

Introduction

We begin with a series of chapters on the social and cultural framework that provided the backdrop for contestations over female identity in Spain during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Whether in the field of social relations, work, or politics, women had to confront, adapt, or acquiesce to a web of institutions, laws, values and customs that dictated the “proper” behavior for each sex. As elsewhere in Europe, this web was shaped by the dominant ideology of separate spheres, which posited complementary missions for men and women in the public and private spheres organized in a hierarchical fashion. While the complex reality of gender roles did not conform to the rigidity of separate spheres, as many of the later chapters in this book demonstrate, the ideology and its supporting web of cultural institutions was a necessary point of departure for female identity formation. In this sense, part one sets the stage for the rest of the book and its theme of constructing identities.

Each of the chapters in this section explores how the web of separate spheres was constructed in specific ways and how it supplied a context for the formation of female identity. The first piece by Mary Nash provides a general overview of the evolution of separate spheres ideology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The other chapters focus on the reinforcement of separate sphere ideology—in educational policy, in school textbooks, and in community rituals—during the Franco dictatorship, which prided itself on the maintenance or revival of “traditional” culture. This introductory essay will provide a general background on the separate spheres model and its institutional structure in Spain.

As part of Spain’s economic and political transformation in the nineteenth century, Spain developed a version of the new gender ideology taking shape in “modernizing” countries, an ideology that attempted deliberately to marginalize women’s participation in the social and political transformations taking place. As the new language of liberalism with its rhetoric of individual citizenship and liberty took hold, a parallel language of exceptionalism emerged to explain why certain groups, including women, did not qualify for citizenship. The explanation, in the case of women, was the division of the world into strictly divided public and private spheres. Thus, while the public and political realm got recast as the stage of the modern worker and citizen, women were defined out of that realm and relegated to the private sphere of domesticity.¹ By the mid nineteenth century, the dualistic world of separate

spheres constituted the official framework for assigning woman's status and proper function, and its residual impact remains an important constituent of gender roles to the present day.

Within these general parameters, however, the specific contours of separate sphere ideology and its consequences were rooted in the particularities of Spanish history.² Because the Spanish context provided an unusually fertile ground for such rigid dualisms, the intensity and durability of separate spheres as a prescriptive model was greater in Spain than in other Western European countries. In simple terms, the binary opposition between domestic and public, female and male, fed into and off of the larger discourse of binary opposition that dominated Spanish political culture from the Napoleonic invasion (1808–1814) to the recent transition to democracy (1975–1978). In other words, the political culture favored and encouraged binary oppositions. Thus, while the ideology of separate spheres took root in many places, it fit particularly well in the Spanish framework.

The black and white world of Spanish political discourse revolved around the opposition between “right” and “left,” or traditionalists and modernizers. While this struggle existed to some extent throughout the industrializing world, in Spain it took an especially acute form, summed up in the common image of the “two Spains.” Over the course of the nineteenth century, an increasing minority of secular Spaniards set themselves in opposition to the traditional society dominated by the Church, the Bourbon Monarchy, and the large landowners, calling instead for the adoption of “European” ideals of democracy, liberalism, socialism, secularization, and economic modernization. For the modernizers, the old Spain was backward, “African,” an antediluvian monster, while for the traditionalists, their opponents were not simply misguided, but anti-Spanish. Eventually, these two mutually exclusive visions of Spain led the country into one of the most brutal civil wars of the twentieth century (1936–1939), followed by the equally brutal attempt by the victors to impose their conception of traditional Spain over the course of General Franco's nearly 40-year dictatorship (1939–1975).

The dominant discursive trope of the “two Spains” reinforced the ideology of separate spheres by investing it with the highest political stakes: those of national identity. The traditionalists who controlled the political and cultural establishment for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries viewed women's domesticity as part and parcel of the larger vision of Spain that they would defend literally to the death. In contrast, the image of the “modern” public woman was equated not just with social disorder but with national decadence: the quintessence of anti-Spain. For the secularizers, the image (if not always the reality) of the modern woman embodied the promise of the future, while the traditional (Catholic) woman symbolized religious superstition, the inquisitional black legend of Spain's ignoble past. In this black and white

world, there was little room to maneuver between the two extremes and even less incentive to break down polarities of thought.

Furthermore, because the neo-traditionalist forces managed to sustain the upper hand in the hegemonic struggle throughout most of the modern period, their uncompromising version of separate spheres constituted the cultural norm for gender roles until the end of the dictatorship in the mid-1970s. This norm, like most hegemonic systems, did not go uncontested; but its notions dominated the field of gender discourse to a greater degree and over a longer time span than in most other Western countries. Consequently, it created an especially powerful system of constraints within which Spanish women lived their lives.

The impact of this ideology, which emphasized woman's exclusive role as wife, mother, and guardian of the home, is evident in all areas of Spanish life. On the most direct level, the inequalities between men and women were codified in the legal structure, as they were in most European countries in the nineteenth century. In particular, Spain closely followed the oppressive gender prescriptions enshrined in the Napoleonic Code, one of the few legacies of the French occupation. While single women retained a good deal of independence, in terms of the ability to conduct business and manage their public affairs, married women were virtual legal appendages of their husbands, to whom they owed strict obedience. Thus, article 57 of the Civil Code of 1889 stated: "the husband must protect his wife, and she must obey her husband." Wives needed their husbands' permission for everything from selling property to seeking employment or taking a trip, and could be either fined or jailed for disobedience.

