

COMING TO CONSCIOUSNESS AND ACTION: THE EARLY LIFE OF DOLORES

IBÁRRURI, *PASIONARIA*, 1895-1930

by

SUSAN RILEY

(Under the Direction of John H. Morrow, Jr.)

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the early life of Dolores Ibárruri, the Spanish Communist best known as *La Pasionaria*. The work covers the period from her birth in 1895 to the end of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship in 1930. By exploring her life and the historical context in which she lived, the thesis addresses issues of women's history, the history of working class movements, especially Communism, in Spain, and Spanish history more generally. Also discussed are historiographical and theoretical issues surrounding testimonial literature and autobiography, and the role of gender in the production of those types of texts. Primary sources include Ibárruri's autobiography and interviews. Secondary sources include biographies of Ibárruri, histories on both the Spain of these years and the contextual issues under examination, and criticism on the genres of testimonial literature and autobiography.

INDEX WORDS: Ibárruri, Dolores, Spain 1895-1930, Communism, Spanish women, *La Pasionaria*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the early life of Dolores Ibárruri (1895-1989), the Spanish Communist best known as the famous “La Pasionaria.” The project begins with her birth and continues through 1930, the year prior to the first elections of the Second Republic. Ibárruri is a unique figure, as she was a working class woman who rose to national and international prominence through her involvement in the Communist Party. She became one of the most recognized and controversial figures in the Spanish Civil War, primarily due to her fiery oratorical style, and her ability to arouse her audience’s emotions. Furthermore, she became the only female leader of a Western European Communist Party.

The early period of Ibárruri’s life provides insight into the figure she later would become. Her youth and the period leading to the Second Republic, her subsequent election to the Chamber of Deputies in 1936, and the civil war yield interesting insights into the persona she developed as a public figure. Also, studying this woman causes other themes to emerge. Her life story provides a window to explore issues such as the rise of the workers’ movement in Spain -- especially Communism, although not exclusively this particular movement -- and the history of Spanish women. Thus, although the thesis is a biography of Ibárruri, it ties events in her life to the broader context and uses her story as an entrée into larger issues in Spanish history.

This project has two main bodies of sources: those dealing directly with La Pasionaria, and those illuminating the context. The sources on Ibárruri fall into two groups: primary materials (her autobiography and interviews), and secondary biographical works. The secondary contextual sources cover the broader issues previously mentioned: Spanish Communism and workers' movements, Spanish women's history, and general works on the history of Spain. This thesis responds to a lack of historical studies on Ibárruri in the English language. One biography of her, written by a journalist, Robert Low, has been published in English. While he provides an interesting biography of Dolores Ibárruri, he does not address the broader context as this study does. The Spanish language literature primarily consists of interviews conducted by scholars and journalists sympathetic to Ibárruri's life work. Most of these interviews come from the 1970s (when Ibárruri lived exiled in Moscow), when it became clear that Franco would soon die, and the possibility of Ibárruri returning to Spain began to grow. The few Spanish language biographies also come from this later period. Thus the literature, being from this later era, allowed Ibárruri, and the authors of the biographies to reflect upon her life with the perspective of time.

The nature of this project and the types of primary sources necessitate certain precautions. These sources require reading with a critical eye, rather than viewing them simply as a transparent window on her life. The same approach holds for the interviews conducted with Ibárruri: a critical eye on what she wrote and said will be necessary to avoid mythologizing her life. As James D. Fernández noted in his book on Spanish autobiography, "life stories are unusually effective pedagogical tools, which many communities (religions and nations, especially) have frequently used to promote or invent

a sense of filiation or belonging.”¹ This pedagogical function seems especially pertinent in examining Ibárruri, as she wrote her autobiography after she had already achieved prominence in the international Communist movement. She may have planned for people to read her memoirs as a type of how-to manual for becoming a properly active and revolutionary Communist. Furthermore, she wrote her memoirs while in exile, and while she worked with the Soviet government to broadcast Communist propaganda to Spain. Thus, she might have had motivations to write a life story that could inspire others to join the movement, and to join the fight against the Franco dictatorship.

Another set of issues with Ibárruri’s autobiography concerns the type of story she told. The early chapters of the book tell the story of her region (Vizcaya, in the Basque Country), and “her people”- the Basques, but especially the miners in the area. This leads to an almost testimonial tone, particularly in the earliest part of the work. Indeed, in the author’s preface to the English edition of her autobiography, Ibárruri addressed some of these issues. “When I was writing this book I did not have in mind merely to publish some brief memoirs, which I considered secondary. I wished, rather, to offer written testimony to the traditions of struggle of the Spanish people, and to set forth the truth about our war [the Spanish Civil War] in answer to the lies of reactionary propaganda of yesterday and today.”²

Testimonial literature, best known by its Spanish name, *testimonio*, has recently been the subject of much scholarship, largely resulting from the famously controversial book *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. Much of the scholarly debate has centered on the truthfulness of the stories told in *testimonios*, and the classification of these works. Are they

¹ James D. Fernández, *Apology to Apostrophe* (Durham: Duke UP, 1992) 4.

² Dolores Ibárruri, *They Shall Not Pass* (New York: International Publishers, 1966) 5.

literature, with the implications of fiction present in that label, or are they testimony, to be taken as a faithful accounting of facts? Indeed, the common English translation of *testimonio* shows this conflict clearly. One author provides a commonsensical approach for dealing with this issue. “In my view, the testimony can be best understood neither as history nor as fiction, but as an extension of the oral tradition of storytelling. The storyteller in pre-literate societies preserved and transmitted collective memories; the testimonial narrator aims to do the same, often with the express purpose of raising consciousness so that readers will become active in movements for progressive social change.”³

While Ibárruri did not write her autobiography explicitly as *testimonio*, the early chapters do have a testimonial ring to them, so this issue must be addressed. Ibárruri clearly identified herself as a product of a Basque mining village, so she might have tried to write her life story as a more widely representative tale than reality warranted. For example, she notes that while she remembered, even later in life, all of the struggles of the miners and the difficult lives they lived⁴, her family benefited from multiple incomes (some of her brothers worked while they still lived with her parents), so her family’s situation was less dire than that of many of the other miners.⁵ David Stoll, one of the foremost voices in the Menchú debate, argues that one of the concerns with *testimonio* is the role of the central figure in the testimony. “When a person becomes a symbol for a cause, the complexity of a particular life is concealed in order to turn it into a

³ Elizabeth Dore, “Introduction: Afro-Cuban History From Below,” *Reyita: The Life of a Black Cuban Woman in the Twentieth Century*, ed. María de los Reyes Castillo Bueno (Durham: Duke UP, 2000) 13.

⁴ Ibárruri 42

⁵ Robert Low, *La Pasionaria* (London: Hutchinson, 1992) 13.

representative life. So is the complexity of the situation being represented.”⁶ In the case of La Pasionaria, who did rise to the level of a symbolic figure for her defense of workers’ rights and her role in the Civil War, this caveat is important. Certainly keeping these issues in mind while reading her autobiography will help in determining its importance as a text, while also accounting for the potential motivations of Ibárruri in telling the story.

Finally, the fact that Ibárruri was a woman may also have a bearing on the type of autobiography she wrote. Recent scholarship on women’s autobiography has illuminated some of the differences between female and male authors in this genre. “The (masculine) tradition of autobiography beginning with Augustine had taken as its first premise the mirroring capacity of the autobiographer [...] No mirror of *her* era, the female autobiographer takes as a given that selfhood is mediated; her invisibility results from a lack of tradition, her marginality in male-dominated culture, her fragmentation – social and political as well as psychic.”⁷ This thesis will explore issues regarding Ibárruri’s gender and the impact that had on the story she told.

Despite these caveats, these sources are very rich. The interviews with Ibárruri published over the years provide a second primary source that, at least sometimes, contradicts the seamless tale of her autobiography. As Stoll noted, “The contradictions glossed over by a heroic figure will not go away because we wish to ignore them.”⁸ Indeed, rather than glossing over these contradictions and tensions in her story, the thesis will bring them to the fore and explore what they tell us about her life. Arguably, these

⁶ David Stoll, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999) xi.

⁷ Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, “Introduction,” *Life/Lines*, ed. Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988) 1.

⁸ Stoll xi

represent some of the episodes of her life that can provide the most insight into her formation and the persona that she created. The cracks in the myth may permit us to see the woman behind the symbol.

The thesis contains three chapters. The first covers the first twenty-one years of her life, from her birth in 1895 to the end of her first year of marriage, 1916. This chapter focuses mainly on the conditions of her early life and the earliest stage of her marriage, setting the scene for their impact on the later course of her life. The second chapter picks up in 1917 and takes the story through 1918, two years that mark a very significant series of events in her development, as she became increasingly politicized and active due to the impact of the Russia Revolution. The final chapter covers the period from 1919 to 1930, focusing on the personal and political events of those years, when she came to have an increasingly active role in the Communist Party at the provincial level. The chapter breaks match important dates in her life. Rather than simply splitting the chapters so that each one includes the same number of years, this study lets events in her own history dictate where each chapter should end and the next one begin. Thus, for example, chapter one ends just prior to the Russian Revolution, an event that she marked as one of the most significant in her life, and chapter two begins with 1917, which she termed “a decisive year.”⁹ Furthermore, the chapters have been organized with an eye to the cohesiveness of the story told in each one. Thus, for example, within chapter three the thesis looks at her role in the Communist Party of Spain on the provincial level, from her involvement in its genesis to the point when she made the move from a locally-known Party figure to the national political stage.

⁹ Ibárruri 63

This early period of her life has been discussed and contested by both her supporters and detractors, as it seems to underline some of the apparent contradictions between traditional and revolutionary attitudes in her character that became more obvious as she became more publicly, politically active.

CHAPTER 2

THE MINER'S DAUGHTER FROM GALLARTA

On December 9, 1895, a Basque miner, Antonio Ibárruri, and his Castilian wife, Juliana, welcomed a daughter, Isidora, into the world. This baby, whom they called Dolores – from her baptismal name, María Dolores,¹⁰ was both a natural product of the world into which she was born and an anomaly within it. The circumstances of her childhood shaped her life, which was also a reaction against those circumstances. The young Dolores witnessed the difficult life of the iron miners in her Vizcayan town of Gallarta. In her autobiography, written many years later, she remembered a childhood life molded by the mining village in which she lived.

We climbed the hills to pick wild berries and madrona apples in summer and to gather chestnuts in autumn. Accustomed to a hard life, we were not afraid to take risks. We – both boys and girls – raced through the mine sites; we leapt onto moving freight cars; we slid down the steepest slopes; we hung from aerial tramcar cables; we crawled through tunnels; we explored the mine drifts and the railroad trestles. We possessed no toys, but any of us could have written an anthology of childrens' [*sic*] songs and games.¹¹

While this description paints a picture of Dolores's childhood as rough and tumble, it does not seem an unhappy childhood. Yet, in her autobiography, Dolores described it as “a sad childhood and an adolescence that was not relieved by hope.”¹² Dolores seemed to have a political motivation behind these descriptions of her childhood. In her

¹⁰ Rafael Cruz, *Pasionaria: Dolores Ibárruri, Historia y Símbolo* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1999) 29.

¹¹ Ibárruri 49-50

¹² Ibárruri 42

autobiography, the narrative of the difficult life of a proletarian family did not leave room for the small joys and pleasures of her life as a young girl. Without discounting the difficulties that families such as hers faced, it seems that she did, in fact, overstate the sadness and gloom of her early years when she called her childhood sad and unrelieved by hope. Many years later, she acknowledged that her childhood was not as sad and full of despair as she previously stated. “The memories of my childhood in Gallarta are very good, very happy.”¹³ Her memoir makes her childhood into part of a larger story of the misery involved with mining, and the lives of the miners and their families. It was a misery that Dolores knew well, and in her autobiography she adopted it completely as her own.

A number of members of her family were miners, and this family history was crucial to Dolores: “I come, then, from mining stock, the granddaughter, daughter, wife and sister of miners. Nothing in the life of mining people is strange to me, neither their sorrows nor their desires nor their language nor their roughness... I’ve not forgotten anything.”¹⁴ While she identified with miners and the privations and difficulties of their lives, as a small child she did not experience quite the same level of harsh life as others in her town. Her family life, though not easy, was more comfortable than that of many other miners, because the Ibárruri family benefited from multiple incomes during Dolores's childhood, as her father and two of her brothers worked.¹⁵

Despite being in a better financial position than others in her town, she identified with the problems that miners faced. In her autobiography, she painted a vivid picture of

¹³ Ibárruri, Dolores, from *Biblioteca de Mundo Obrero* (1985), quoted in Andrés Carabantes and Eusebio Cimorra, *Un mito llamado Pasionaria* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1982) 31. (All translations mine.)

