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Exploring Female Identity in Francoist Spain

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One can hardly research Spanish female identity during the Franco regime without also studying the Sección Femenina and their desire to create a unified nationalist feminine identity. Many historians have presented the Sección Femenina as the most intrusive organization in Spanish women’s lives from 1939 through the 1970s. Indeed, the Sección Femenina’s prominence continued to grow throughout the entire regime as they had the greatest influence over women’s education and media, and young women were required to enroll in their Volunteer Service schools. The organization’s programs were built to train women to embody its nationalist and Catholic ideologies in their roles as wives and mothers. An analysis of the formation of female identity within the semi-autobiographical novels of Spanish writers Ana María Matute, Carmen Laforet, and Carmen Martín Gaite reveals a counter-narrative to that of the Sección Femenina’s rhetoric. Repression, famine, and poverty, created a culture of political silence, making it difficult for most women to embody the nationalist’s ideal female figure of wife and mother. The works of Matute, Laforet, and Martín Gaite demonstrate the various ways in which women were forced to form their identity between the contradictions of the Sección Femenina’s ideal and the socio-economic and political realities of Francoist Spain. Their works indicate that many women did not reflect the ideologies of the Sección Femenina in the formation of their identity as women, wives, and mothers. Instead, their texts reveal that despite the Sección Femenina’s attempts to create a unified nationalist feminine identity, women formed their identity more in reflection of the realities of Francoist Spain.

The authors and their works chosen for this paper are
representative of the formation of female identity and Spanish culture during the Franco regime. Matute, Laforet, and Martín Gaite were all born just before the start of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), and died after the end of the Franco regime (1975). In addition, they were all a part of the generation that experienced the violence of the war and the continued oppression of the regime, which in large part influenced the formation of their feminine identity and the identities of most adult Spaniards until 1975. All three female authors were also members of the Spanish upper-middle and middle classes. Besides upper-class women who were expected to act in accordance with similar ideals to that of the Sección Feminina (from here forward: the SF), as the SF’s ideals were largely modeled after customs of the upper class, middle-class women were most receptive to adopting the SF’s nationalistic feminine identity, which was innately Catholic and supported the notion of female subordination.¹

Because the works Nada (1945), Fireflies (1955), The Trap (1969), and The Back Room (1978) are semi-autobiographical, they reflect the formation of identity for each writer and account for the effects of SF ideals and the greater Spanish culture during years of Francoist repression. Their publication dates span the decades in which the Francoist regime and SF actively shaped Spanish culture and collective identity, and are representative of the period. The popularity of these works further affirms their worth as being reflective of the ideas of Spanish women. Laforet’s Nada won the Premio Nadal, Carmen Martín Gaite’s The Back Room was awarded Spain’s National Prize for Literature, and Ana Maria Matute also won various awards for her works, including the Premio Nadal.² Overall, the demographics of the authors, the nature of their works being semi-autobiographical, and the critical acclaim these works received confirms their strength as sources concerning female identity during the Francoist regime.

Originally, the SF was a political group that acted as the women’s section of the Falange, the major quasi-fascist political party that supported Franco’s initial rise to power. As they ex-
panded to have the greatest influence over shaping women’s lives during the Civil War, their nationalist rhetoric continued into the post-war regime. The SF aimed “to encourage national syndicalist spirit in all aspects of life and the promotion of love of the Patria.” Nationalist rhetoric was therefore built into their ideals. Distinct gender roles were also central in the formation of Spanish nationalism. All of the SF’s programs, from primary education to the Volunteer Service Schools, were designed to create a specific nationalist female identity in which women were united in their roles as the wives and mothers of the Patria to preserve the sanctity of the home. If a woman was unable to be married, the other option was to devote herself to the State through membership within the SF. None of the leaders of the SF were ever married because being a wife would have taken precedence over their position as a party member. The SF believed that women’s political participation should be supportive of male figures who were active in the public sphere. Certain sections from the creed of the SF exhibit their subordinate role as political actors:

3. Do not comment on any order; obey without hesitation.
5. Action is not yours; encourage others to act.
6. Let the man in your life be the best patriot.
11. Try always to be the wheel of the cart and let the one guiding it be in control.
12. Do not stand out; help someone to excel.
18. There is no glory comparable to the glory of having given everything for the fatherland.

The SF taught that working within the home to support male family figures and raise the next generation of nationalist children was the best way to support the Patria. Tasks such as cleaning the home and rearing children were considered a large part of a woman’s nationalist duty. By nationalizing housework and motherhood, the SF politicized female Spanish identity.
Besides their assertive stance on women’s active (though subordinate) role in promoting nationalism, Catholic conservatism was central to the SF’s formation of the ideal Spanish woman. The SF believed the Catholic religion to be a pillar of Spanish identity. Religion did not figure separately in its statutes; traditional Catholic values were implicit in the vision of the ideal Spanish woman it projected. Pilar Prima di Rivera the founder of the SF, explained,

We cannot think of our comrades as having two separate identities: part Falangist and part Catholic. Rather, we understand these two elements making up the whole, in the same way as body and soul together are part of every human being and as a person one is both Catholic and Spanish.

