The destination varied depending on the person who escaped: on the one hand, there were the Consulates of the Allies in Spain and Portugal, while others, such as the Jews or young French fugitives, had a much harder time.

Another example were the British and North American airmen, who were transferred down to Gibraltar itself. These networks were organised and subsidised by the allied secret services, who also provided weapons, forged papers and even radio transmitters to the evasion channels. Among these networks there was the Ponzán network, organised by the anarchist **Francisco Ponzán**³ (**Vidal**), in which Maria came to participate.

² The *chantier* were the camouflaged Maquis in the *tajos* (workplaces) that harboured weapons, supplies or people.

³ Francisco Pozán (1911-1944), who had been a member of the Consell d'Aragó until 1937, as well as of the information services of the Popular Army, went into exile in France after the defeat. He contributed to building an important network of *passeurs* (smugglers) and guides from Toulouse.

The Ponzán network was one of the most important networks operating in France and it helped to evacuate between 2000 and 3000 people, mostly through the Pyrenees, but also by sea. Ponzán was in charge of the area from Toulouse to the Spanish territory. The anarchists of the Ponzán Group wanted to spread and strengthen the fight against Franco on all possible fronts, and their collaboration with the allied secret services provided them with funding, weapons and contacts. The Ponzán network of *passeurs* and guides, which helped fugitives cross the border, never depended on any organisation, but collaborated intensely with other French and English networks such as the Pat O'Leary network, one of the most important in terms of evasion, information and mail at the service of the Resistance and the Allies between 1940 and 1944. It was organised by the secret services of the United Kingdom and specialised in the evasion of Allied airmen who had accidentally crashed or landed on occupied French territory.

When her stepfather was exposed and had to flee to Andorra, pursued by the Gestapo, the women of the family became even more involved in the Resistance, and from April 1943 onwards they became involved with the 3rd Ariège Brigade. Maria's mother Elvira, her sister Conxita and she herself became known as "**The Beleta**". They continued with the logging business, acting as liaison to the Col du Py guerrillas. From their home in Peny, they took care of the allied soldiers, helping them escape across the Pyrenees, carrying parcels and making contacts between the different guerrilla groups.

At 9 o'clock in the morning of 24 May 1944, after a raid by the French Militia⁴ and a shooting at their home, the two women were arrested. At the time, they were giving shelter in their own home to a group of guerrilla fighters who were to flee across the border. Among them was Jesús Ríos, who was seriously injured. The Beleta women were harshly interrogated at the Foix prison, and then handed over to the Gestapo at the Saint Michel prison in Toulouse.

Despite the tortures, neither of the three women revealed any information about their activities and companions. The pain

⁴ The French Militia (*Milice Française*) was a paramilitary organisation, converted into an official army, created on January 30, 1943 by the French government of Vichy with the support of Nazi Germany, with the aim of fighting the French Resistance and thus unburden the *Schutzstaffel* (SS) and the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) in their actions.

and the threats of execution went on for two long days, but the three women kept to the version they had agreed to when no one could hear them: the guerrillas had come to their house to have their clothes cleaned and mended; none of them knew anything or anyone. On 30 June 30 1944 they were transferred from Toulouse to Bordeaux where they were deported on board the so-called "ghost train".

The so-called "ghost train" was one of the last transports to take its occupants to the Nazi concentration camps. And there began a journey that, according to Nazi plans, was intended to reach the Dachau concentration camp in three days. The train began its journey by transporting the prisoners in trucks from the Vernet d'Ariège camp to Toulouse. Once there, they were joined by prisoners from the Saint Michel prison and by approximately twenty women from nearby camps, among whom there were also other Spanish women. The train left Toulouse on 3 July 1944 with 750 deportees, 221 of whom were Spanish, and finally reached Dachau on 28 August 1944, 54 days after its departure. The relentless bombardments by the Allies, combined with the attempts of sabotage by the Maquis to free the prisoners, slowed down the journey, hindered by a constant back and forth in deplorable conditions. The prisoners were besieged by hunger and thirst, the conditions in the train were inhuman and got even worse when the train stopped for days as the summer heat hit hard. The wagons had no air vents and were overcrowded with people who had no place to relieve themselves or to sit, and had almost nothing to eat or drink. In addition to that, due to constant attacks which managed to block the train in some sections, the prisoners had to endure long walks and continuous train changes under the harsh repressive conditions already imposed on them.

On 26 August 1944 they finally entered Germany, and five days later, France was liberated. On 28 August 1944 they arrived at Dachau, where Maria was registered in the camp with serial number 93.886 and her married name: **Maria Ferrer**. The women aboard the train were the only women registered or coded in Dachau, as the Nazi commanders did not know whether they would end up being transferred to the Ravensbrück concentration camp. A week later they set off again on the road to deportation and finally, on 9 September 1944, they were interned in Ravensbrück, in Barracks 22, where they were not separated because they were registered under their married names. Maria was given a new serial number in the camp register: 62.479.

In her testimony, her cousin recalls Maria's arrival at the camp: *"When I arrived at the camp they stripped off my earrings and all the jewellery I was wearing. They stripped me naked. They couldn't take off my wedding ring and the German woman told me: "Take it off with a bit of soap, otherwise they will cut your finger off". They gave me some soap and I was able to take it off, and I haven't seen it since [...] they didn't cut my hair because I didn't have lice. What they did was to rub a liquid on my armpits, where I haven't grown any more hair"*.

Shortly after, the Beleta women were again sent to a kommando in Oberschöneweide, a suburb in Berlin, where they were forced to work day and night with other women. They were in charge of manufacturing aviation material, although in the words of her cousin Conxita, if they could, they also sabotaged it: *"I was supposed to control the parts, but we sabotaged them. We all did it. I was caned a lot and they shaved my head. Out of 650 women, at the end there were only 115 of us left"*.

Maria also worked in a *kommando* in Leipzig manufacturing hand grenades. In addition to punishment and torture, the deportees had to endure all kinds of abuse. According to Maria, during this period *"Once they took us to clean up debris in a factory that had been bombed. Equipped with a shovel, we removed all sorts of human remains: heads, legs, arms... we would carry them in wheelbarrows somewhere and throw them on the heap"*.

Due to the very hard living and working conditions, Maria fell ill and had to return to Ravensbrück, leaving her mother and her cousin for good. She was then sent to another camp, Bergen-Belsen, where she stayed until it was liberated by the Allied troops on 11 April 1945. To the troops *"I asked for bread.... Bread, because we were terribly hungry"*.

After she was released, and due to her illness, she was transferred to Paris, where she was finally admitted to the Salpêtrière hospital. Her husband Joseph Ferrer had returned to France in June 1939 where he had been interned, first in Argelès and later in Fort Ha in Bordeaux. After having been mobilised by the French army, he was arrested by the Germans in Dunkirk and deported first to Buchenwald camp and then to Mauthausen. He managed to survive and returned to Ariège, where he settled in Rieux-de-Pelleport until his death in 1973. When Maria's mother and her cousin were finally released, they returned to Ariège and were reunited with her stepfather and her three children, who had no news about her. Finally, thanks to a telegram, they were able to visit her in Paris shortly before her death. Conxita would recall that moment with extreme harshness: *"She was completely unrecognisable [...] she was a living skeleton [...] she had been poisoned by the waters of the Bergen-Belsen camp. Because of all the piles of corpses lying around, typhus broke out. In the last days, the water of the camp became poisonous. In spite of her condition, she retained all her clarity"*. Maria died on 16 June 1945 in Paris, aged 31.



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