¹⁴ Ibárruri 42

¹⁵ Low 13

the squalid and inhumane conditions that were the lot of miners in her region. “The bunkhouses that the mining companies offered as shelter to those who came from other regions resembled the lairs of wild beasts rather than human dwellings. At night, when the miners went to bed, the interior of their bunkhouses looked like a scene from Dante.”¹⁶ Although her family did not directly experience these bunkhouses, as they had their own home, the mine and its accompanying dangers and problems dominated Gallarta at this time. Cave-ins loomed as a persistent threat,¹⁷ and the dynamite used in the mines created other dangers. Dolores remembered how an alarm used to sound, warning people to clear the streets when dynamite in the mines exploded, as potentially deadly chunks of rock often flew into the street. In fact, her own grandfather died after a block of stone crushed him.¹⁸ Dolores's parents' home stood just sixty meters from the mine in Gallarta, a fact that shaped her knowledge of miners' lives.¹⁹

People responded to these threats and problems in a number of different ways, according to Dolores. Catholicism, always an important factor in the Basque region of Spain,²⁰ took hold in interesting ways. Superstition played a role in how people dealt with the world around them. People in the village tried to court favor with good spirits through superstitious practices as a way of dealing with the dramatic changes that they experienced. Dolores's experiences with these superstitions began early in her life. “The terror-inspiring beliefs and superstitions that the Church tolerated and even encouraged were transmitted from father to son; many of these were concerned with exorcizing evil

¹⁶ Ibárruri 17

¹⁷ Ibárruri 18

¹⁸ Carabantes 16

¹⁹ Cruz 31

²⁰ Salvador de Madariaga, *Spain: A Modern History* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1958) 166, 230-231.

spirits from persons thought to be bewitched or possessed by the devil. From the day we were born our mothers sewed onto our belts or blouses little bags sold by the Little Sisters of the Triano Hospital and containing images of the Evangelists or of Saint Peter Zariquete, patron saint of sorcery.”²¹

Mothers feared that evil spirits would possess their children. Dolores had experienced this realm of superstitious belief as well, since Juliana took Dolores to be exorcised when she was ten years old²² (almost certainly to the delight of Dolores’s political opponents later in her life). Far from opposing these somewhat unorthodox practices, the Catholic church encouraged them, at least tacitly, perhaps because they lacked the ability to eliminate them.²³ While some analysts argue that this Church response indicated problems within the institution, it seems likely that the Church saw the dramatic changes occurring in the lives of its parishioners, and believed that if they got some comfort from their superstitions, then that justified them. These religious, or pseudo-religious practices also kept people involved with religion, in whatever form, rather than having them resort to secular, potentially anti-clerical, responses. Rather than attempting to eliminate superstition, the Church tried to manage it as a way of keeping the population in the fold. The priests of the region tried to keep their parishioners closely linked to the Church through a variety of means. “The Basque clergy were ever jealous to keep the purity of their flock intact by keeping nearly closed the chief pass which led to the outside world – the Castilian language. Basque nationalism is but the extreme form of this solicitude of the Basque priests to keep unpolluted by liberalism,

²¹ Ibárruri 50

²² Ibárruri 50

²³ Madariaga 169

socialism...’’²⁴ The origins of this Basque nationalist movement came from the impetus to link the Basque provinces more closely to tradition. Frequently these references to tradition involved the Church. “It [Basque nationalism] was also violently Catholic and supported by priests who saw Basque culture and language as an insulation against liberalism. ‘Don’t teach your son Castilian, the language of liberalism.’’’²⁵

Upheaval and change, and the response to them, marked the environment into which Dolores was born. These early years of Basque nationalism, which especially focused upon the province of Vizcaya, coincided with increasing radicalism among the working classes. Rapid growth in mining marked the two decades prior to Dolores’s birth. Between 1875 and 1895, the production of iron in the province increased twenty-fold.²⁶ This industrial growth was unique to the region as Spain at this time remained largely rural and unindustrialized. People began to see the changes accompanying this economic growth as a threat to the traditional culture and way of life in the region. “Vizcaya was becoming highly differentiated structurally from the rest of Spain. Along with Barcelona, it was one of only two industrial provinces in a rural, agrarian country. The process of development and differentiation placed heavy strain on the old structure of Vizcayan society, threatening traditional values and identity.’’²⁷

The influx of foreign capital into mining ventures, and the introduction of large numbers of Spanish, non-Basque workers transformed the mining regions. In her autobiography, Dolores discussed both the effects of these changing times and some of

²⁴ Madariaga 232

²⁵ Raymond Carr, *Spain 1808-1975* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) 557-8.

²⁶ Stanley Payne, *Basque Nationalism* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1975) 61.

²⁷ Payne 63

the miners' responses to them. Even among working class Basques, a sense of loss regarding tradition and culture loomed.

The shepherds could no longer graze their flocks on communal land nor could the people cut firewood in the municipal forests. It was forbidden. The road home was no longer a road; it fell within a concession and was shut off by barbed wire. The land, which still bore the marks of their grandparents' and parents' labor, was placed in litigation by the new owners. A law had been passed that legitimized the rights of the outsiders and deprived the people of rights which had been established and maintained for centuries by usage and custom. Strange names appeared on signposts. Here, Luchana Mining; there, the Orconera mine; farther on, the Franco-Belgian, Rothschild and Galdames mines; in Posadero and Covarón, the MacLennan and other smaller mines...

The zortzicos and other Basque songs that sang nostalgically of wars, legendary heroes and freedom were no longer heard. The Echecojuana no longer appeared, as in the song of Altabiscar, at the door of the ancestral home, to summon the Basques with his war horn to defend their land against foreigners. Now the foreigners were invited into Basque homes, and seated around the massive oak tables next to the fireplaces, while they ate roasted codfish and drank sweet cider or sour chacoli. Chestnuts roasted in the embers, while they argued with their hosts about the payment of concessions, the price of mining stocks, and the market quotations on railway and shipping company stocks.²⁸

Dolores poignantly captured the sense of both loss and concern prevalent in her native Basque country. People believed that a modern capitalist society diminished the quality of life in the region, because it not only caused tradition to slip away, but also dehumanized the workers and turned them into one more of the region's commodities.

A variety of responses to these perceived threats arose. Basque nationalism, a movement which did not attempt to appeal exclusively to one class over another, nonetheless did not gain a strong following among the working class in this period.²⁹ As historian Stanley Payne noted, "the nationalist movement was to this point almost exclusively a middle-class (and Vizcayan) enterprise, nourished by a sense of middle-

²⁸ Ibárruri 14-15

²⁹ Payne 77, 93

class cultural and moral superiority in an environment of altered mores and apparent degradation.”³⁰ Other movements of the period would hold more appeal for the workers. While the miners may have had some of the same concerns as the Basque nationalists, they increasingly turned toward other types of solutions to the displacements and upheavals they faced during this period of economic change.

During this epoch organizations devoted to making changes on behalf of the disenfranchised masses (both the urban working classes and the peasants in the southern regions of the country) began to make inroads across Spain. They appealed to groups, like the miners of Gallarta, who felt an increasing sense of exclusion and loss of control over their lives. While these sentiments existed well before this period, only at this time did organization begin to give these people a voice. “The strikes, which occurred in the Biscayan mining industry after 1890 and which were the first serious strikes in Spain, showed how socialist influence transformed the vague discontents of the past into ‘societies of resistance.’”³¹

The rise of socialism in Spain owed a great deal to the efforts of one man, Pablo Iglesias, who pushed for the party to expand its following by publishing a newspaper, and opening local houses, where workers could gather to discuss their grievances.³² Groups like the socialists and the anarchists both experienced growth in their numbers during this period, and unionization also started expanding. Yet difficulties remained. During the 1890s, socialists tried to recruit discontented miners to their cause in Vizcaya, but internal divisions and lack of organization, coupled with the government’s ability and willingness to repress radical movements, made these early stages of resistance rather

³⁰ Payne 92

³¹ Carr 1982 448

³² Carr 1982 447

unsuccessful. Differences between migrant miners and resident miners, for example, bedeviled attempts to form a united miners' platform, as those two groups had different demands, and different ideas about what their employers should change. Furthermore, the government remained staunchly opposed to negotiations with striking workers. "Instead of 'giving in to socialism' what was needed were more Civil Guards."³³

Throughout Spain in the last years of the nineteenth century and the very first years of the twentieth century, people began to take their cause to the streets. Yet they faced stiff government opposition to their activities. Anarchist groups often organized the strikes, which frequently became violent. Equally frequently, government forces used repressive measures against the striking workers.³⁴ Despite this repression, unions continued to grow in numbers, responding to the problems that workers like the miners of Gallarta faced. Carr cites government statistics on the number of unions (called "societies of resistance") for six years, 1898-1904. In 1898, only 19 unions appeared in the count. By 1903, 224 registered, falling back slightly to 193 by 1904.³⁵

The year of the largest number of unions registered in the government statistics corresponded to an important year for the political development of the young girl from Gallarta. Dolores marked her first revolutionary political experience as the 1903 miners' strike in her town.³⁶ During this strike, the government called in the army to protect strikebreakers brought from other parts of Spain. Dolores, even as an older woman, still clearly recalled the events of the strike and the emotions that she felt, as a girl of eight, at seeing the drama unfold before her eyes.

³³ Carr 1982 448

³⁴ Madariaga 152

³⁵ Carr 1982 439n

³⁶ Carabantes 18

For example, when I was eight years old, in 1903, there was a miners' strike, and one morning the neighborhood where I lived was occupied by the army. From where the mine began to where the street ended, the soldiers, with bayonets fixed, guarded the path that the strikebreakers brought from Castilla were to take to work in the mine, because the miners had already been striking for several weeks and there was not a way to end the strike, and then they [the mine owners] believed that they could end the strike by bringing in scabs. But it was fantastic, because they brought in scabs and even the women rose against them. And the army had to withdraw... the army had to withdraw because the women went to the soldiers and said, "Sons, you don't understand why our men are on strike!" And, of course, there was something that demoralized the soldiers in seeing how the people lived in the mines, and then they withdrew.³⁷

This experience of witnessing the miners strike left a deep impression on young Dolores. She noted in her autobiography that this event marked her childhood sharply. "The year 1903 emerges clearly from my hazy memories of the past like a sharply defined mountain peak which neither time nor subsequent events have been able to dim or distort. My childhood memories are dated from this year on, and it could almost be said that it marked the beginning of my conscious life..."³⁸ Seeing the strike of the miners resolve at least some of the issues that concerned them led the young Dolores to file this image away as an effective means, perhaps the only effective means, to make workers' demands heard. It also marked the important role that women could have in the struggle, a fact that was almost certainly not lost on a young girl, ambitious and intelligent, like Dolores.

Following this dramatic event, Dolores returned to life as normal, although seeds had been sown in her mind about the potential for revolutionary action. These seeds later would sprout, once she acquired more knowledge and information, and as her life became more difficult personally.

³⁷ Jaime Camino, *Intimas conversaciones con La Pasionaria* (Barcelona: INGEMESA, 1977) 22-3.

³⁸ Ibárruri 37

Socialism's influence began to grow in Gallarta in this period. Dolores noted that after the socialists rented a floor in a house as a meeting center (the *Casa del Pueblo*), they became more active in the community, organizing meetings; parties; a mutual aid society; entertainment, such as speakers, plays, and musical groups; and a lending library.³⁹ The songs of the movement seem to have become one of the favorite techniques of expression for workers.

The children in Gallarta became more and more familiar with the rhetoric of revolutionary-minded workers during this time, largely through their songs. Although at school the children were made to sing songs devoid of any revolutionary sentiment, Dolores remembered that after school, when they were playing in the streets, they sang revolutionary songs that they learned from miners.

At school we sang songs which glorified the slave labor of the mines, like the following:

The mountains of Vizcaya
Are pure iron and nothing more ...
And her sons mine the ore
In utter joy and contentment.

But in the street we sang, to the displeasure of "respectable" people, a stanza from the song which was considered the most revolutionary of all:

Come, workers, let us abandon
Fields, factories and mines,
Abandon the labors that enrich the idle
And get on with the Revolution.⁴⁰

According to Dolores, another popular tune of her childhood referred to the Russian Revolution of 1905. "Don't lose heart, Russian people,/ Go on fighting, do not weaken,/"

³⁹ Ibárruri 24-5

⁴⁰ Ibárruri 46-7

For the International supports/ Your revolution./ We, too, demand revenge upon/ The autocratic rabble./ Let the blood of the oppressor/ Run through the streets like a river.”⁴¹

Apart from these budding revolutionary influences, the religion of her family and her town also shaped Dolores. These religious influences came both from church and from school.⁴² She belonged to a religious club, and participated in religious parades.⁴³ She also identified very strongly with the Virgin located on the altar of the Passion. “My faith was concentrated on that altar. The sorrowful mother and her dead son moved me to tears... I never stopped to think about what that image was made of, or for what purpose it had been made. I was used to seeing it just as it appeared on the altar, and if anyone had asked me, I wouldn’t have hesitated to reply that it was made of rare substances and animated with the divine breath.”⁴⁴

In addition to her recreational activities, Dolores continued with her schooling, completing her studies at the age of fifteen, and qualifying to study at a preparatory college for teachers. She had to leave the preparatory school early, however, and went to a dressmaking academy instead.⁴⁵

This stage of Dolores’s life sounds both common and atypical. As a young woman from a working class family, it was somewhat unusual for her to be literate, but due to the three incomes that her family had when she was a child, they did not go hungry, and they had enough money to send her to the local school.⁴⁶ Yet despite her educational background, as a woman, she faced typically limited options for what to do

⁴¹ Ibárruri 28

⁴² Camino 29

⁴³ Carabantes 19

⁴⁴ Ibárruri 48

⁴⁵ Camino 30

⁴⁶ Carabantes 38

with her life. In her autobiography she stated that the reason that she could not pursue a career as a teacher was financial; “my adolescent dreams faded, in the face of hard economic realities; books, food, clothes were all expenses that my parents simply could not continue to meet.”⁴⁷ Later in her life, however, Dolores acknowledged that the cause for her change in career path may have been something rather different.

Look, I wanted to be a teacher and my parents could have paid my way because the economic situation of my family was not as difficult as that of the other miners, generally speaking. And I wanted to be a teacher and went to school until I was 15 years old and I studied the preparatory course to enter the Normal [school for teachers], but no. I did not study more because they said; ‘No, how are you going to be a teacher and your brother is a baker and another brother a carpenter’, and I was left without being able to study to be a teacher, although my parents could have paid my way.⁴⁸

The differences between the two reasons Dolores gave for not attending the preparatory school reveal some of the tensions and conflicts this young woman faced. At this time, societal norms held that women should remain in the home. Juliana, Dolores’s mother, worked in the mines when she was young, but left that work to devote herself to her family full time when their needs became too great for her to continue to work outside the home.⁴⁹ As a young woman, she almost certainly worked doing menial labor around the mines, work that could not be classified as a career path, but rather as odd jobs where she could easily be replaced. Becoming a teacher certainly would not have been equivalent to the work that Juliana did; it required schooling, and implied a commitment to a career path that Dolores’s family clearly felt inappropriate for their daughter.

Historians have noted that at this time, women faced difficulties in working outside the home. “Workers subscribed to the discourse of domesticity with the

⁴⁷ Ibárruri 59

⁴⁸ Camino 30

⁴⁹ Dolores Ibarruri *“Pasionaria” Su vida; su lucha* (Mexico City: Sociedad de amigos de España, 1938) 11.

definition of the home as the exclusive working environment for women... The economic independence of women was considered a subversion of the fundamental order of the family and, in particular, as a threat to the hierarchical power of the husband.”⁵⁰

Dolores’s parents probably felt that if she were to take a career outside the home, not only would she be functioning in an unnatural position, but she would also be less marriageable, since her potential husbands would probably view her work in much the same way that Antonio and Juliana did.

The two different stories here also echo the two different descriptions she gave of her childhood. It seems possible that she gave the economic reason for curtailing her studies to further the narrative she developed in her autobiography, of class struggles, and her portrait of the oppression that the workers faced. Yet her family, as she admitted, had more means than most others. Thus, the more gendered tale of internal family dynamics seems to ring truer, given the specifics of her situation, but it would have fit less neatly into the Marxist, class-driven narrative developed in her autobiography.