According to the SF, the ideal Spanish woman must also be Catholic. Indeed, the “perfect woman” as described by Francoist ideology was a dedicated and submissive wife, educated in the
The SF’s commitment to Catholicism explains the subordinate role they assigned to women in their ideology; many of their reasons for this position were related to Catholic beliefs. The use of Catholicism in SF doctrine, furthermore, provided moral endorsement for their ideals, though the SF often promoted more modernist ideologies than the Church. With the help of the Church, the SF was able to educate girls separate from boys, giving them the ability to cater girls’ education to their ideals for women. The SF formed the ideal female figure in accordance with Catholic education, forging together the SF’s nationalist agenda and the promotion of Catholic identity. On the topic of education, Pilar (Primo de Rivera) declared, “We will teach women to take care of their children because it is unforgivable that so many children should die because of the ignorance of their mothers; Children that are God’s servants and future Spanish soldiers.” Not only was the SF’s ideal female figure supported by the Nationalist government but because their ideologies were reflective of Catholic conservatism, their rhetoric further permeated Spain’s social systems.

The realities of Francoist Spain and the rhetoric of the SF, however, were contrasted one another. Spain underwent massive social and ideological changes after the end of the Civil War in 1939. The regime’s attempt to eliminate the country of liberal ideologies and Republican supporters both legally and forcefully caused wartime repression to continue until Franco’s death in November of 1975. As a result, a culture of fear and seclusion was evident throughout the regime as Spaniards avoided interacting with politics in order to save themselves from the possibility of violent repression. As the economic practice of autarky did little to eliminate famine or repair the economy, the war continued to affect citizens throughout the 1940s and into the 1950s. Women were needed in the workforce in order to feed their families. At the same time, however, the government and the SF passed legislature that discouraged women from working outside the home in order to promote their conservative ideals.
Famine and poverty were blamed on the immorality of liberalism, meaning the government did little to pass legislature to alleviate its citizens’ misfortunes. In addition, the problems of those who suffered the most from hunger and poverty (usually former Republicans) were blamed on individuals for acting immorally.\(^\text{16}\) The massacre by the Nationalists against republicans at Badajoz in 1936, for example, created an influx of widows without any source of welfare, and many of them resorted to prostitution. The SF deemed these widows morally corrupt without recognizing the fault of the Nationalist government in the matter. To this day, pro-Francoists deny that the massacre occurred.\(^\text{17}\) Spaniards felt isolated from their government and the rest of the country as they were forced to deal individually with the misfortunes of authoritarianism. Limited by poverty, famine, and a culture of fear, women were often unable or unwilling to form their identity to that of the SF’s ideal.

The ideals of the SF were not only state rhetoric to which women could aspire, but were directly taught to all women through the channels of education and media. The SF was the most intrusive group in women’s lives throughout the Francoist regime.\(^\text{18}\) They believed that all women could become the ideal nationalist woman. The SF had the most influence over women’s primary education, and created a curriculum that taught them specific skills related to wifedom and motherhood. Outside of primary education, women were required to complete the *Servicio Sociale*, or Volunteer Service, especially if they wanted a passport, driver’s license, or to work in the public sector. This volunteer Service was a mandatory six month, unpaid program in which participants worked in hospitals, schools, orphanages, and food kitchens, and more importantly were instructed in Nationalist politics. These women learned specific ways of performing certain tasks like cleaning and child-rearing that were associated with being a wife and mother, as opposed to following local/regional traditions. For example, the SF encouraged women to go to a doctor and not a local woman when seeking maternity
care. In this way, the organization intended to create a nationalized female identity by distancing women from their traditional, regional practices. The SF continued to promote its domestic training through radio and magazines. The two most famous women’s magazines in Francoist Spain, *Medina* and *Y*, instructed women in various domestic tasks such as dressing their child for first communion, and reminded them of their position as support for the Patria. These ideals of the SF were not only a fantasy of the upper classes; women from all socioeconomic classes were specifically taught how to identify with them, and were expected to express the SF’s teachings in their roles as women of the Patria.