In addition to subordination, wives suffered a legal double standard when it came to expectations of fidelity. While any infidelity on the part of the wife was termed adultery and punished by up to six years in prison, a husband's affair did not break the law unless it caused a "public scandal" or occurred in the conjugal bed. Likewise, if a wife killed her husband after discovering him *in flagrante delicto*, she could be condemned to life imprisonment, while for the same crime he received from six months to six years of banishment from his home town.³

While this legal situation corresponded to that of most of the other European countries in the mid 1800s, by the end of the century national differences began to appear. Largely in response to feminist activism, some countries, including Great Britain, the Scandinavian nations, and the United States, followed a gradual path towards the equalization of women's legal position, culminating in the vote in the years after the First World War. In other countries, like Russia and Germany, women's legal equality was swept in as part of the post-war revolutionary transformation. And in others, particularly Catholic Italy and France, despite a few small victories legal equality and the vote were

resisted until after the Second World War. At this point, a basic legal and political equality between men and women became the norm for most European countries (including the new communist regimes in the east and post-Nazi Germany).

In Spain, there was almost no reform to the gender sections of the oppressive Civil Code until the declaration of the Second Republic in 1931. As in Russia and Germany in 1917–1918, the regime transformation brought basic civil and political equality for women, including suffrage, which was adopted after a hard-fought parliamentary battle. However, the Nationalist forces who overthrew the liberal republic in 1939 revoked all of these changes. In their place, Franco reinstated the old Civil Code that mandated women's unqualified obedience to their husbands, and the portions of the Criminal Code that maintained the double standard on adultery.⁴ Not until the 1970s and 1980s did the Spanish legal system again correspond to the European norm of basic gender equality.⁵ Thus, for all but a few years in the 1930s, Spanish women as wives lived under one of the most consistently restrictive and hierarchical legal systems in Europe.

This rigidity extended beyond the legal framework into the more informal constraints of cultural and social norms. The most powerful vehicle for the transmission of these norms was the Catholic Church, which acted as the cultural bulwark for the traditionalist forces. As such, it maintained an extraordinary hold on public mores long after secularizing forces began to break that hold in other countries. Although the Church remained strong in other Latin countries, such as France and Italy, only in Spain could the Church work its influence from inside rather than outside the political establishment throughout most of the modern period. Thus, while the Church had to confront secularizing regimes in both Italy and France in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, only the short and tragic Second Republic of the 1930s made a serious attempt to curb the Church's hold on public culture. As a result, the Church's prescription for woman's role, first formulated in a sixteenth century tract by Fray Luis de León entitled "The Perfect Wife," remained the standard frame of reference into the 1970s.⁶

Reinforcing the teachings of the Church, the prevailing Mediterranean discourse of "honor and shame" provided more powerful arguments for women's domestic confinement. Phrased in the language of high moral purpose, women were assigned the heavy responsibility of being moral guardians of the family and home. While guardianship normally implies some sort of authority and action, in this case it translated to a mandate for passivity, for "not doing" rather than "doing." That is, to protect the honor of the household, women were supposed to abstain from any dubious activities that could defile the family name. In obvious terms, this meant the preservation of chastity and purity, but these terms encompassed much more than resisting intimate sexual

relations before or outside marriage. For the woman, upholding her purity and thus the honor of the family name required "refraining from actions which are proper to men . . . according to the division of labor, because women are under the tutelage of men."⁷

In other words, the boundaries of gendered spheres were further protected by the onus of family dishonor and ultimately social extinction. While all of these terms—honor, dishonor, chastity, and shame—existed and shaped gender roles in European society in general, anthropologists have noted the higher value attached to these labels and the increased time invested in the Mediterranean countries in distinguishing and defending the barriers between them.⁸ Whether or not the honor/shame complex actually dictated the lives of men and women in modern Spain, its common cultural usage necessarily fortified the foundations of a separate sphere ideology. Like the rigid legal structure, then, the gendered discourse of honor and shame put up further barriers to women's range of motion. The result was an impressive bulwark, woven together from overlapping cultural, social, religious and legal texts that, at least in theory, consigned women to a predetermined set of roles. While the reality of female identity was more complex, no Spanish woman could completely ignore this bulwark.

Notes

1. For extended treatments of this topic, see Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988); and Carol Pateman, "The Fraternal Social Contract," in *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989).

2. We use the word particularity not to indicate Spain's difference from a general model, but in recognition of the specificity of each national context.

3. For more details on women's legal position, see Geraldine Scanlon, *La polémica feminista en la España contemporánea, 1868-1974* (Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 1986), Chap. 3.

4. Adrian Shubert, *A Social History of Spain* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), p. 214. The double standard on adultery was finally done away with in 1958 (p. 216).

5. Thus, Article 14 of the 1978 Constitution stated that "all Spaniards are equal before the law, and no discrimination whatsoever may prevail by reason of birth, race, sex, religion or opinion." Cited in Mónica Threlfall, "The Women's Movement in Spain," *New Left Review* 151 (May-June 1985): 49.

6. See Bridget A. Aldaraca, *El ángel del hogar: Galdós y la ideología de la domesticidad en España* (Madrid: Visor, 1992), Chap. 1, for a discussion of de León's book.

7. Julián Pitt-Rivers, "Honor and Social Status," in Jean G. Peristiany, ed., *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 69.

8. See, for example, J.G. Peristiany, Introduction to *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (1974), p. 10.