Rather than entering the preparatory course, Dolores entered a dressmaking academy, then took a job for three years as a domestic servant in the home of a relatively wealthy family. Clearly, after her failed attempt to become a teacher, she faced a rather limited range of options for work. Although she had a relatively high level of education, job opportunities that would have allowed her to use that education seem to have been closed to her, either by her family, or by social norms. If she could not become a teacher, an already well established role for women (indeed, education was a job specifically set

⁵⁰ Mary Nash, “Movimiento Obrero,” *Textos para la historia de las mujeres en España*, ed. A. Ma. Aguado, et al (Madrid: Cátedra, 1994) 336.

aside as appropriate for women⁵¹), then other jobs requiring education certainly would be off-limits.

Interestingly, her work was in the home; although the home belonged to someone else, her work there was accepted, since it fit within the realm of women's options. Furthermore, her sister Teresa previously held the domestic servant job Dolores took, indicating her family's acceptance of it as appropriate. She did not take a job that would have led to a real career; instead, she took a job that could be considered as training for her "true" career as a wife and mother. Teresa left the job when she married, clearing the position for Dolores.⁵² Indeed, one biographer of Ibárruri contends that the reason that she entered the dressmaking academy was not to be able to earn a living, but rather to teach her the skills that she would need to be a proper wife.⁵³ Her work as a house servant seems to follow this same sort of pattern. The position could serve as training for her future. The pay was paltry; she earned only twenty pesetas a month,⁵⁴ and the work was difficult; she worked twenty hours each day, cleaning, caring for the animals, serving the food⁵⁵, and generally doing the tasks that she, as a wife, would be expected to know how to perform. She asked her parents for permission to leave the job, but they refused, saying that her salary, though small, was necessary to sustain their household.⁵⁶

As Dolores noted later in her life, marriage and children were supposed to be the goals of women in her region when she was young, and she took that route when she could no longer tolerate working in other people's houses.

⁵¹ Cruz 38

⁵² Cruz 39

⁵³ Cruz 39

⁵⁴ Low 17

⁵⁵ *Dolores Ibarruri "Pasionaria"* 12

⁵⁶ *Dolores Ibarruri "Pasionaria"* 12

At 20, seeking liberation from drudgery in other people's homes, I married a miner whom I had met during my first job as a domestic. My mission in life was 'fulfilled.' I could not, ought not, aspire to more. Woman's goal, her only aspiration, had to be matrimony and the continuation of the joyless, dismal, pain-ridden thralldom that was our mothers' lot; we were supposed to dedicate ourselves wholly to giving birth, to raising our children and to serving our husbands who, for the most part, treated us with complete disregard.⁵⁷

Ibárruri does not seem to overstate this conception of women's roles. A study of Basque women, carried out decades after Dolores made this choice, confirms that the traditional role of mother and wife remained foremost for women in the Basque region. Much of what Dolores had to say about her life fits within this traditional image of women in her area. For example, the researchers noted that Basque women tended to describe themselves in relation to the men in their family, rather than basing their description on their own qualities. "We see that the woman defines herself based on the position that she occupies in the familial hierarchy: as a daughter, wife, mother."⁵⁸ Dolores's description of herself echoed this tendency: "I come, then, from mining stock, the granddaughter, daughter, wife and sister of miners."⁵⁹ Furthermore, as Dolores noted, the expectation for women was that they would assume a traditional role as wife and mother, and that their aspirations ought to remain just that. "To be a mother and get married are two of the most important options in the life of the Basque woman. From the moment that she establishes a stable marriage, her life will revolve around this relationship."⁶⁰ Dolores found that this was the case for her; she marked her marriage as one of the major turning points in her life.

⁵⁷ Ibárruri 59

⁵⁸ Teresa del Valle (ed.), *Mujer vasca. Imagen y realidad* (Barcelona: ANTHROPOS, 1985) 114.

⁵⁹ Ibárruri 42

⁶⁰ del Valle 115

“[When I got married] my life changed completely.”⁶¹ Dolores found that marriage did not offer her the escape from what she termed drudgery that she previously hoped. Her marriage to a miner, Julián Ruiz, led to a variety of drastic changes in her life, changes that would completely alter the path she took.

One of the most immediate differences that she faced was financial. While her life with her parents had not been luxurious, it was much more comfortable than the life she experienced after she and Julián married.

I have already told you that in Vizcaya it rains 160 days a year, 160 days of the year when one cannot work. Then imagine what that represents. Count the Sundays, the holidays, and also the 160 days, and you can calculate what the salary of a miner means. My husband earned 4 pesetas, and he earned 4 pesetas because he was a driller, because, in general, the salary of the miners was 3 pesetas or 3.50. And being a driller, he earned 4 pesetas or 4.50. Then, counting out the Sundays, holidays, and the 160 days of rain, imagine how reduced the salary of a miner remained! It was a very difficult life.⁶²

Dolores now faced a life that had completely turned around. From a relatively comfortable childhood, and the possibility of an education and career as a teacher, she entered a terribly difficult life filled with poverty, uncertainty, and no outlet for her to explore the world outside of her home.

This situation, difficult to begin with, became even more of a struggle for a number of additional reasons. Within the first year of their marriage, Dolores gave birth to their first daughter, Esther.⁶³ Now, rather than only two mouths to feed on a salary that was already stretched to the limits, Dolores and Julián had three. Furthermore, Dolores’s marriage to a highly politicized husband came to have a variety of repercussions. Julián belonged to the Socialist Party, and the most immediate result of these political leanings

⁶¹ Camino 31

⁶² Camino 32

⁶³ Low 20

was economic. The atmosphere at this time was not favorable for politically active miners, and so Julián had concerns about his future at work; blacklisting always loomed as a possibility, which meant a period without income.

The strains on Dolores's marriage emerged quite quickly. In her autobiography, she noted that difficulties plagued her relationship with Julián.

When my first child (a girl) was born, I had already suffered a year of such bitterness that only love for my baby kept me alive. I was terrified, not only by the odious present but also by the dismal, pain-filled future that loomed before me, as day by day I observed the lives of miners' wives. Nevertheless, like other young people, I built castles in the air. And, full of illusions, I closed my eyes to my surroundings and built my dream house on the shifting sand of '*contigo pan y cebolla*' ('with you, bread and an onion'), believing that mutual attraction and fondness would compensate for and surmount the difficulties of privation. I forgot that where bread is lacking, mutual recrimination is more likely to enter; and sometimes, even *with* bread, it still creeps in.⁶⁴

The first year of her marriage disillusioned Dolores, leading her to question her position, and the position of wives more generally.

She described her role, and the role of women in general, as that of "domestic slaves, deprived of all rights."⁶⁵ Furthermore, she began to feel isolated; as though all of her identity became wrapped up in her domestic duties as wife and mother. "In the home, she was stripped of her social identity; she was committed to sacrifice, to privation, to all manner of service by which her husband's and her children's lives were made more bearable. Thus her own needs were negligible; her own personality was nullified..."⁶⁶

She began to long for the days when women worked in the mines, not only because of the possibility of having an additional income, but also because it provided a social outlet,

⁶⁴ Ibárruri 60

⁶⁵ Ibárruri 60

⁶⁶ Ibárruri 60

and gave women a way to mobilize themselves; as workers they could press for their rights in ways that in the household setting they could not.⁶⁷

These difficult living conditions, coupled with her husband's influence, began to change some of the beliefs that Dolores held as a younger woman. The religious influences of her childhood had led her to marry Julián in the church. It would be the last time that she would enter a church for a religious ceremony.⁶⁸ As her religious beliefs waned, and her life became more difficult, she began to adopt some of her husband's political beliefs.

The intimate daily contact with harsh reality began to fray the fabric of my religious convictions. And everyday I moved a little further from religious superstitions, prejudices and traditional fears of the supernatural. I was beginning to understand that our poverty – the lack of the most basic human necessities – was not caused or altered by the will of any deity. The source of our misery was not in heaven but on earth. It arose from institutions established by men which could be altered or destroyed by other men.⁶⁹

After the birth of her daughter Esther in 1916, especially, she felt that she needed to work to change the situation so that her daughter would have a better life.⁷⁰

Dolores felt the problems with her marriage, noting “My mother used to say, ‘She who hits the bull’s-eye in her choice of a husband, cannot err in anything.’ To hit the bull’s-eye was as difficult as finding a pea that weighed a pound. I did not find such a pea.”⁷¹ Yet she acknowledged the important impact that Julián had on her political

⁶⁷ Ibárruri 59-60

⁶⁸ Low 19

⁶⁹ Ibárruri 61

⁷⁰ Camino 32

⁷¹ Ibárruri 59

development. “If I had married another man who was better and earned more money and so forth, well I would have been just the wife of him: this way I am Dolores Ibárruri!”⁷²

Although it was not typical for women to take a major role in political activity at this time, Dolores began to think that women should be involved, as they felt the impact of difficult living conditions as much as men.

Was life worth living? My companions in misery and I often asked this question as we discussed our situation, our wretchedness. They spoke with resignation; after all, what could we women do? I rebelled against the idea of the inevitability of such lives as ours; I rebelled against the idea that we were condemned to drag the shackles of poverty and submission through the centuries like beasts of burden – slapped, beaten, ground down by the men chosen to be our life companions.⁷³

In all likelihood, the memory of women’s actions in the 1903 strike further enforced Dolores’s conviction that women could play an important political role.

As a result of this change in her beliefs, Dolores began to read Marxist literature at the local *Casa del Pueblo*, the socialist meeting center, during the first year of her marriage. Although she found some of the reading very difficult to understand at first, with perseverance, she began to comprehend more. This transformation did not happen immediately, however. She noted that much in her past caused resistance against these new ideas.

But the transformation of an ordinary small-town woman into a revolutionary fighter, into a Communist, did not occur in a simple fashion and merely as a natural reaction against the subhuman conditions in which the mining families lived. It was a process upon which the negative influence of the religious education I received at school, at church and at home acted as a brake.⁷⁴

⁷² Carabantes 26

⁷³ Ibárruri 61

⁷⁴ Ibárruri 43

She noted the strong religious beliefs she had held stayed with her as she acquired a political consciousness. “My former Catholic beliefs began to dwindle, although not without resistance, as if they were determined to leave a shadow, a fear, a doubt in the depths of my consciousness.”⁷⁵

As Dolores read more and understood the material more clearly, she came to believe in the possibility of political struggle. “The only path is the struggle, to end the misery in which we lived then.”⁷⁶ Apart from the benefits and changes in living conditions that Dolores felt could come from the struggle, her political life also gave her a social outlet that she felt she lacked as a wife and mother. The social interactions she found in the political struggle were similar to those she believed were possible through working in the mines. “In that context [that of Dolores and Julián’s household] only one thing could sustain the morale of that young woman, tremendously unhappy as a wife and mother: the political struggle...”⁷⁷

Although Dolores gained a sense of solidarity and fellowship through her political activity, she also lost something. Her family, who disapproved of Julián before their marriage (they eventually relented after a local priest interceded on behalf of the young couple),⁷⁸ also disapproved of the change in their daughter’s politics and political activities. Her family’s political beliefs differed significantly from those that Julián held, and their daughter also would adopt. Her father and uncles were both Carlists⁷⁹, while

⁷⁵ Ibárruri 61

⁷⁶ Carabantes 19

⁷⁷ Teresa Pàmies, *Una española llamada Dolores Ibárruri* (Barcelona: Ediciones Martínez Roca, 1975) 28-29.

⁷⁸ Low 18-19

⁷⁹ The Carlists originated as a political group in the mid-nineteenth century in a struggle over succession to the throne. They supported the king’s brother for ascension to the throne, rather than his daughter, Isabel. The cause, which remained important throughout the nineteenth century was associated with clericalism,

her older brother was very Catholic, and was a Basque nationalist.⁸⁰ Her mother was Catholic, but apolitical. “She was a literate woman who liked to read the newspapers and keep up with the news – but according to her daughter she was not at all interested in politics.”⁸¹ After Dolores’s conversion to socialism, and eventually Communism, she fell out of touch with her family, except for her elder sister, Teresa. While this was probably motivated at least in part by ideology, these also were hard times for opposition to the government. “The family members of Dolores Ibárruri (with the exception of Teresa, her older sister) did not help her for fear of reprisals, apart from the fact that economically they could do very little.”⁸²

The first twenty-one years of Dolores’s life showed her the difficulties of life as a miner’s daughter and wife. She directly experienced the tensions of being female and wanting a career. She found herself, after her marriage, cut off from social interactions. She did not work outside the home, and her family, with the exception of her sister Teresa, did not interact with her. Her husband, the one link she had to the outside world, offered little in the way of positive interactions. When he was not at work or in jail, he spent his time in cafes and pubs, socializing with other men. The disillusionment and isolation Dolores faced plunged her into a despair and unhappiness she had not previously experienced. The following year, 1917, however, would afford her the opportunity to break out of her shell of isolation, to feel connections with the world beyond the four walls of her home, and would start her on the path to a life outside her role as a wife and mother.

anti-liberalism, and conservatism generally. The last Carlist War ended in 1875. See, for example, Carr 1982 150

⁸⁰ Camino 27, 29

⁸¹ Low 12

⁸² Pàmies 28

CHAPTER 3

TWO TRANSFORMING YEARS

By the end of her first year of marriage, Dolores found herself trapped in a difficult situation and she felt increasingly isolated and despairing of the path her life had taken. She had an infant daughter, a husband who was often out of work, very little income, and she was cut off, both physically and emotionally, from her parents and siblings. She and Julián moved from Gallarta to Somorrostro, another Vizcayan mining town, shortly after their marriage, leaving Dolores in an unfamiliar place, with more problems than means of solving them. The difficulties in her life would lead her to take on a new role, agitating for a better life for herself, her children, and her comrades in despair.

Dolores recalled in her autobiography the sense of longing for an improvement in her life during this period. She remembered asking Julián if they could move elsewhere, or do something to better their situation.