**Becoming Female**

The Civil War had an immense impact on the formation of Spanish female identity. For most Spaniards, memories of the war were painful. Martin Gaite’s work, *The Back Room*, is an exploration of her memories and identity having grown up during the Civil War and later under the Franco regime. Her memories of the war were often distorted; when remembered all at once, they were painful. Martín Gaite likened her memory of the war as if it existed in the back room of her mind, hidden and jumbled yet ever present. She wrote that her grandmother and mother had spent much time in the back rooms of her childhood home, hinting at a continuation of the war’s effect on women. This is also the case in Laforet and Matute’s works, in which their main characters’ identities are affected by continued consequences of the war. Famine, poverty, repression, and the rise of conservative policies continued after the end of the war and became the daily realities of many Spanish women and girls living under Franco’s regime. They affected how the war was remembered, how women responded to post-war educational and religious programs, and how receptive women were to the ideals propagated by the SF. This section will explore how these realities of Francoist Spain and the ideals of the SF affected the formation of Spanish women’s identities.
Despite the SF’s nationalistic rhetoric, the Spanish Civil War created a culture of distrust among Spaniards. Distrust is a reappearing theme in Matute’s *Fireflies* and Laforet’s *Nada*. Sol, the main character of *Fireflies* and a youth during the Civil War, realizes throughout the work that people cannot be trusted to help one another. Because her father died and her mother could not work, Sol was starving. When she asks Cloti, a teenage refugee, to help her find a job, Cloti warns, “trust no one. Everybody will always try to bamboozle you.” Sol first learned this lesson with her boss, who was sexually inappropriate with her. Later, the “friends” of her brother were continually unreliable. They, like Sol, were starving. Famine was a continuous issue in Spain as Franco’s policy of autarky prevented Spaniards from obtaining imported foods and materials. This culture of distrust had already affected *Nada’s* main character, Andrea, when she arrived in Barcelona in the 1940s to live with her aunts and uncles. Andrea was introverted and had only one continuous friend, Ena. This friendship, though, was easily disturbed by Andrea’s reluctance to share information about her life, and by her assumption that her friendship with Ena would end sometime in the future. Her family, though individually unreliable, was a source of continuity in her life. Cazorla Sanchez wrote that the most decisive tool to surviving autarky and famine was family. When Andrea’s Grandmother suspected Gloria was pregnant, she reluctantly told Andrea, stating that before the war she would not have told her, but since the war, she was unsure of who she could trust. The Civil War and the resulting famine caused women to be distrustful toward others outside of their immediate families, an attitude that was not consistent with the SF’s nationalistic agenda.

The Spanish Civil War was also a turning point for female ideals regarding social rhetoric. The Second Republic was the most liberal period in Spanish history. During this time, women were allowed to vote and gain political positions, to divorce, and to have abortions. After Franco’s victory, feminism
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and egalitarian reforms were attributed to moral decay, the corruption of women, and denial of their ‘natural’ mandate as mothers. Immediately after the war, all liberal rights were revoked, forcing women to form their identities within a conservative society in which they had few rights. The works of Martín Gaite and Matute show a connection between this drastic change in the perception of women and how women formed their identity. In *The Back Room*, Martín Gaite wrote that as a child during the Civil War she had been bold and rebellious, but after the war she became silent due to fear. In *The Trap*, Matia, the main character of the work, admitted, “In the first years, my character was undisciplined and rebellious; but in my second school (where I was a boarder as soon as the war was over) I changed completely… I became a respective, timid adolescent.” The premise of the work, which is a diary of the main character, is to tell her story after years of personal silence. As an adult, she able to recognize how drastically the results of the war had affected the formation of her identity as she was forced to grow up in the Franco regime. As liberal ideologies were replaced by conservative ideologies, female identities shifted from bold to silent in response.

Post-war repression had an immense effect on the lives of Spaniards. Immediately after the war, 50,000 people were executed for having ties to the Republican army. By 1960, The total number of people killed by the Francoist government was 200,000. Repression was used as a mode of enforcing political dominance and recreating Spanish identity under Franco’s conservative and nationalist rhetoric. Prisons, especially women’s prisons, were full of people who had ties to the Republican army or expressed beliefs in liberal ideology. It was in this ideological repression that the SF began their first school. Held in a women’s prison, the SF taught religion, politics, and specific ways of doing domestic work. Women who went through the one-year program were released, though they would continue to be repressed throughout the regime. All persons associated with the Republicans were subjected to limitations, such as lack of access to aid
or jobs. The culture of submissiveness to Franco’s rule was apparent across society. For example, at the cinema, the audience had to clap when Franco appeared on the screen.\textsuperscript{31} Any action that could be construed to be anti-Franco could be met with violence. As a result of repression and the promotion of only one ideology and way of life, Spaniards were forced to suppress their opinions, questions, and memories. Martín Gaite, in her work, reminded herself twice not to think of what happened to her uncle.\textsuperscript{32} Evidently, Spaniards decided it was better to give up their freedoms by remaining silent in order to maintain peace.

Given the population’s political silence, it is not surprising that the topics of patriotism and nationalism are not widely discussed in the works analyzed. Only Matute’s work directly addresses the topic of nationalism during the Regime. Isa did not love her country, and believed it was “fervently ignorant” though she still felt connected to it. Further, she believed that women did not have a role in society in which they could promote the Patria. Despite the SF’s assurances that subordination within the private sphere was beneficial to Spain, Isa did not consider it to be true. She thought, “Solitude and ignorance are [Spain’s] natural patrimony.”\textsuperscript{33} Matute’s work illustrates that nationalism, and women’s roles as supporters of the Patria were unrealistic ideals that did not reflect the culture of repression that was so prevalent throughout the regime.

Education was an important element in the creation of a national female identity. From the beginning of the regime, Pilar had emphasized the Catholic belief that in order for women to learn their proper roles as a wife and mother, their education should be separate from men’s. Almost immediately after the Nationalist victory, boys and girls were separated in primary schools in order to receive gender appropriate education. All subjects from history to physical education were designed to train young girls to one day become good wives and mothers. The SF believed that education was essential for women in order for them to perform their nationalist duties to educate their children
and to provide suitable companionship to their spouses. They believed that literate mothers were more likely to bear healthier children than illiterate mothers. Education was thought to be so imperative that a woman who was lacking in femininity could regain proper character through education. The SF encouraged parents to enroll their children in schools, and they were successful in increasing the student population, though the percentage still remained low. Education became one of the greatest sources for the SF to promote Catholicism and nationalism as part of the ideal female figure.

University education had a more noticeable impact on the formation of individual female identity. Like primary education, the main goal of the Spanish university was to instill morality and patriotism, reinforcing the ideals of conservatism and Catholicism. Unlike primary education, university was not separated by sex. At first glance this would appear to make higher education less gender biased, but, in reality, women were strongly encouraged to enroll in certain subjects such as letters or nursing, as they were believed to be the most suitable for educating future wives and mothers. These courses were not useful in attaining most career paths available to men. This discrepancy between the value of women’s and men’s education is noticeable in the literature. Nada’s main character, Andrea, moved to Barcelona to go to university and study letters. Throughout the work Andrea mentions that she has to finish translations from ancient Greek and Latin. Later in the work, she is asked by a classmate what she plans on doing with her degree. Andrea realizes that her degree is only beneficial to becoming a teacher or a wife, two vocations she has no desire to pursue. There were few academic options open to women that would allow for a public career path. Translating texts from ancient languages would have been a normal coursework for women but was only useful in attaining a secretarial position. Andrea’s character illustrates a lack of fulfillment from education as it was designed in order for individuals to identify with conservative ideology and not to prepare them for a public
role in Spanish society.

Despite the importance of Catholicism to the state and everyday functions, people’s individual relationships with religion were a point of contention. The Catholic church was one of the most powerful entities in Spain. As the moral force behind the Franco regime, the church had legal control over education and marriage. Catholicism touched every aspect of a woman’s life from birth to death. Despite the church’s position, many women were not firm in their faith. In these authors’ works, the main characters question their faith, and realize throughout the book that they do not believe in God. In *Fireflies*, when Sol is a child, she has questions about Catholic doctrine. She identifies her questioning as making her different from her mother and brother who first seem to be firm in their beliefs. When she questions a nun at her school about theology, the nun is quick to dismiss her to the point of saying her questions were heretical. Left with unanswered questions, Sol no longer identifies herself as Catholic nor believes in God. Regardless, she is forced to continue her Catholic education. During the Regime, Catholicism became more of a tradition than a faith for many women. In *Nada*, Andrea associates going to mass as a task she did with her Aunt Angustias. Once her Aunt joined a convent, Andrea ceased going to mass. The character’s lack of association with Catholicism attests to a lack of receptiveness to the SF’s ideals.

Despite the invasiveness of the SF’s ideals in Spanish society, the authors ascribe a counter attitude to their characters with which they more closely identify. Historian Inbal Ofer noted that almost all of the SF’s texts included feminine traits such as “caribosa (affectionate), compasiva (compassionate), abnegada (self-sacrificing) and graciosa (gracious), as well as other less gender-specific traits such as animada (animated), disciplinada (disciplined) and tranquiula (tranquil).” None of the female protagonists use this rhetoric when referring to themselves or other women like them. In *The Trap*, Isa confesses that “selfishness, lack of understanding, and solitude are still... the common and
“vulgar experience of women like me.” Later, she recollects the memory of leaving her hometown after the unpleasant ending of a romantic relationship. She realizes then that her “true force of will” had been suffocated “because a girl must appear submissive and sweet, although she is not sweet, but caustic.” Martín Gaite also believed that these feminine traits were emotionally stifling and that she did not identify with them. Her work is the latest of the works and reflects the greatly changing culture of Spain as consumerism and contact with Europe began to modernize Spanish culture. Though the culture still remained largely traditional, standards for women were beginning to loosen. She was willing to admit to a near stranger that she didn’t have the right makings of a wife and mother according to the standards of the SF. Though Martín Gaite is more prideful of her non-conformity than Matute’s character, she still harbored a sense of bitterness. In the text, she imagines a mirror image of herself as an eighteen-year-old saying to her as she held a rag in her hand, “well I never thought I’d see you do that,” to which Martín Gaite replied, “I haven’t let myself be brainwashed.”