When my husband's wretched wages were not enough to pay the rent; when, instead of meat we ate a few potatoes cooked with red peppers to give them color; when we had to mend our *alpargatas* (rope-soled canvas shoes) with wire; when I had to patch the patches on my husband's work clothes; when, for lack of food, I hadn't enough milk to nurse my baby, I confronted my husband with a desperate question: "Do you think we can go on living like this?" The answer was disheartening: "How do you think the others live?" "The same as we. But I can't resign myself to living worse than animals. Let's go away; let's go somewhere else where life isn't so hard, where we can at least feed our children." "Somewhere else? Wherever the ox goes he will be harnessed to the plow."⁸³

⁸³ Ibárruri 61

Dolores, although desperate for a change, recognized that Julián was right; at that time the owners of the mines exploited the miners at every turn. Although collective action, such as strikes, had allowed the miners to make some inroads in the previous years to improve the worst of their conditions, working conditions in the mines were still, in many respects, inhumane. The open air mines of the region, given the climate of the Basque Country, left most miners out of work for many days each year. Ibárruri, later in life, frequently referred to the number of days of rain the region received, coupled with Sundays and holidays, and noted how those conditions contributed to make earning a living very difficult.⁸⁴ These facts would not change even if Dolores and Julián left Somorrostro to live elsewhere.

Yet Dolores never simply accepted injustice without trying to change things. She remembered that even as a child she rebelled against perceived injustices. “During my adolescence I was filled with a bitter, instinctive resentment which made me lash out against everything and everybody (at home I was considered incorrigible), a feeling of rebellion which later became a conscious indignation.”⁸⁵ As she grew older, she realized that the injustices that she saw affected a broad segment of the population, and the rebelliousness of her youth (for example, when her mother punished her) transferred itself to a rebellion against the conditions that kept her people in their misery. “I, I am a woman of the people,⁸⁶ and what is more, I belong to the most classic working class.

⁸⁴ Camino 32

⁸⁵ Ibárruri 43

⁸⁶ Here Dolores used the phrase “Yo, yo soy una mujer del pueblo,” which has more than one possible translation, both of which make sense in this context. It means both a woman of the people (as I have opted to translate it) and a woman who is not from the city. *Mujer* (woman) can also mean wife, adding an additional possible translation, as “wife of the people.” Certainly, given the strains present in Ibárruri’s marriage, it is possible that she meant to imply a devotion to the people as a whole with the statement that she was the “wife of the people.” My thanks to Dr. Benjamin Ehlers for pointing out this double meaning.

Logically, since I was very small, I have been extraordinarily rebellious.”⁸⁷ Thus, after realizing that moving to a different town would not solve her problems, that the situation required a different solution, she began to turn to other possible means of change, particularly after she began to read Marxist literature.

Other Spaniards, from a variety of social groups, also began to actively seek alternative solutions to their problems at this time. 1917 marked a year of tremendous strife and upheaval in Spain. A number of disgruntled groups, including junior army officers, regional separatists (particularly in Catalonia), unions, and middle class political parties all protested the government and its policies.⁸⁸ Although Spain maintained neutrality during the first World War, the instability sweeping the European continent did not leave Spain untouched. The situation was ready to explode. “The neutral nations, economically linked to the belligerent powers, could not escape the general crisis, Spain least of all. The war, easily penetrating the fragile shell of Spanish neutrality, aggravated most of the nation’s problems and evoked the major politico-social upheaval that had long been latent.”⁸⁹

Indeed, the situation in Spain was so grave that one historian argued that the policy of neutrality was the only thing that kept the Spanish government from meeting the fate of the Russian government, the only thing that kept Spain from falling into a revolution.⁹⁰ The government managed to ward off this threat, but did not emerge unscathed. The widespread nature of the discontent indicated severe structural problems

⁸⁷ Camino 161

⁸⁸ Raymond Carr, *Modern Spain 1875-1980* (1980; Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001) 84-5.

⁸⁹ Gerald H. Meaker, *The Revolutionary Left in Spain, 1914-1923* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 194) 63.

⁹⁰ Meaker 63

in Spain's society, economy, and political system.⁹¹ Regionalist sentiment was on the rise, particularly in Catalonia; the government continued an unpopular colonial war in Morocco; the intelligentsia found itself increasingly restive; the quasi-feudal system of land tenure remained in place in the southern regions of the country; and other significant sectors of the population, such as the workers and the military, felt more and more disengaged from Spanish society. In the face of these uncoordinated threats, the government looked less and less able to contain these potentially revolutionary forces, and faced a crisis of legitimacy.⁹²

While many Spaniards in the bourgeois classes made a lot of money during the war, the average working class Spaniard faced an increasingly difficult economic situation, as prices rose during this period at a pace that outstripped the increases in wages. "Never before had so much wheat, so many potatoes or onions been grown before or sold at such high prices. The landowners doubled and trebled their capital. The workmen's and even the agricultural labourers' rose, though an even greater rise in the cost of living usually offset this."⁹³ Yet despite these financial gains, significant problems remained. The war divided the country into pro-Allied and pro-German factions, with the three main power-holding groups -- the Army, the Church, and the socioeconomic elite of the aristocracy and landowning class -- sympathetic to the Germans and the left, the intelligentsia, and the liberals siding with the Allies.⁹⁴ The confluence of rising economic strength, and the already present schisms in Spanish

⁹¹ Carr 2001 85

⁹² Meaker 63

⁹³ Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1971) 57.

⁹⁴ Brenan 57

society, exacerbated by the war, led to an increasingly divided society, with each group more able to fight the others.⁹⁵

The spark that began the conflagration in 1917 came from the army. Faced with a declining national and international prestige after the 1898 crisis, in which Spain lost her remaining colonies, the military began to rebel against the sense that the government and the population as a whole did not respect them. One historian noted the parallels between the situation of the army and that of the working classes. “Spaniards, on the whole, preferred not to think about the Army, just as they preferred not to think about the importune demands of the emerging proletariat. Indeed, though set apart from the workers by barriers of class and caste, the officer corps in the early twentieth century shared with the labor movement a similar sense of rejection and isolation within Spanish society.”⁹⁶

Despite the similarities in their situations, however, the military and the working classes did not join forces, largely because of the army’s traditional antipathy toward the workers. “Though as a rule they [the army] held no strong socioeconomic views, they were generally hostile to the labor movement, of whose realities they had little comprehension.”⁹⁷ This hostility came from the military’s traditional role of defending the government against any turmoil, and “partly from their commitment to a highly centralist, if somewhat nebulous, conception of patriotism – centered largely on loyalty to the monarch – that led them to view all class and regionalist appeals in a sinister light.”⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Brenan 57

⁹⁶ Meaker 64

⁹⁷ Meaker 65

⁹⁸ Meaker 65

In spite of these misgivings about the substance of working class movements, the army did recognize the effectiveness of some of that movement's organizational tactics. Taking a page from organized labor, in the spring of 1917 the junior officers set up *Juntas de Defensa* (Officers' Syndicates) to press the government to meet their demands.⁹⁹ These demands were largely professional: inadequate training and arming; poor salaries, particularly in light of wartime inflation; the end of a system of royal favoritism; and a desire for a return to the system of promotion by seniority, rather than merit promotions for service in Morocco.¹⁰⁰

The *Juntas* spread across the country, and before long the government had to recognize their revolutionary potential. In the face of this military threat, the government made concessions in the early summer of 1917 to prevent a military coup from unseating it.¹⁰¹ Although this kept the army from formally attempting to take over the government, the changes did grant a good deal of influence to the military, giving it a major role in the development of Spanish politics. "The colonels of the Junta Superior [...] had the power, if not actually to govern Spain, to decide who would or would not do so. During the next six months the Army, as the arbiter of Spanish politics, would compel legalization of the *Juntas*, depose two cabinets, quash a revolutionary general strike, obtain a War Minister of its own choice (La Cierva), and order the closing of the Cortes [Parliament]."¹⁰²

The military's actions showed other discontented groups that the potential existed for resistance to the government and its policies. "Although the *Juntas*' coup could not be construed as a genuinely revolutionary action, since few officers were interested in

⁹⁹ Brenan 63

¹⁰⁰ Meaker 65-66, Carr 2001 84

¹⁰¹ Meaker 68

¹⁰² Meaker 68-69

sweeping reforms, their defiance of the state nevertheless served as the catalyst of a more authentic movement. It brought into focus all the deeper discontents with the Restoration system that had been growing for years and had been sharpened as a result of the dislocations produced by the war.”¹⁰³ Labor leaders, in particular, began to believe that defiance of the state was possible, and that they might even manage to sway the military to take their side in the dispute.¹⁰⁴ This would have been a significant step for the workers of Spain, who had previously been subjected to the butts of soldiers’ guns when they attempted to strike or otherwise press their demands on the government. Yet this proved a miscalculation. The army had opted to throw its lot in with the government, which had listened to its demands, and had made concessions to the military. As a result of those concessions, the military had a stake in keeping the government intact, so as not to lose the gains they had made as a result of their strike. Thus, the army again played the role of the defender of the monarchical system.¹⁰⁵

This did not end the revolutionary fervor sweeping the country, however. Catalan regionalists, primarily from the industrial bourgeoisie, seized on their increased economic power as a result of the war boom to try to press the government for their own demands as well. They believed that they could play the role of the bourgeois revolutionaries, to change the political system, although they had no interest in making a social revolution. “Their fervent desire, as Cambó [the leader of the Regionalists] said, was to ‘de-Africanize’ Spain and make it a part of European society. They did not wish to abolish the monarchy, but to democratize and decentralize it. They were regionalists who wished to transcend regional boundaries. Cambó’s great goal was to convert the Lliga [the

¹⁰³ Meaker 69

¹⁰⁴ Meaker 69

¹⁰⁵ Meaker 69

Regionalist political party] into the nucleus of a broad political coalition...”¹⁰⁶ Thus, while the Regionalists would join forces with the workers if necessary, they did not seek to make a social revolution, as it would have harmed their own position, rather than strengthened it, which was, of course, the goal of their rebellion.

On the part of the workers, the slights and difficulties they had experienced for decades boiled over, as other sectors of Spanish society challenged the government. Labor groups made plans for a revolutionary “general strike intended to usher in a bourgeois-democratic republic.”¹⁰⁷ At the forefront of this impetus stood the Socialist Party, which provided much of the strike leadership. The workers had numerous grievances, based on both national and international conditions, to air by 1917.

Thus behind the revolutionary purpose of the strike were a variety of motives: acute economic discontent, due to rising inflation and unemployment; anger over the refusal of the monarchy to effect a rapprochement with the Allied Powers, or even to protest the torpedoing of Spanish vessels by German U-boats; democratic desire for a political transformation that would enable Spain to confront the postwar world with dignity; the deepening conviction of labor leaders that only a republic would give the labor movement the free environment needed for its growth; finally an opportunistic recognition that the regime, because of the military uprising, was extremely vulnerable.¹⁰⁸

The workers, along with their middle class allies (largely from the Regionalist camp) had specific, mostly political, goals for the general strike, planned for August 1917. “The general strike of August 1917 would be, above all, a political strike with concrete objectives: the departure of the king, the creation of a provisional government, and the summoning of a constituent Cortes to preside over the restructuring of national

¹⁰⁶ Meaker 70

¹⁰⁷ Meaker 76-77

¹⁰⁸ Meaker 77

life.”¹⁰⁹ The Socialist leadership took a planning role, making painstaking preparations while the workers who were supposed to actually take action grew increasingly impatient and ready to strike.¹¹⁰ When the railroad workers began a national strike on 10 August 1917, the Socialists felt they had to push ahead with the general strike to support their striking comrades, although the plans were not fully ready for implementation yet.¹¹¹ On 12 August, the strike committee issued a strike manifesto outlining the logic of the action, and the following day, the workers took to the streets.¹¹²

The government managed to play this potentially destabilizing and revolutionary situation to its advantage. First, the government, by refusing to negotiate with the Railworkers’ Union, led those workers to strike, thus forcing the Socialists to declare the beginning of the general strike out of solidarity, even though they were not really prepared for it to begin.¹¹³ “By provoking the strike prematurely the government was able to introduce an element of confusion into it from which it never recovered.”¹¹⁴ Furthermore, the government used the diversity of forces in the strike alliance to weaken the movement, and preserve its own position. “In effect, they played the various rebellious groups off against each other and used one crisis, that of labor, to help dampen another, that of the insubordinate officer corps.”¹¹⁵

Around this time, Dolores also took more active roles to agitate for change. “Shortly after marrying I already carried a basket with pistols and hid dynamite.”¹¹⁶ In the late summer of 1917, this subversive activity led Dolores to join a group of miners

¹⁰⁹ Meaker 77

¹¹⁰ Meaker 80-81

¹¹¹ Meaker 82

¹¹² Meaker 82, 85

¹¹³ Meaker 82-83

¹¹⁴ Meaker 84

¹¹⁵ Meaker 84

¹¹⁶ Luis Haranburu and Perü Erroteta, *Dolores Ibárruri* (San Sebastián: Luis Haranburu Editor, 1977) 72.

who planned to participate in the strike. The Socialist Party, along with other groups opposed to the monarchy, began to circulate rumors that a revolution was on the way.

Dolores recalled this incident, not without bitterness, years later.

The Socialist Party, together with bourgeois opposition groups, was making plans, although they had no intention of carrying the struggle against the monarchy to its ultimate conclusion. Socialist propaganda, deliberately ambiguous, gave the working class the impression that the revolution was in preparation. To deepen this impression, small firearms were distributed in several regions – especially in Asturias and the Basque provinces – to metalworkers and miners, with the advice that they should be prepared for any contingency.¹¹⁷

Dolores and her comrades took these calls very seriously and began to prepare themselves for the coming revolution, as a separate action, apart from what happened at the national level. “While waiting for instructions, a group of miners from my district decided, on their own, to prepare for coming events by making bombs; in this undertaking, I was an eager participant.”¹¹⁸ Using the materials at hand, especially dynamite, and their knowledge from the mines, the group built bombs that Ibárruri termed “primitive,” but “perfect, above all from the psychological point of view – the din they produced was bloodcurdling.”¹¹⁹ Dolores, having grown up in a mining town, and the daughter of a dynamiter, proved an important addition to this group. “We [the children of Gallarta] knew all of the mysteries of dynamite, just like the men, because we saw them work... It was the life of our fathers, our brothers, our neighbors.”¹²⁰

Dolores’s group stored the bombs, waiting for a signal to act, and as time passed, they became increasingly impatient. In August 1917, when the railroad workers decided to stop waiting and rise up in a strike, the others opted to move. The government

¹¹⁷ Ibárruri 64

¹¹⁸ Ibárruri 64

¹¹⁹ Ibárruri 64

¹²⁰ Carabantes 33

responded swiftly and mercilessly. The army killed many workers, and the government jailed many more. The prisoners included the strike committee. The Somorrostro group quickly learned about what had happened, and had to make a decision about what to do with the armaments they had already prepared. “What were we to do? The first thing was to get rid of our arsenal. Some of us, in the dead of night, and in the greatest of secrecy, threw our bombs into a muddy stream, where the dampness would render them useless. I breathed easier; even if someone were to denounce us, as did in fact happen, a denunciation without evidence would carry no weight.”¹²¹ Indeed, Dolores herself was the one charged with the disposal of the bombs.¹²² Julián, as a leader of the local strike committee, had to go on the run, hiding from the authorities. “After we had cleared the cave, my husband took refuge in a shepherd’s hut. At dawn, several members of the Civil Guard came to our house, looking for my husband. When they found neither the ‘culprit,’ nor bombs nor arms of any kind, they threatened to arrest me unless I revealed his whereabouts. I refused.”¹²³

Julián, however, lacked the steely nerves of his wife. After seeking the advice of a Socialist leader, he took the man’s advice, and turned himself over to the authorities, who promptly arrested him. Once again, Dolores found herself alone, isolated, and angry with Julián.