Monument to Carmen Martín Gaite in Salamanca

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Becoming a Wife

Through childhood and adolescence, women were encouraged to become wives and to perform specified duties assigned to that role. Marriage, an institution which led to the pro-creation of children essential to the well-being of the Patria, was encouraged by both the state and the church. In the Nationalist context, marriage was more than the primary unit of the State, it was a natural institution that went beyond the boundaries of human law. In the religious context, marriage represented the ultimate goal for a Christian woman, allowing her to accomplish motherhood. In the SF’s view, all women worked for the state through their domestic duties as a wife. The SF promoted a specific gender dynamic in marriage in which women took the subordinate role. Instructional guides written by the SF described domestic labor as essential to being a good wife. A guide book published for their Volunteer Service school instructed that women should be happy performing domestic chores because that is what made a husband happy. The guide book further promoted subordination in the ideal wife figure by instructing that they remain silent though they may have many things to say because to listen to her husband, and to record what he says, is essential to a happy marriage. Being a wife was a job in itself, and it is not surprising that marriage was meant to be the sole work for women. This further perpetuated the conservative ideal in which the men were the sole financial providers of the family unit, and women were to play the supportive role at home. This section will explore the extent to which women identified with the SF’s ideal wife figure and its effect on their role as a wife.

Whether a wife was able to forfeit external work after marriage or not, the notion of the ideal woman remaining only in the domestic sphere had an effect on her identity. The SF and government programs attempted to make it more economically viable for married couples to only rely on the man’s salary through subsidizing his wages. Despite the fact that education for women and mandatory volunteer service was designed to reflect the
SF’s belief of female domesticity, due to the economic realities of Spain, many women worked outside the home. As consumerism became part of the dominant culture in the 1950s and 1960s, the SF was forced to acknowledge the desire of women to make money, and in 1961, it was the major force behind the passing of the “Law of Political, Professional, and Labor Rights for Women.” If women wanted to work, the SF made sure that they would have equal rights in the workforce. The SF continued to promote their ideals of domesticity. Idealistically, wives were only supposed to work if absolutely necessary and only for the benefit of the family unit, meaning that it should not be to advance a wife’s individual career but only as a short-term necessity. In The Back Room, Martín Gaite explored the contradiction between the SF’s ideal and reality. A founding member of her university’s first female literary review, she desired a self-fulfilling career as a writer. She achieves this for herself, but throughout her work she is reminded of the domestic position she was supposed to have. The contradiction existed in her understanding of who she was as a writer. For women who continued to work, the ideals of the SF become points of contention within their identity as a worker.

In the works analyzed, none of the female protagonists who are married reflect the ideologies of the SF’s ideal wife character. As discussed, being a wife was one of the greatest female identities as it “naturally” leads to motherhood. The SF promoted the duties of being a wife, such as cleaning and rearing children, as leisurely activities that make women and their families happy when done properly. Historian Richard Hudson notes that because the SF attempted to encourage housework as a leisurely activity (images beside domestic instructional guides show women smiling) strongly implies that women did not actually enjoy doing it. In Nada, Ena’s mother, Margarita, feels unfulfilled in her marriage. As a woman of the upper-middle class, Margarita is expected to become a wife, but in marriage she does not feel in love with her spouse nor is she happy. She recognizes that she is supposed to feel happy in maintaining the house and noted that...
her husband, so long as the house was clean, did not understand why their relationship was not loving. The birth of Ena causes her emotional suffering as she believes that one day her daughter will also be unfulfilled in marriage.\textsuperscript{57} It is not until she realizes that happiness is not dependent on her role as a wife that she becomes happy. Other women not born in the upper class were still exposed to the SF’s ideal wife figure through the Volunteer Service schools. Matute, a woman from the middle class, knew before she was married that she would not be a good wife or mother by the standards of the SF because she had failed the Volunteer Service school.\textsuperscript{58} Regardless, her marriage had been fulfilling. To act in defiance of the SF’s instructions for wifedom, that cleaning and subordination meant a happy marriage, became a large part of Matute’s identity. Both Laforet and Matute show that despite the SF’s attempt to train women to be their ideal wife figure, women did not always accept it.

Ena’s Mother’s confession to Andrea is also important as Laforet shows that young women were aware that SF’s ideal wife figure was not naturally fulfilling to women. Upon hearing Margarita’s confession, Andrea, whose experience with courting had been ended because Pons’ social class was higher than her own, would have been further influenced to believe that marriage was not as naturally fulfilling as she was supposed to believe. Though the ideal wife was an image that was promoted in many modes, unmarried girls would learn from married women like Ena’s mother that cooking, cleaning, and childrearing were not what made a woman happy, nor did it improve the love between husband and wife. Therefore, though unmarried girls were aware of the ideal wife figure, they did not always form their own identity as a future wife to this ideal.

Conservative marriage laws restricted the ability of women to become a wife. During the Second republic, marriage could be obtained legally through the state without the consent of a Priest. Divorce was also legalized. After Franco’s victory, marriage was only attainable through the church and divorce once
again became illegal. Further, the law stipulated that any marriage not officiated by a priest was illegitimate. The passing of this law created much social chaos. Overnight, thousands of children and marriages became illegitimate, and any divorces made were considered illegal. To make matters more complicated, some priests refused to ordain state officiated marriages because by the church's standards the couple had been living in sin.\textsuperscript{59} This chaos put women, especially, in difficult positions as most of their social worth was in the success of their family unit. In \textit{Nada}, Aunt Angustias represents the female character who wishes to uphold the SF’s rhetoric as a wife, but is unable due to the marriage laws. The man she desires to marry is already bound in marriage to another woman, though it is understood that he also wished to marry her. Aunt Angustias tells Andrea that there are only two honorable choices for women: marriage or the convent.\textsuperscript{60} As an unmarried woman of middle age, Aunt Angustias was unlikely to become a wife. Because she is unable to fulfill the role of an ideal woman, though she desired to do so, she decided it is better for her to leave society rather than exist in a state of social limbo. Laforet brought attention to the contradictions between legal realities and ideals that greatly affected the ability of women to form their identity as they desired though Aunt Angustias’ tragedy.