I was alone with little Esther; those of my husband’s old friends and fellow workers who were able to escape had gone to Santander or Galacia [*sic*] or León. I was furious with my husband for having given himself up. It seemed absurd to me that workers, above all, Socialist workers, should voluntarily report to the authorities, under the illusion that they faced no reprisals. As long as they were free, there was always something they could do; in jail there was very little.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Ibárruri 64-5

¹²² Carabantes 32

¹²³ Ibárruri 65

¹²⁴ Ibárruri 65

Dolores believed in action, and from jail, Julián would not be able to act. She did not only believe in action for her husband, however, but also for herself. “Already from 1917, Dolores’s socialism was not that which Julián Zugazagoitia described as ‘socialism of the kitchen,’ consisting ‘of reinforcing the faith of her husband, in keeping him happy in days of dispiritedness, which are many, and in participating in his days of joy dedicated to cordiality.’ Her socialism, in contrast, was built upon the lessons of books and in helping in the syndical activities of her husband.”¹²⁵

After Julián’s arrest, Dolores found herself in a very dire situation. She had no income, and no one from whom she could request help. “I didn’t know what to do, to whom I should turn. I couldn’t expect any help from my family. And in a town where mining was the only activity, it was impossible for me to find work.”¹²⁶ She did the best she could to provide for herself and Esther, her baby. She used her training as a seamstress to barter sewing for milk, and she sold some of the vegetables she had planted in a small garden. At this point, she experienced an almost complete isolation. Not only was Julián in jail, he had put himself there, in her mind. She must have felt a sense of betrayal at this stage. After all, she stood up to the Civil Guards by refusing to turn him in, despite the fact that she was the only one in the house to care for Esther, while Julián gave up and turned himself in. He left her alone, and almost certainly damaged any respect she had for him at that point.

¹²⁵ Cruz 57 Roberts defines syndicalism in the following way: A movement arguing that “workers should amass their power in unions, and at the right moment carry out a general strike, crippling capitalist society and bringing it down.” David D. Roberts, “Escalating Tensions, 1880-1914,” Thomas F.X. Noble, Barry S. Strauss, Duane J. Osheim, Kristen B. Neuschel, William B. Cohen, and David D. Roberts, *Western Civilization: The Continuing Experiment* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2002) 822.

¹²⁶ Ibárruri 65

As she scraped by, feeling very alone, she received a tremendous gift. “One day I received a money order for 50 pesetas, sent to me by a group of miners, friends of my husband, who were working in the León mines. Only those who have been in circumstances like mine can imagine how welcome it was.”¹²⁷ Dolores used the money to leave Somorrostro and move back to a small room in Gallarta until her husband left jail, and visited her husband in prison when she could.

While the generosity of her comrades eased Dolores’s situation somewhat, she soon found herself in difficult conditions again, as she had no steady source of income, and the authorities continued to hold Julián in jail. In the midst of her despair, she witnessed an event that would change the direction of her life forever.

One stormy November day – the sky was cracking with thunder and lightning, a fitting background for a world-shaking event! – our local newspaper vendor electrified our street as he shouted out the sensational news: “*Revolution in Russia!*” My heart turned over and I ran to the street to buy a paper. The vendor wouldn’t let me pay him because he knew my husband was in jail. “Here, take one,” he said, “and rejoice. The Socialist Revolution has broken out in Russia.”¹²⁸

Although the revolution occurred half a world away, Dolores felt hope swell within her. She began to believe in the possibilities for change, due to the revolution that had taken place in Russia. “My former sadness vanished; I no longer felt alone. Our revolution, the revolution which even yesterday we considered to be remote and beyond reach was now a reality for one-sixth of the world.”¹²⁹ Her sense of connection to the Russian Revolution proved swift and strong. She stopped singing lullabies to Esther and began singing her to sleep with “revolutionary songs which I had learned in my village and

¹²⁷ Ibárruri 66

¹²⁸ Ibárruri 66

¹²⁹ Ibárruri 67

which had lain dormant in my memory. They were awakened by the echoes of the October Revolution.”¹³⁰ She later described the Russian Revolution as opening “a path of hope”¹³¹ for her and her comrades.

Naturally, as people across Europe learned of the revolution in Russia, they responded with strong sentiments, both in favor and in opposition to the Bolshevik Revolution. Although information from Russia spread sporadically, and was not always accurate, the information that did exist inflamed emotions across the continent. “But even though they lacked reliable information about Russian events, millions of European workers, exhausted by the war and disillusioned by the peace, were prepared to embrace the Revolution as a redemptive event and as the embodiment of all their desires for a better world.”¹³² Spain did not differ on this count. Workers, in particular, and their political parties, had a range of reactions. The strike and ensuing repression of earlier in 1917 left the labor movement in a shambles, with the political parties still trying to decide what the next step should be.

The news of the revolution in Russia underlined the divisions between, and within, the various groups. The Anarchists generally embraced the Bolshevik Revolution, although it did cause them to rethink their ideas about what the nature of a revolution should be; namely, whether it needed to be a spontaneous uprising, or if it could be orchestrated. Nonetheless, despite these questions, the group tended to view the Russian Revolution positively. “In the presence of the Bolshevik achievement in Russia and the revolutionary ambience in Spain, the Anarchosindicalists would for the first time be required to rethink their conception of the revolutionary process. They would be

¹³⁰ Ibárruri 67

¹³¹ Haranburu 72

¹³² Meaker 99

genuinely stirred by the Bolshevik accomplishment and challenged by the idea of an ‘organized’ revolution for which (as they soon realized) Bolshevism stood.”¹³³

The Syndicalist faction of the labor movement took a much more cautious and restrained tone toward events in Russia. Partially, at least, this resulted from a lack of firm and reliable information on which to base a judgment. But it also sprung from an ideological concern from the leadership of this union-based group. “The ‘pure’ Syndicalists, like their UGT [Socialist] counterparts, were increasingly conscious of the unreadiness of the workers and of how much would be lost by the kind of bold, precipitate action that the Bolshevik coup seemed to sanction.”¹³⁴ Part of their concern was that the Russian Revolution would sanction the terror tactics of the extremist Anarchists, pushing them to carry on with activities that the Syndicalists considered out of control.

This type of restraint also found expression in the Socialist movement at the time. Pablo Iglesias, the man who had become the physical, human embodiment of the Socialist Party in Spain, along with his closest disciples, opted to turn his attention to the bourgeois democracy stage of development, which meant focusing less on the mobilization of the workers for a Russian-style revolution, and focusing more on reformist, Parliamentary tendencies to create a republic.¹³⁵ Furthermore, many people in the Socialist bureaucracy adopted the Allied cause as their own, and felt an Allied victory in World War I crucially important. Thus, they criticized the Russian Revolution for

¹³³ Meaker 103

¹³⁴ Meaker 107

¹³⁵ Meaker 110-111

taking focus off of the Great War, and criticized the Bolshevik leadership for signing a separate peace with the Germans.¹³⁶

Not all members of the Socialist Party, however, followed the “Pablista” line. The Russian Revolution opened up a schism within the party that later led to an actual split, and the creation of the Spanish Communist Party. In 1917, some Socialists spoke out strongly in support of the events in Russia, and argued that those who focused on the World War instead of the Revolution placed their attention on the wrong conflict. “They were the first Spanish Socialists to insist on the profundity of the social revolution unfolding in Russia and to assert that this movement, rather than the war, was the crucial event of the era.”¹³⁷ Although it took a few years for the decisive break to occur between this group and the “Pablistas,” these Socialists set the stage for the development of a new political party in the country, and their views on the Russian Revolution led one historian to refer to them as “the cradle of Spanish Communism.”¹³⁸

Dolores later called 1917 “a decisive year.”¹³⁹ It seems that year was decisive for a number of different reasons. For Dolores, the year was filled with desperation (she thought at several points of selling her sewing machine to make ends meet while Julián was in prison¹⁴⁰) and isolation, particularly after the failed strike attempt and her husband’s subsequent absence. Yet hope remained. Clearly, the Russian Revolution had a critical impact on Dolores and her path in life. After the triumph of the Bolsheviks, it seemed possible that the lives she and her people lived could improve. Rebellion and resistance to the harsh circumstances of the miners’ existence became possible.

¹³⁶ Meaker 108

¹³⁷ Meaker 112

¹³⁸ Meaker 116

¹³⁹ Ibárruri 63

¹⁴⁰ Ibárruri 66

Yet, on a more local, personal level Dolores could find hope as well. In the depths of her isolation and financial troubles, comrades had reached out to help sustain her. The fifty pesetas she received from her husband's friends gave her a chance to survive the tough times while Julián was imprisoned. The newspaper vendor who did not charge her for the paper that reported the Russian Revolution gave her a chance to gain hope in their cause, without taking precious and scarce money from her. The fact that Ibárruri remembered these incidents so many years later reveals the importance they held for her. They were signals of solidarity and fraternity among the workers, a solidarity and fraternity whose absence she previously lamented. "The strike of 17 ... well I already had a baby a few months old and my husband in jail, and I could only sustain myself thanks to the solidarity that had organized itself in the metalworking zone for the families of miners who were in jail; of the people that were in jail generally. It was an extremely difficult situation."¹⁴¹

According to some sources, at the end of 1917 or in 1918, Dolores joined the Socialist Party. One source claims that Dolores joined the Socialists at the end of 1917.¹⁴² A second claims that although she considered herself a Socialist earlier, she did not formally join the Party until the spring of 1918, when Julián was released from prison.¹⁴³ A third -- an interview with Ibárruri -- states that Dolores never belonged to the Socialist Party at all.¹⁴⁴ Dolores herself, after the formation of the Communist Party (*Partido Comunista Español*- PCE), denied belonging to the Socialist Party probably because of the conflicts between the two groups. Despite the different stories about

¹⁴¹ Camino 34

¹⁴² Dolores Ibarruri, "Pasionaria" 14

¹⁴³ Cruz 56

¹⁴⁴ Camino 35

whether or not Dolores ever became a member of the Socialist Party, clearly she became more politically active through this period. She noted in her autobiography the happiness she experienced when, in the 1918 elections, a Socialist won a seat in the Chamber of Deputies. Yet, she had some misgivings about the way in which he won the election.

The 1918 elections, in which Indalecio Prieto was elected deputy, were won with fists and pistols. I do not record this as an *a posteriori* recrimination, for I, too, wholeheartedly welcomed our candidate's triumph, and I, like all of working-class Vizcaya, hailed him at the victory meeting. Even though I had gone along with the idea that one does not defeat the enemy by smiles and legal niceties, I did not relish taking men from the mining district to win the elections in Bilbao and, if necessary, to crack the heads of the [Basque] nationalists.¹⁴⁵

Indeed, the Socialists registered a significant victory in the 1918 elections, winning six seats in the Chamber of Deputies.¹⁴⁶ The government declared an amnesty for those involved in the 1917 strike, and after nine months of incarceration, Julián was freed.¹⁴⁷ Dolores's statements about the elections demonstrated some of the tensions inherent in the workers' movement at this time. While the Spanish Communist Party would later claim that they believed in the possibility of revolution in Spain -- unleashed by the news of revolution in Russia -- they did not reject the idea of democracy. Dolores, too, came to believe in the revolution, but also in the possibilities of democracy. This tension in her position offers an example of the divisions in Spain that would later crystallize during the Civil War.

The year following the Russian Revolution was a difficult one for many Spaniards. The economic difficulties continued, with fewer people working, and the cost

¹⁴⁵ Ibárruri 67

¹⁴⁶ Carabantes 36

¹⁴⁷ Haranburu 24

of living rising.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, news about the events in Russia continued to spread, reaching more people than before. “From the middle of 1918 there were signs that the Spanish labor movement was beginning to revive from the low point of the previous summer; and that nonstop inflation, rising unemployment, and the less tangible but perhaps no less powerful force of the Russian Revolution were once again pushing the country toward an acute social crisis.”¹⁴⁹ This led to a combustible situation in Spain, a country that had a number of similarities to the home of the Bolshevik Revolution. Like Russia, it was considered backward and somehow less European than the rest of the continent. Furthermore, the two countries both had large agricultural populations that worked land without being able to own it themselves. Finally, the population had a sense of exclusion from the political system in both countries. More and more groups in Spain began to organize and push the government to meet their demands. In the south, peasants and agricultural laborers took action, inspired by stories from Russia. Urban workers also became more active, protesting their living conditions.¹⁵⁰

Dolores Ibárruri was not left out of this rising tide of political activism. 1918 marked a critical year in her public formation because in that year she adopted the pen name that would remain with her for the rest of her life, becoming more recognized than her legal, given name¹⁵¹. She had become involved with a local newspaper, *El Minero Vizcaíno* (*The Vizcayan Miner*) by 1918, and during Easter Week of that year, the editors chose her to write an article. She cast around for a pseudonym and chose “La Pasionaria” (The Passion Flower), a name that she kept for the next seven decades. Ibárruri

¹⁴⁸ Meaker 117

¹⁴⁹ Meaker 116

¹⁵⁰ Meaker 116-117

¹⁵¹ *Pasionaria: Memoria gráfica*, (Madrid: Ediciones PCE, 1985) 11; Haranburu 23

remembered making the choice rather simply. “On a certain occasion, during Holy Week, which is the week of the Passion, to put myself in the tone of the date, I signed with that pseudonym some newspaper articles in *El Minero Vizcaíno*. I signed ‘Pasionaria.’ People liked the name and they began to call me that and so it has remained.”¹⁵²

Yet despite the seeming simplicity of the choice, the choice of this pen name warrants more thought and discussion than Ibárruri herself acknowledged.¹⁵³ She did admit that some people found her choice to be ironic, and somewhat comical.

Then, I signed ‘Pasionaria’ and the editors of the newspaper found that amusing that I, the daughter of the family of Antonio “the Artillero,” who were Catholic and Carlist, would write in the newspaper of the miners, that they immediately said who ‘Pasionaria’ was. Then I said to them: but you are idiots, Why did you tell? Now how will I write? And they answered me: well, you are going to continue being ‘Pasionaria.’ And I continued writing with that pseudonym, although the whole world knew that it was Dolores Ibárruri.¹⁵⁴

The name Dolores chose raises a number of interesting points. First, as Pàmies points out, a number of women wrote under pseudonyms, yet they generally chose to use a man’s name as their pen name, while Ibárruri chose a distinctly feminine one. “If Dolores Ibárruri was not the only woman of her time to sign her writings with a pseudonym, she did not choose in contrast a masculine name. Not only in Spanish and universal literature do we find women who had to entrench themselves, in the face of a misogynistic society, behind the name of a man: Rosa Luxemburg herself signed ‘Junius’ in revolutionary publications at the beginning of the century. Dolores Ibárruri

¹⁵² Carabantes 28

¹⁵³ My thanks to Dr. Reinaldo Román for encouraging me to think about this.

¹⁵⁴ José Ramón Garmabella, *La Pasionaria* (Mexico City: Editorial Diana, 1977) 143.

opted for the name of a flower.”¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, the religious implications of the name also raise interesting questions. “Pasionaria is a flower that, according to the people of villages, opens to show the Passion and death of Christ.”¹⁵⁶ While Dolores claimed that she simply took the name because it was Easter Week, and she felt that the imagery appropriate, given the publication date of the article, there may be more to the story. The article she first signed “Pasionaria” dealt with the theme of religious hypocrisy.¹⁵⁷ Thus, there was a certain irony in taking a pen name so explicitly linked to religious tradition. Yet beyond the superficial irony of the name lurks something more personal, linked to Pasionaria’s own childhood.

In her autobiography, Ibárruri discussed the religious convictions she had as a child. She noted her involvement in religious processions and the time that she spent at the family altar, which was located close to the altar of the Passion. As a girl, Dolores regularly fixed her attention on the altar of the Passion.

In the church in my town, the “grave” where we prayed to the dead of my family was near the altar of the Passion, and on the altar there was a glass box in a niche with a bony Christ lying inside, the terrifying sight softened with a tulle-and-lace veil... My faith was concentrated on that altar. The sorrowful mother and her dead son moved me to tears. In that simple figure I worshipped the living image of the Virgin Mother, whose heart, pierced with seven daggers, shone on the black velvet dress. At times, when the reflection of the candle flames danced in the glass tears incrusting in the Virgin’s face, it seemed to me that she was really crying. This made a profound impression on me. I never stopped to think about what that image was made of, or for what purpose it had been made. I was used to seeing it just as it appeared on the altar, and if anyone had asked me, I wouldn’t have hesitated to reply that it was made of rare substances and animated with the divine breath...¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Pàmies 13

¹⁵⁶ Pàmies 13

¹⁵⁷ Garmabella 142

¹⁵⁸ Ibárruri 48

The quotidian maintenance required to keep the altar clean shook Dolores's childhood faith in the divine nature of that altar.

The teacher in my school was the curator of the sisterhood of the Heart of Jesus, and it was her responsibility to arrange the altar every week. She usually took the older girls along with her to the church to help her, and I went with her several days without anything out of the ordinary happening. But one day, following her instructions, I climbed onto the altar table to dust one of the niches. When I got down – without turning my back on the images, which was considered a sinful breach of reverence – I looked over my shoulder to keep from stepping on the altar slab and saw a sight that froze me in my tracks. Two Sisters of Charity were handling a kind of manikin without the slightest ceremony. Where there should have been legs there were two triangles made of strips of wood. The dummy stood on the bases of the triangles. Big wires ending in very white hands came out of the sides of the sack of sawdust, and on top – merciful heavens! – on top was the Virgin's head. Her hair with its blond curls undone fell over her face and shoulders as though she had just gotten out of bed. My Virgin was like one of those scarecrows the peasants put in the wheat fields to frighten off the sparrows!¹⁵⁹

The detail with which Ibárruri recounted this experience in her autobiography indicates how deeply it affected her. She recalled having nightmares the night after seeing her beloved Virgin as nothing divine at all, but rather a sack of sawdust covered over with fine fabric.¹⁶⁰

Given the impression this made on the young Dolores, it is less surprising that she would choose the name *Pasionaria* when writing about religious hypocrisy. She probably remembered the feeling, not only of betrayal at discovering the nature of that Virgin figure on the altar of the Passion, but also the confusion that must have resulted from that episode. After all, she took great care not to give the altar her back, so as not to seem irreverent, but those figures to which she had to pay such respect were nothing more than sacks of sawdust. Given her personality, and her admittedly rebellious nature, it seems

¹⁵⁹ Ibárruri 48

¹⁶⁰ Ibárruri 48

plausible that she would have found some dissonance in the situation. The scene probably occurred to her when writing about religious hypocrisy some years later.

Beyond this childhood experience, however, Ibárruri's choice of a pen name reveals something else about her personality. While at the time, Catholicism and Socialism were considered inherently antithetical,¹⁶¹ Ibárruri was close to finding a middle path of reconciliation between the two. "I would like to say that among the comrades that have been in the Party, the one who has always attempted the issue of religion has been me. And I have done it for a very simple reason: because as I have been Catholic, I have understood better than the other comrades the need that we have to treat with respect Catholic women to incorporate them into our activities, although they were not Communists."¹⁶² While many Socialists, and later, Communists, during this time (and, indeed, into the next two decades) took overtly anti-clerical positions, Ibárruri took a different approach to the question of religion.

In contrast to other leaders of the workers' movement, "Pasionaria" believed that in a Catholic worker there could be an essentially good and potentially revolutionary person. Her political position before Christians did not obey a single tactic. She lived the most determinant experience to calibrate the authenticity of the religious faith of many people. If she 'was moved to tears' before the altar of the Passion and then afterwards entered the most exigent combat, why couldn't it happen to others?¹⁶³

Indeed, she never saw an inherent contradiction between religious faith (as opposed to the institution of the Church) and a Communist, revolutionary struggle for justice for the working class. She once noted "there is nothing more similar than a Christian and a

¹⁶¹ Low 21

¹⁶² Garmabella 157

¹⁶³ Pàmies 19

Communist... our doctrine is derived from the justice Christ predicted...”¹⁶⁴ The pen name Ibárruri chose seemed to embody all of these complex issues, regarding her own views on religion, as well as her refusal to deny her femininity. Furthermore, the name would come to have other links to Dolores’s life as time wore on.¹⁶⁵

After assuming the name Pasionaria, Dolores’s role began to change, corresponding to the change in name. Perhaps as Dolores she was simply Antonio’s daughter, or Julián’s wife, but as Pasionaria, she made a public role for herself in the political struggle; she began to operate more and more autonomously from her husband, and to gain a following of her own.

¹⁶⁴ Quoted in Cruz 36

¹⁶⁵ Cruz 54-5

CHAPTER 4

A DECADE OF CHANGE

After taking the pen name La Pasionaria, Dolores began to make a name for herself, politically and publicly. The decade of the 1920s saw Dolores become increasingly politically active, from helping to found the *Partido Comunista de España* (PCE- Communist Party of Spain) to acting as an elected provincial delegate to various Party committees and congresses, her public role expanded. Yet while her public, political life became richer and fuller, her personal life remained filled with pain and hardships. Arguably, these aspects of Dolores's personal life helped to drive Pasionaria's political activity in the 1920s.

With the proclamation of the Third International in 1919, the workers' movement in Spain experienced some turmoil. The question arose of how the workers' parties, particularly the Socialist Party, would respond to the goals of the Third International. Would they conform to the Third, revolutionary, International, or would their loyalties remain with the Second International's program? The Socialists in Spain answered this question with a split, with some staying with the previous program, and others opting to follow the path of revolution, declaring themselves loyal to the Third International. "The creation of the Third International, in March 1919, contributed greatly to clarifying the differences among them [different factions of the Socialist Party]. The struggle around affiliation with the Communist International – which represented and embodied Marxist

Socialism, and which brought to the international labor movement the experience of the Socialist triumph in the largest country in Europe – lasted for many months.”¹⁶⁶ The group in Somorrostro (Dolores and Julián’s group) decided to go with the Communist International in 1919, splitting away from the less revolutionary-minded Socialists. This group came to be one of the most vital in the PCE once it formed, and Dolores played a major role within the organization. “When the Communist Party was organized in April 1920, the Somorrostro group became one of the most active units in Vizcaya. In 1920 I was elected to the first Provincial Committee of the Basque Communist Party...”¹⁶⁷

Although Spain shared a number of characteristics with pre-revolution Russia, that type of conflict did not explode in Spain, largely due to the ability and willingness of the government to repress revolutionary activity. Furthermore, two structural factors also inhibited the coming of a revolution in Spain. “The difference in the situation in the two countries – accidental but of decisive importance – was the absence in Spain of the charge which set off the Russian revolution: the World War in which Russia was involved. Also, Spain lacked a team of revolutionary leaders comparable to the Bolshevik elite headed by Lenin.”¹⁶⁸

Nevertheless, the conditions that produced the revolutionary impetus in Spain remained in place, thus making the country an ideal place for the establishment of a Communist Party. After several years of internal quarrels in the Socialist Party about the issue of revolution and the Third International, a group of disgruntled Socialists opted to break away from the Socialist Party to form a group that would follow Moscow’s lead.

¹⁶⁶ Ibárruri 68

¹⁶⁷ Ibárruri 68

¹⁶⁸ Guy Hermet, *The Communists in Spain: Study of an Underground Movement* (Lexington, Mass.: Saxon House, 1971) 12.

The group also drew some members from the Anarchist movement in Spain, who had supported the Russian Revolution of 1917. Although most of these members would drop out of the PCE over differences in their concepts of revolution two years after its formation, they proved an important impetus to the initial formation of the party.¹⁶⁹ During 1919 and 1920, various Spaniards traveled to Moscow, making contacts with the Communists there and discussing the possibilities of establishing a revolutionary Communist party in the Iberian peninsula.¹⁷⁰ Also during these years various small, often regional, groups, such as the Socialist Youth in Madrid, broke away from the larger parties with which they were affiliated and formed little Communist organizations.¹⁷¹ In November 1921 a new party emerged from these negotiations, party divisions, and already established Communist organizations, and adopted the name *Partido Comunista de España*. At its birth the Party counted just over 1000 members.¹⁷²

The first few years of the Party's existence were difficult. Many of the originally enthusiastic members quit the party over various conflicts, including many of the Anarchists. The Party claimed to have a growing membership, but a historian of the movement argued that this claim was, in fact, false. "Although it officially claims to have had 5,000 members in 1924 – the same membership as it had claimed for 1922 – it would seem that in fact its membership shrank from 1,200 in 1921 to a mere 500 in 1924. The figure remained at this level throughout Primo de Rivera's dictatorship..."¹⁷³

Dolores and Julián could claim membership in this small party, and their local group remained important within the Party. From her 1920 election to the Provincial

¹⁶⁹ Hermet 14

¹⁷⁰ Hermet 14-16

¹⁷¹ Hermet 15

¹⁷² Hermet 16

¹⁷³ Hermet 17

Committee on, Pasionaria's political career began to take flight. She quickly became an important, valuable member of the Communist Party at the provincial level. The impact that the Russian Revolution had upon her led her to follow the program of the Third International, rather than remaining with the Socialists. She noted, years later, that the notion of revolution was the basic point of division between the Socialists and the Communists in Spain. "For us [the Communists], the problem of the Russian Revolution was fundamental. The socialists had not made any revolution. They did not understand very well what the October Revolution represented, and there was this differentiation, of support for the revolution or not. One scission of socialism was the origin of the Communist Party, which planted the possibility of a similar revolution in Spain..."¹⁷⁴

The party caught on in the mining regions, and Dolores, now more widely known as Pasionaria, found herself at the center of the activity, working to broaden the reach of the Communist Party.

Look, when the Communist Party formed, we converted the Socialist Association of Somorrostro into a Communist organization. And from that moment on we began to have relations with Madrid, comrades went to the capital of Spain... Basically, we organized a great party in the mining zone, with sections in Campillo, Gallarta, Arboleda... Yes, we organized a great party in the mining zone. And I continued participating and I collaborated on occasions with the central newspaper of the party.¹⁷⁵

At the same time as La Pasionaria's political career took off, personal tragedy struck. In 1919, at the young age of three, Esther died. At this point, another meaning attached itself to Dolores's choice of pen name. As Cruz noted, the religious connotations of the name also lead to comparisons between Dolores and the Virgin. "The representation of the passion of the mother for the passion of the son has a central

¹⁷⁴ Carabantes 34

¹⁷⁵ Garmabella 146

significance: apart from having given him life, the pain caused by the death of the son legitimates Mary as mediator between God and men.”¹⁷⁶ With the death of Esther, Dolores added another layer of empathy with the working class. Apart from being able to identify with workers because of her childhood and marriage to a miner, Dolores now felt the pain that was all too common among working class mothers: the death of a child. This fact, coupled with her relationship both with workers and the party, led her to a role of mediator between the people and the political institutions of Spain, in a parallel to the role of Mary as mediator between man and God. This also reinforced some of the links between her pen name and the religious, underlining the image of the grieving Mary that partially inspired her to take the pen name Pasionaria the previous year.