Spain’s culture of female subordination, exacerbated by the rhetoric of the SF and culture of machismo, was greatly influential to the formation of female identity. For some women, the culture of female subordination resulted in unhappy and even violent marriages. In \textit{Nada}, Gloria is often verbally and physically assaulted by her husband, Juan. Unfortunately, most of the family do not try to relieve Gloria’s situation directly. Only Gloria’s sister wants to help her, but Gloria has to be careful not to accept too much financial help or else anger Juan who desires to be the only financial provider for Gloria and their son. The culture of machismo promoted men to be the only financial provider. When she is caught accepting help, Juan reacts violently. The family is sympathetic to Juan’s financial issues and tends to make
life easier for him in order to appease his emotional instability. The domestic abuse is never addressed by members of the family. Andrea ignores it as one of the unpleasant realities of her family life, and helps only when Juan is especially violent toward Gloria. Through Gloria’s experience Andrea learns to accept it as a reality of life. Gloria tells her, “you know I can’t live here? I can’t… He’ll kill me.”61 Later, Andrea sees them consoling each other after Román’s suicide, and thinks that their story might have been beautiful but that only happened in novels, in real life everything “is ruined by the living.”62 Andrea could not believe that Gloria would leave or the cycle of violence end. Instead, Gloria and Andrea were forced to make decisions around a possibility of being abused because of their subordinate role in society.

The relationship between Gloria and other members of the family further attests to Carmen Laforet’s awareness of women’s suffering due to society’s reluctance to acknowledge the failure of encouraging female subordination. Compared to Gloria, Andrea’s other aunts are images of ideal Spanish wives. Their husbands have good jobs, they live in nice accommodations, and have a few children each. Like Aunt Agustina, they are likely in social circles that chat about what is decent or indecent of other women. As discussed, Spanish culture was unaccepting of women who were sexually active outside marriage and believed that sexual immorality was the cause of unhappy marriages. Throughout the work, Aunt Agustina, Román, and the other aunts often accuse Gloria of sexual immorality. On various occasions Román hints that she wanted to have sex with him. No family member rejects Román because he is believed to be sexually active outside marriage. The family blames Gloria’s situation on her supposed sexual immorality. As the work progresses, the reader learns that they were incorrect accusations. Gloria has to be secretive about where she goes in the middle of the night because she is visiting her sister who is providing them with financial support. Her sister assures Juan one night that men had propositioned her at the bar but Gloria always refused.63 Gloria admits to Andrea that it
is Román who was trying to coerce her into sex with him. The aunts’ refusal to acknowledge a greater issue causing domestic abuse is representative of Spanish society’s system of continually encouraging female subordination. Ideally, if Gloria ceased her sexual immorality, as Andrea’s aunts believed, then her situation would have been resolved. Unfortunately, Laforet’s focus on this injustice shows that some women would continue to suffer alone as a result of this ideal.

**Becoming a Mother**

As part of the national effort to increase the Spanish population, the SF strongly encouraged women to be mothers. Both religious and nationalistic rhetoric were endorsed by the government and the SF to unite women under a common female destiny due to their reproductive capabilities. Motherhood was part of a woman’s national duty, and the relationship between being a mother and being an active player in promoting the wellbeing of the Patria were closely related. The ideal mother was one who would have many children, provide them with a holistically clean home, and teach them Catholicism so that they may become proper Spaniards in the standards of Francoist Spain and the SF. In the repressions and social disorder of Francoist Spain, the extent to which women were able to uphold this ideal is questionable. Very little academic discussion has been provided in English about whether women felt they had internalized the SF’s ideal motherly figure. The topic of motherhood has been addressed in the works of these authors as being a point of internal strife for the mother characters as they were both aware of nationalistic ideals and struggled with social realities. This section will analyze fictional mother characters as well as the results of prenatal policies to argue that women were largely unreceptive to the SF’s idealized mother and the government’s attempts to increase the birth of children.