Dolores had a number of motivations for becoming involved in politics. Her rebellious nature was one of the reasons Dolores gave for her political activity. “Well it is true, I am not an intellectual, I am a woman of the people¹⁷⁷ who has felt all that capitalist exploitation represents and that has not resigned herself to live as my parents lived, nor as the other workers lived; that when I understood where the cause of our misery was, I have struggled and I have struggled with all of my soul, and in every way, eh, and in every way.”¹⁷⁸ The conditions in which miners lived, given the way in which the mining economy was constructed led to the revolutionary path opened by the Soviet Union to appeal to many people in the region, including Ibárruri.¹⁷⁹ The concrete circumstances of the life she experienced after her marriage compelled her to actively work to improve the material conditions of her family and other families like hers. She

¹⁷⁶ Cruz 54-5

¹⁷⁷ Again, “mujer del pueblo.” (See note 86, Chapter 2, p. 30)

¹⁷⁸ Camino 161

¹⁷⁹ Garmabella 145; Low 19

frequently recalled the days of not having enough to eat, and of not being able to provide properly for her children.¹⁸⁰

In 1920, Dolores gave birth to a son, Rubén, and thus had to worry about providing for a baby so shortly after the loss of Esther. This fact must have weighed on her mind as she agitated for improvements in the lives of miners.

Yet for Dolores, whose parents had eliminated the possibility of having a career as a teacher, and who spent so much of her early years of marriage isolated, the political activity also signified something else. Working within the Party opened the opportunities to be a part of something larger; to feel less isolated. Pàmies's analysis of the situation again seems germane. "In that context only one thing could sustain the morale of that young woman, tremendously miserable as a wife and as a mother: the political struggle, the sensation of feeling part of something both indefinite and growing, composed of thousands of barely perceptible but latent elements, translated in a postal turn, in a grasping of hands, in the shared risk, in the possibility of helping a stranger that, in turn, will help you or had helped you."¹⁸¹ Years later, when asked what the Party meant to her, Ibárruri expressed the importance of this link to a larger entity as a critical part of the Party in her mind. "And in the party I have found solidarity, I have found comradeship and friendship. Because, independently, each comrade has his formation, his things, the whole of the Party is a whole of people who help you, console you. For me it has been the great stimulus of my life."¹⁸²

Dolores's rapid ascension within the Party allowed her to take part in this solidarity very quickly. From 1920, the year of the founding of the PCE on, she was a

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Haranburu 72; Ibárruri 60-1, 66

¹⁸¹ Pàmies 29

¹⁸² Haranburu 94

critical part of the Party's activities. At first, in 1920, she was elected as a member of the Provincial Committee of the Vizcayan Communist Party.¹⁸³ In 1922, she went to the First Congress of the PCE as a delegate.¹⁸⁴ While Pasionaria ascended into a vital position within the Party, however, her personal life did not become any easier, and soon political activities for the PCE would also become more difficult.

Instability and turmoil marked Spain's political system during this period. Between 1918 and 1923 a series of ten short-lived governments ruled the country, each lasting less than a year.¹⁸⁵ The system was a shambles, with no government able to effectively deal with the two wars the country fought: the colonial war in Morocco and the so-called "labour war" in Catalonia.¹⁸⁶

In Morocco, the Spanish government faced a difficult situation. During the World War, Spain's colonies in coastal Morocco had remained subdued, necessitating little action by the Spanish military.¹⁸⁷ By 1919, the Spanish government decided to try to strike decisively against the Moroccan tribal chiefs in the Spanish protectorate, in an attempt to gain full control of the area.¹⁸⁸ The result was a military disaster. The structural problems of the military (some of which precipitated the officers' revolt of 1917) had not been resolved. Although the government spent exorbitant amounts of money on the military's budget, little of it went to training an effective fighting force or to arming the force that existed. Debates about the military budget raged in the Spanish Parliament during the first two years of the Great War, but nothing happened to change

¹⁸³ Pàmies 54

¹⁸⁴ *Pasionaria: Memoria gráfica* 20-1; Haranburu 26

¹⁸⁵ Carr 2001 87

¹⁸⁶ Carr 2001 87

¹⁸⁷ Carr 2001 93

¹⁸⁸ Carr 2001 93-94

the unwieldy budgetary situation. “Although military expenses frequently consumed 25 percent of the total budget, and in some years more than 50 percent, it was the astonishing superabundance of officers (the ratio was about one officer to seven enlisted men, the highest in Europe) that took the lion’s share of military expenditures. Thus 60 percent of the military budget went for officers’ salaries, 30 percent for the troops, and 10 percent for equipment.”¹⁸⁹ This pattern of expenditures translated into military disaster in North Africa. Additionally, the civilian government and the military failed to see eye to eye on what type of operations to undertake. “The consequence was an unworkable compromise between the civilian politicians’ determination to avoid trouble at home by conducting a difficult and unpopular colonial war on the cheap in terms of conscript casualties (‘relative war’), and the military view that there was no alternative to the methodical conquest by trained and reliable troops (‘absolute war’).”¹⁹⁰ The inconsistencies of the military’s actions and the unpreparedness of the troops led to a military disaster, from the Spanish point of view, in 1921. At Annual, the Spanish army retreated in the face of a frontal attack by Moroccan troops, led by a chief, Abd el Krim. The casualties included numerous Spanish conscripts, as well as thousands of square kilometers of territory lost by the Spanish military.¹⁹¹

In Catalonia, the government faced an internal war with the workers. During the years of the great war, the Anarchists’ membership exploded. While the CNT (*Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*- National Confederation of Labor, the Anarcho-Syndical Union) numbered only 14,000 members, by 1919 its membership grew

¹⁸⁹ Meaker 65

¹⁹⁰ Carr 2001 93

¹⁹¹ Carr 2001 93-94

exponentially, to 700,000.¹⁹² This dramatic growth led to “one of the more savage social conflicts of postwar Europe.”¹⁹³ While many Anarchists belonged to the moderate sector of the party, believing that “the first step must be the organization of a strong union which must avoid wasting its strength in futile revolutionary gymnastics and must produce results in the form of wage settlements and better working conditions,”¹⁹⁴ the party also included a group of action-minded individuals who did not hesitate to use terror tactics in an attempt to effect the revolution. These groups, known as “‘action groups’, *grupos de afinidad* [were] firm in their belief that the revolution could be triggered off by acts of violence which became ends in themselves.”¹⁹⁵ While the Anarchists in Catalonia battled the employers, the city of Barcelona fell into fear when a general strike exploded in 1919, throwing the city “into darkness, closing its cafés and theatres and threatening food supplies.”¹⁹⁶ At the same time, Andalusia faced strikes, and increasingly organized protests of landless workers, as well as domestic workers.¹⁹⁷ With the organization of the PCE in 1921, the government faced numerous challenges from the working classes, and an increasingly disorganized and unstable situation. As violence and killings grew during this labor war, more and more segments of the population lost faith in the ability of the government to control the situation.¹⁹⁸

In 1923, a general, Miguel Primo de Rivera, stepped into this confusion, with the stated goal of rescuing the nation. The King, realizing that the civilian governments had failed to control the situation, opted not to oppose the coup, which with nothing more

¹⁹² Carr 2001 88

¹⁹³ Carr 2001 88

¹⁹⁴ Carr 2001 89

¹⁹⁵ Carr 2001 89

¹⁹⁶ Carr 2001 89

¹⁹⁷ Carr 2001 91

¹⁹⁸ Carr 2001 92

than a whimper, ended this era of civilian politicians and ushered in a new era of military dictatorship.¹⁹⁹

Primo de Rivera, who would rule the country until 1930, was not a sophisticated political thinker. He saw himself simply as the man to save the country. “Primo de Rivera’s political thinking was primitive, personal, and naïve. Unpatriotic professional politicians had destroyed Spain; a patriotic amateur would restore her.”²⁰⁰ At first, Primo de Rivera faced little domestic opposition. After the turmoil of the previous five years, many in Spain stood convinced that the civilian political system needed to be eliminated, and something else had to be done.²⁰¹ Perhaps Primo de Rivera was the man to do it.

Furthermore, the economic situation in Spain benefited the general during the first few years of his rule. “The causes of [the dictatorship’s] initial success and subsequent failure are mainly economic, for its period coincided with that of the world boom, of high prices and cheap money and expanding markets, and its premature decline was due to over-spending on public works and to the incompetent management of finances by a gifted but not very intelligent young man, Calvo Sotelo.”²⁰² While the dictator had some success during his rule, primarily by managing to subdue the Morocco disaster,²⁰³ and by creating public works projects that helped to lower the level of unemployment,²⁰⁴ the dictatorship had some ugly sides and some serious problems as well. The main problem for Primo de Rivera was his multiple, and conflicting, loyalties to various groups.

[H]is rule rested upon an absolute contradiction. Spain needed radical reforms and he could only govern by permission of the two most reactionary forces in the

¹⁹⁹ Carr 2001 96

²⁰⁰ Carr 2001 98

²⁰¹ Brennan 78

²⁰² Brennan 78

²⁰³ Brennan 80

²⁰⁴ Brennan 82

country – the Army and the Church. He had come in with the consent of, but not as the representative of, the Army to cover up the responsibilities of the King. His dependence upon it prevented a solution to the agrarian question and made him the oppressor of Catalan liberties: his relation to the King made it impossible for him to return to legality by summoning a Constituent Cortes. The hostility of the Liberals and intellectuals which this brought him threw him into the arms of their enemy the Church.²⁰⁵

Thus, the general found himself in a difficult predicament, caught in a crisis of legitimacy, and unable to effect any real reforms.

A number of groups faced severe repression under the dictatorship. Primo de Rivera strongly repressed the desires of the Catalan regionalists.²⁰⁶ The labor unrest in that province had led many of the bourgeois political groups to support the dictatorship initially, but they quickly faced the pressures of a government that sought to centralize, rather than devolve power to Spain's various ethnic communities. The measures instituted by Primo forbade the use of the Catalan language, the display of the Regionalist flag, and the banning of the traditional Catalan dance.²⁰⁷ "Though he expressed mild sympathy for Catalan aspirations in 1923 in order to secure support in Barcelona, he shared the Castilian view that regionalism that went beyond folklore and home crafts was a cover for 'blind and perverse separatists'. He thought that Catalanism was the work of a small minority of university professors and intellectuals..."²⁰⁸ The government also bickered with the intellectual community, largely due to the dictator's firm belief in censorship.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ Brenan 82-83

²⁰⁶ Brenan 83

²⁰⁷ Brenan 83

²⁰⁸ Carr 2001 104

²⁰⁹ Brenan 83

Workers' groups also faced the wrath of the government during this period. The general did not hesitate to repress working class movements when they threatened to explode.²¹⁰ The Socialists had opted to cooperate with the dictatorship, with many of the party's leaders accepting the dictator's wishes to incorporate the UGT (*Unión General de Trabajadores*- General Union of Workers, the Socialist labor union) into the state. From the leaders' point of view, this would allow the Socialist Party to move beyond its rival working class parties and gain the upper hand. "This did not entail *political* collaboration but merely an acceptance of the existing situation [...] All Spanish Socialists had to do for the moment was to accept posts in the various government agencies concerned with labour issues, *without* committing themselves to overt support of the regime."²¹¹

As a rival to the Socialists, the newly-formed Communist Party suffered some of this governmental repression, being outlawed by the government in 1923.²¹² Immediately following this ban, the government did not bother the Communists very much, as it felt that they were rather inconsequential. However, by the end of Primo's first year in power, the number of Communists arrested rose. This trend continued throughout the next two years, with serious repercussions for the PCE. "As a result, the Party was virtually destroyed and those members of its Executive Committee who remained at liberty sought refuge in Paris."²¹³ While the Party was damaged during the dictatorship (the Socialists and the Anarchists gained much more support and power among the workers in this period), it managed to survive, and it did not halt its activities altogether.

²¹⁰ Carr 2001 103

²¹¹ Carr 2001 103-104

²¹² Hermet 17

²¹³ Hermet 17

The period between 1923 and 1930 marked an important time for Dolores as well as for Spain more generally. In 1923, she gave birth to triplets, an event that she later remembered with a sense of the irony of that situation. “For me 1923 was not only the year of the establishment of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship and the unleashing of brutal attacks against Communists, it was also the year in which my triplet daughters – Amaya, Amagoya and Azucena – were born. Triplets born in the house of a striking miner!”²¹⁴ This multiple birth compounded the difficulties of providing for the family when Julián was out of work. Dolores recalled that the family only survived because of the friends and neighbors who helped out with whatever they could.

The only food in the house was bread – because the baker gave us credit – and potatoes... In previous deliveries a neighbor had helped me, but because of birth complications I needed medical attention. Although we were unable to pay the doctor, her offered to look after me and expressed his willingness to wait for his fee until my husband was working again. I spent 18 days in bed, cared for by my neighbors, each of who, poor as they were, would every day bring me something nourishing; a bowl of soup, some eggs, apples, a jar of milk.²¹⁵

Despite the generosity of Dolores’s new “family” of neighbors and friends, tragedy quickly struck. Shortly after her birth, Amagoya died. At the tender age of two, Azucena died. Dolores and Julián did not have the money to buy the medicine she needed.²¹⁶ Of her five children, only two remained, Rubén and one of the triplets, Amaya.²¹⁷

Thus, while Pasionaria made a name for herself within the Party, Dolores, the mother, faced obstacles and heartbreak. As a woman in the Spain of the 1920s, making a career for herself proved very difficult. Indeed, she saw that early on, with the resistance she faced to becoming a teacher. As a mother and wife, society expected her to maintain

²¹⁴ Ibárruri 75-6

²¹⁵ Ibárruri 76

²¹⁶ Low 25

²¹⁷ Ibárruri 76

her home and family, rather than moving outside of the domestic sphere into the public, political sphere. Furthermore, as working women were relatively uncommon, facilities for childcare did not exist. Pasionaria faced the dilemma of what to do with her children when she attended political meetings, or worked at the Party newspaper. Traditional society expected mothers to provide for their children, and to take care of them, while frowning upon women who attempted to do so by becoming politically active. Pàmies imagined the reaction of Ibárruri's community to the political activity of Dolores and her comrades. "Denatured mothers! That would be the reflection of the authorities and the better part of the Vizcayan population. How many times have they said it about Dolores Ibárruri! 'You don't have the right to insert your children in all of that.' No, she did not have the right. They could incarcerate the father of the creatures, impose the pact of hunger, persecute them in the mining zone; to this they have the right..."²¹⁸

Politically active women were also very rare at this point in time, as societal conventions held that politics was an arena much more suited to male actors than female actors. According to one analyst, the late arrival of feminist movements in Spain is due, at least in part, to a number of cultural factors. First, the ideals of liberalism based in the French Revolution took hold much later in Spain than in other European countries, leading to a lack of concern about such issues as the rights of man, as well as the rights of women. Without a strong liberal tradition, the issue of women's liberation did not come to the fore. Also, the late arrival of the Industrial Revolution meant that fewer women

²¹⁸ Pàmies 32-3

had the opportunity for incorporation into wage labor, cutting them out of inclusion in workers' demands for education, labor reform, and suffrage demands.²¹⁹

Interestingly, one of the areas where women had been incorporated into a remunerated labor force was in the mining regions of the Basque Country. However, the fact that this was one of the most traditional areas of Spain probably had an impact on the ability of women to take a major role in political activity earlier. Although groups such as the Basque nationalists addressed the role of women, the nationalists certainly did not advocate a strong public or political role for females. Indeed, one woman involved in the Basque nationalist movement stated in 1923, "politics is not for women."²²⁰ Women's importance within the nationalist movement hinged primarily upon their role as mothers; as transmitters of the Basque culture to the next generation.²²¹

Nor were the working class, including Socialist, groups much more revolutionary about the role of women in politics. While some women did achieve some notoriety within the movements, those who did were often critical of their male comrades' views about women, feminism, and the role for females in the public, political arena. Margarita Nelken, a Socialist painter and art critic who would later be elected to Parliament, noted in 1919, "the heads of the workers' parties... ignore that the true feminist problem is an economic problem and, therefore, a branch of the social problem..."²²² Although some Socialist women's groups formed during this period, their goals, and their notion of women's roles did not leave much room for autonomous political activity. "The

²¹⁹ Pilar Folguera Crespo, "Revolución y restauración," *Historia de las mujeres en España*, ed. Elisa Garrido González (Madrid: Editorial Síntesis, 1997) 486.