The mother characters in Laforet and Matute’s works do not identify themselves as mothers. In *Nada*, the mother of Ena
recounted that she did not have the desire to be a mother. She admits, “When Ena was born, I didn’t love her… I hadn’t wanted her.” As discussed, her marriage was unhappy and she felt as though she was not in a position in which she could be happiest. Motherhood, the “natural” progression of marriage, was to her “another of life’s brutalities added on to the many others [she]’d had to endure.” In the years following, she grew to enjoy motherhood, though she was motivated neither by a love for the Patria nor an identification with the maternal role. Instead, Ena reveals to her the best qualities in herself and her husband, repairs their marriage, and encourages her to have more children. But still she does not feel that she, “dissatisfied and egotistical,” was a natural motherly figure. Matute also echoes this lack of identification as a mother. It is known throughout The Trap that her main character, a close representation of herself, is distant both physically and emotionally from her child, and by the end, their relationship is even more strained. Speaking through the voice of her main character, Matia, she wrote, “[My son] knows that I cannot behave like mothers usually do. (I shall not say good mother because that definition turns out to be too compromising for me).” For Matute, to be a good mother is too complicated an ideal for her character to uphold. Laforet and Matute’s works indicate a sense of inability for women to be idealistic mothers, not only that which the SF promoted, but also the ability to love their children as they believe a mother is supposed to love her child.

It is important to note that the tone in which both characters spoke is confessional. Confession implies that the individual has done something they felt was wrong or against what was expected of them. Ena’s mother admits to Andrea her personal turmoil about motherhood in a way that made Andrea feel like she was hearing a deeply personal secret. It is not hard to imagine the difficulty it would have been for Margarita to admit she had not loved her child even in today’s standards. Despite state sponsored programs to increase procreation and encouragement
from the SF, Margarita did not desire motherhood because the role was unfulfilling to her. She believes that she is not acting as a mother should, and therefore cannot identify as one. In *The Trap*, the physical and emotional separation between Matia and her child was due to the Civil War. Her husband left to fight for the Republicans, and she, a woman who was not able to be self-supportive, especially as she was not applicable to subsidies given to Nationalist women, allows her child to be raised by relatives throughout his life. Matia confesses to herself that she can not be a “good mother” after she left him with more distant relatives. Laforet and Matute’s characters built their understanding of what a motherly figure should be based on the ideal of the SF, but, forced to deal with the realities of Francoist Spain, they did not feel they could identify as a mother.

Many women were fearful of ever becoming mothers due to the social and political landscape, and practiced birth control or resorted to abortion. After years of pre-Civil War social reform that allowed access to birth control, women of the Francoist age did not want to devote their entire life to bearing children. They did not feel it was their duty despite rhetoric that promoted it. Despite governmental attempts to limit access to birth control and the illegalization of abortion, both practices continued. By the 1960s women were known to openly ask for an abortion, but in the years following the war, legal repression caused birth control and abortion to be crude ordeals. Historian Antonio Cazorla Sánchez argues that abortions may have killed an average of one percent of the female population. His numbers of recorded deaths as a result of abortion highlight the desperation of women to avoid having a child and, by default, become a mother. The works of Matute and Laforet explore the position of would-be mothers as they struggled with repression, famine and abuse, and, as a result, did not desire to be mothers.

Laforet and Matute would-be mother characters, Gloria and Cloti, display an aversion to motherhood due to their social position. In *Nada*, Gloria, who was already the mother of one
child, is fearful and upset when she believes that she may be pregnant. Though it turns out she is wrong, her open aversion to another pregnancy is cause for alarm. She, her husband and child are starving during the years of famine after the war, and they do not have access to proper sanitation. She is also unsafe due to domestic abuse. Though set during the Civil War in Madrid, Cloti’s position as a refugee is still reflective of many lower class families who suffered from famine and poverty during the immediate post-war years. When she becomes pregnant out of wedlock, she is not in any position to support a child. Further, the father refused to accept the child. She decides that she is going to ask an old lady to perform an abortion despite remembering a local girl who died screaming in blood as a result of an abortion. After Sol asks her whether she could love the baby, Cloti replies, “I cannot love him. I cannot, it is impossible for me.” Given their situation, neither Gloria or Cloti are able to be the idealized version of motherhood well known to Laforet and Matute. As a result, the characters reveal an aversion to being a mother, and in this aversion they do not desire to identify as the idealized mother.

Ana Maria Matute in 2010
It is unsurprising given these characters’ lack of identification with and aversion toward motherhood that the Francoist government and the SF’s attempts to increase birth rates were largely unsuccessful. There were many prenatal policies during the Franco regime, and yet, the fertility index of Spain was steadily below that which it had been before the Civil War (from 4.13 in 1922 to no greater than 2.97 through 1965).\textsuperscript{77} The family subsidizing policies of the government were provided through the father’s paycheck. This was part of the machismo culture, as by giving the money directly to the head of the household the government furthered his economic claim on the family. The autonomy of the mother was not recognized. The social program, \textit{Plus de Cargas Familiares}, would cease to give money to the father if the mother began working.\textsuperscript{78} Further, the socio-economic reasons for Spain’s poor fertility rate were blamed on theories of moral decadence, religious decline and moral apathy.\textsuperscript{79} Though the SF also greatly stressed proper hygiene, because women’s access to this was often limited, it seems not to have greatly increased fertility rates. These failed family social programs have lead historian Mary Nash to claim, “There is no evidence that suggest that women unquestioningly accepted their biological destiny according to the norms of the regime or that they identified with the ideological implications of the prenatal policies of the ‘New State.’”\textsuperscript{80} Because these programs failed to acknowledge female autonomy in bearing children and socio-economic realities, it would have been difficult for many women, especially women in nontraditional positions, to feel that they could have been “good” mothers in their social situations.

\textbf{Conclusion}

This paper has explored the extent to which the \textit{Sección Feminina} and the realities of Francoist Spain had an effect on the formation of Spanish female identity through the works of Matute, Laforet, and Martín Gaite. Their works have indicated that though the SF had a great effect on the formation of female iden-
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tity, women build their identity in contradiction to it, either willingly or unwillingly. Repressions of the authoritarian regime created a culture of fear and political silence that was contradictory to the SF’s nationalist woman whose identity was formed in her desire to promote the Patria. Though education and mandatory Volunteer Schools were structured to make all women become ideal wives and mothers, famine and poverty were major deterrents to accomplishing this ideal. For those who became wives, many did not feel fulfilled in the prescribed submissive role, and, therefore, they did not identify as the ideal wife figure. In light of their unhappiness as wives, women did not feel they were able to become a “good” mother as they had understood through the SF’s influence. The government, acting in accordance with conservative ideologies and failure to aid famine and poverty, further deterred motherhood. Overall, the works of Matute, Laforet, and Martín Gaite have revealed that despite the intrusion of the SF’s ideals into women’s lives, most women were either unwilling or unable to identify as the ideal female figure.
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Notes
2 The Premio Nadal is the major Spanish literary award that has been given every year since 1944.
8 Richmond, *Women and Spanish Fascism*, 53.
9 Pilar Prima di Rivera (1907-1991) was the daughter of Spanish dictator General Miguel Primo de Rivera and the sister of Jose Primo de Rivera who was a founder of the Falangists. She dedicated her life to public service through the SF and was the prevailing advocate of the SF’s control over women given her family position and political spirit. Following her own advice, she never married, choosing instead to devote herself to the Nationalist cause. Pilar’s speech at the 1942 SF national conference, in Primo de Rivera, Discurso de Pilar Primo de Rivera, p. 5.
12 Ibid., 44.
16 Nash, “Pronatalism and Motherhood in Franco’s Spain,” 165.
17 Cazorla Sánchez, *Fear and Progress*, 36.
The Second Republic (Segunda República) was Spain’s second attempt to form a democracy. Lasting only between 1931 and 1939, the government passed a series of laws, including depleting the role of the church in public institutions, allowing access to birth control and abortion, and allowing divorce, which were considered quite liberal by European standards at that time. The Nationalist invasion in 1936, which began the Civil War, was a stark counter-narrative to the Republican government’s liberal policies.

26 Nash, “Pronatalism and Motherhood in Franco’s Spain,” 161.
29 Cazorla Sánchez, Fear and Progress, 20.
30 Richmond, Women and Spanish Fascism, 15-16.
31 Cazorla Sánchez, Fear and Progress, 30.
33 Ibid., 48.
36 Morcillo, True Catholic Womanhood, 80.
37 Laforet, Nada, 153.
38 Matute, Fireflies, 16.
39 Laforet, Nada, 21.
40 Ofer, “Historical Methods, Contemporary Identities: The Sección Femenina of the Spanish Falange and Its Redefinition of the Term ‘Femininity,’” 672.
41 Matute, The Trap, 123.
42 Ibid., 123.
43 Cazorla Sánchez, Fear and Progress, 142.
44 Martín Gaite, The Back Room, 36.
45 Ibid., 68.
46 Nash, “Pronatalism and Motherhood in Franco’s Spain,” 170.
47 Morcillo, True Catholic Womanhood, 38, 89.
49 This comes from the “Good Wives Guide,” which was handed out at the

50 Nash, “Pronatalism and Motherhood in Franco’s Spain.”
52 Richmond, Women and Spanish Fascism, 22.
53 Morcillo, True Catholic Womanhood, 87.
54 Martín Gaite, The Back Room, 68.
56 Laforet, Nada, 196.
57 Ibid., 197.
59 Cazorla Sánchez, Fear and Progress, 92.
60 Laforet, Nada, 79.
61 Ibid., 202.
62 Ibid., 206.
63 Ibid., 204.
64 Laforet, Nada, 208.
65 Nash, “Pronatalism and Motherhood in Franco’s Spain,” 160.
67 Laforet, Nada, 196.
68 Ibid., 196.
69 Ibid., 198.
70 Matute, The Trap, 64.
71 Laforet, Nada, 198.
72 Nash, “Pronatalism and Motherhood in Franco’s Spain,” 168.
73 Cazorla Sánchez, Fear and Progress, 171.
74 Laforet, Nada, 83.
75 Matute, Fireflies, 90.
76 Ibid., 91.
77 Nash, “Pronatalism and Motherhood in Franco’s Spain,” 164.
78 Ibid., 172.
79 Ibid., 165.
80 Ibid., 174.
Images