²²⁰ Robustiana Mújika Tene, *Miren Itziar'i idazkiak eta olerkiak*, quoted in *Textos para la historia de las mujeres en España*, 423

²²¹ Folguera Crespo 490

²²² Nelken, Margarita, quoted in María José and Pedro Voltes, *Las mujeres en la historia de España* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1986) 192.

importance of the woman derived from her role as a companion of the revolutionary, of the working man and, in second place, as the mother of the man of tomorrow.”²²³

Pasionaria, rather than simply accept a secondary position, opted to face this hypocrisy head-on, mobilizing women in the region as wives and mothers; using the biases and stereotypes of her society to her advantage. Women frequently walked out in the streets, taking their children out for some air. Pasionaria did not miss the potential of this. “She got women to distribute propaganda leaflets on the streets, hiding them under the baby in the pushchair.”²²⁴ To Pasionaria, it seemed a perfect opportunity: everyone would assume that the women simply chatted or gossiped, leaving them free to speak to one another. Well aware, from her own experience, that men who were political revolutionaries were not necessarily marital revolutionaries, she stood up to them, encouraging them to look at their wives in new ways. “As her ideas developed, she started urging her comrades to involve their wives more in their Party activities and fulminated against those who kept their partners in the background.”²²⁵

Julián numbered among those Party members with whom Dolores was angry. In her autobiography she recalled the strains and stresses of the period, and her reaction to her husband’s situation. “My husband had just gone back to work after his release from jail, when he was arrested once more. I was furious and desperate; we were just beginning to lift our heads above the water when once again the privations were going to begin, the black days. During his detention I was responsible for the house and family as well as for a variety of political undertakings.”²²⁶ The strain of this dual responsibility

²²³ Folguera Crespo 491

²²⁴ Low 28

²²⁵ Low 28

²²⁶ Ibárruri 80

weighed on Pasionaria, as she recalled. “During much of the time between 1917 and 1931 I was alone with my children; my husband was often picked up in police raids and jailed, along with some of the other comrades, whose wives suffered as I did.”²²⁷

Dolores’s realization that other women found themselves in similar circumstances led her to attempt to mobilize them to make a change. In 1927, Pasionaria spoke with some of the women whose husbands were in jail with Julián. They resolved to do what they could to get the men released.

We wives and relatives met together and decided that if the prisoners were not released within a week we would hold a protest demonstration on the following Sunday. We planned to lie down on the streetcar tracks, in order to bring our plight to the attention of the public and apprise them of the legal abuses to which our husbands were subjected – such as being held without trial for an indefinite period, until the governor of Vizcaya might deign to release them. All the wives and other relatives had supported the plan to demonstrate, but only a few appeared on Sunday. There were Ramona Arrarás and her children, Esther Arrieta and her children, Comrade Casado’s aged mother, and I, with my Rubén and Amaya. Although few in number, we were willing to throw ourselves onto the streetcar tracks as planned.²²⁸

On their way to the tracks, some young Communists stopped the group and convinced them not to throw themselves down. Pasionaria and the others decided to appeal to the governor directly.

We then decided to visit the governor and demand liberty for the jailed members of our families. A large group of Communist women joined us, and we all walked into the headquarters of the provincial government, much to the surprise of the building guards, who were completely at a loss as to what they should do. By the time they had emerged from their state of consternation, we women, with our children, our lunch-baskets and bundles, were already in the governor’s waiting room.²²⁹

²²⁷ Ibárruri 81

²²⁸ Ibárruri 81

²²⁹ Ibárruri 82

According to Ibárruri, a rather heated exchange followed between the women, particularly her, and the governor, who looked at the group “as if [they] were freaks.” He then called them “insolent,” to which Pasionaria replied: “Insolent? If you lived as we do, you’d be insolent too.”²³⁰ After claiming that he lacked the power to release the jailed men, the women explained that they would carry on with their protest until the governor freed the men, then left his office. Ibárruri recounted, with a certain glee, an exchange the governor had the following day with a friend of the protesting women. “Heaven protect me! What a predicament I’m in! Those miners’ wives came to see me yesterday and they were terrifying. If the wives are so fierce, imagine what their husbands are like!”²³¹

This protest reveals the essential strategy Pasionaria used in her political activities. Always a fan of direct action, she took the protest directly to the individual she believed could change the circumstances. Furthermore, she mobilized women to join her in the protest, showing them, as she had seen in the 1903 strike, that women could make a difference by acting on their convictions. They did not need to relegate themselves, or to allow anyone else to relegate them, to the back of the room. Their actions could and would have an impact on the outcome of events, if they just chose to mobilize. Finally, the protest demonstrates that Pasionaria opted to mobilize women within their traditional roles. Not only did they present themselves as the wives of the jailed men, they also expressly showed their role as mothers. By taking their children along with them, they showed that their protest was not, at root, a total rejection of the traditional societal roles for women, but rather, they acted as advocates based precisely on that role. They agitated

²³⁰ Ibárruri 82

²³¹ Ibárruri 83

within the bounds of acceptable female roles, rather than outside of them. This not only probably began to open the lines of communication with the target of their protests, it also probably helped them to recruit women to the cause. Rather than asking women to reject their lives and the positions they held within the family, they advocated an expansion, and publicization of that role, showing that it could be politically important as well. This type of action underlines the way in which Ibárruri blended her respect and understanding of traditional ideas with her belief in political action. Instead of rejecting traditional roles and ideas, she mobilized women within them. By doing so, she used that symbol of tradition to help change the hardships she saw for the Spanish working class, thus linking traditional ideas with revolutionary ones.

Later in her life, Ibárruri made several statements addressing her feelings about the role of women in the political arena. She rejected feminism as a separate women's struggle, noting: "In general, I am not a feminist. I like for women to participate in the struggle in the same conditions and with the same rights as men. To make a feminist struggle on the margin of the class struggle seems a bit absurd to me because within the struggle for democracy lies the revindication of women."²³² Ibárruri seems to have already made this type of choice at the time of the 1927 protest. Her group did not argue for specific women's rights, but rather acted as women in the political arena. She always made clear the importance of her role as a mother. Pàmies argues that this role was of the utmost importance to Dolores throughout her life. "The biggest thing in the stormy life of Dolores Ibárruri is her experience as a mother."²³³ Indeed, it seems clear from Ibárruri's own words that the experience of not being able to properly care for her

²³² Carabantes 37

²³³ Pàmies 31

children played a role of paramount importance in her politicization. She also recognized the difficulties of combining motherhood with her political action. “The mother has not forgotten any of those anguishing hours in which she had to combine her duty as a militant with her maternal sentiments.”²³⁴

One episode in Dolores’s autobiography shows the tensions inherent in her political activity and motherhood. When her son, Rubén, was small, she needed to attend a political meeting one evening. Lacking a suitable childcare facility, she opted to take him with her.

One night we were holding a meeting at the *Casa del Pueblo*. It had been closed by the authorities, but I had a set of keys. I took Rubén, then about two, with me. We were to meet in a room off the stage, and I left Rubén in the auditorium, which was dimly lighted. For a while I could hear him wandering around the room; then there was silence and I assumed that he had fallen asleep on a bench. After the meeting I went to the auditorium to take him home but he wasn’t there. It occurred to me that he might have slipped out and run home alone.²³⁵

After searching high and low, with no sign of the young boy, Dolores returned to the meeting center, frantic with fear for her son’s safety. As the search continued, one of Dolores’s comrades found Rubén, sleeping soundly between two rows of benches, oblivious to the ruckus he had caused. “There was Rubén in the recess between two tiers, sound asleep. I snatched him up; my joy made him seem as light as air. But my strength was deceptive. After the anxieties I had suffered, I could barely stand. A comrade took Rubén from my arms and carried him on his shoulders to our house.”²³⁶

This example, along with that of her neighbors’ help when her triplets were born, and other similar experiences in her life, show the type of fraternity among comrades that

²³⁴ Pàmies 32

²³⁵ Ibárruri 80

²³⁶ Ibárruri 81

Dolores craved and relished. “The important, the decisive thing in the life of that woman, was that fraternity, symbolized that day when her comrade took Rubén from her arms and carried him in his shoulders.”²³⁷ Yet, significantly, the fraternity that was so important, and that this incident symbolized, sprung from the inherent conflict of being a politically active mother in the 1920s. After all, if Dolores had been able to leave Rubén safely in someone’s care while she attended the meeting, that incident of camaraderie would not have occurred. Similarly, if Julián had not been a politically active miner frequently jailed for those activities, perhaps the financial situation in Dolores’s home would not have been so dire as to require the type of assistance she received from her neighbors when the triplets were born.

Ibárruri’s role as a mother never slipped far from the forefront of her mind. “The figure of Dolores wife and mother, always would be in accord with her political dimension.”²³⁸ She maintained, even later in life, that a woman could, and should, be politically involved, but should never forget her role within the home. “My opinion is that, with the necessary securities and bearing in mind her condition as a spouse and mother, the woman can and should participate in all the activities of a modern society. Because experience has shown that sex does not determine the work that a woman should realize, but rather the will and preparation of the man or woman.”²³⁹

Dolores’s public persona also remained within the traditional image of a Spanish woman. Even while carrying out her political protests and other activities, her physical appearance conformed with traditional imagery of her countrywomen. Always dressed in

²³⁷ Pàmies 31

²³⁸ Haranburu 26

²³⁹ Garmabella 160

black, and never wearing trousers,²⁴⁰ Dolores's appearance gave rise to a number of interpretations of her life, most of which lay within traditional gender role boundaries. She began wearing black clothing when her family went into mourning for her grandmother. She never stopped using black clothes after that point. Pasionaria always explained this choice in one of two ways: in black clothing, people of her class could go to more elegant locales without requiring fancy dress- black was always considered more elegant, or she would say that she had been in mourning for one family member after another for so many years that she did not remove the traditional black clothing of that rite.²⁴¹ Others had different opinions about why she dressed in that fashion. "There were women of the towns... who affirmed that she dressed in black for all of the 'crucified sons' or for their own sons killed in the mine."²⁴² Her daughter, Amaya, later argued that Dolores's reason for dressing in black was more traditional. "There has always been a Mediterranean custom that village women dressed in black."²⁴³ Regardless of which of these explanations comes closest to the truth, this choice of costume also fed into Pasionaria's practice of being politically revolutionary without upsetting some of the most traditional images and roles for women. Rather, she turned those images and roles to her advantage.

In 1928, career success and personal tragedy again collided for Ibárruri. She bore a daughter, Eva, in that year, but the baby died at only two months of age. Despite this sad event, however, Pasionaria continued her political rise, being chosen as the Vizcayan

²⁴⁰ Low 10-11

²⁴¹ Cruz 37

²⁴² Pàmies 14

²⁴³ Cruz 38

delegate to the third Communist Party Congress.²⁴⁴ Her fame rose as the story circulated that she had to cross the Pyrenees on foot to arrive at the Congress in France. The story as people told it at the time was highly dramatic: a nighttime crossing of the mountains, on foot; a near capture by the police; the arrest of some of Dolores's group; and the return to Spain, without having been able to cross the border into France.²⁴⁵ Yet later in her life, legacy already securely in place, Pasionaria admitted that this story was false. She recalled that the congress took place in a house in Spain, not in France, and the group did not even try to cross the border, as the plan always was to hold the congress in Spain. Furthermore, all of the delegates made it to the meeting place, attended the congress, and left, all without a single arrest.²⁴⁶

Two years later, Dolores attended the Conference of Pamplona (actually held in Bilbao) as the delegate from Vizcaya.²⁴⁷ At that meeting, Pasionaria was elected to be a member of the Central Committee of the Party.²⁴⁸ This was the last Party function that Dolores Ibárruri, Pasionaria, attended as a mere provincial figure. She was on the threshold of national prominence.

²⁴⁴ Haranburu 26

²⁴⁵ Haranburu 26-7

²⁴⁶ Carabantes 47

²⁴⁷ Carabantes 47

²⁴⁸ Ibárruri 84

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The examination of Dolores Ibárruri's early life yields important insights into both her personal history and the history of her country. This period of her life has been the subject of much reflection, both by Ibárruri herself and her biographers and interviewers. This study, then, can not escape the question of why this early era is so important as to merit further reflection.

Arguably, Dolores Ibárruri's unique public life, particularly after she rose to national prominence and, even later, international stature, drives much of the interest in her early years. What was it in her background that propelled this self-admitted "mujer del pueblo"²⁴⁹ (woman of the people) to attain such stature as to be included in a novel by Ernest Hemingway?²⁵⁰ How did this woman, never one to claim to be an intellectual,²⁵¹ become the only female leader of a Western European Communist Party?²⁵² This distinctiveness drives the biographer to look at her formative years for answers to these questions.

Yet an examination of those years shows a woman who, despite the distinctions she later attained, was in many ways a typical child of a mining town. Certainly, some circumstances of her particular life led to her public emergence and political

²⁴⁹ Camino 160

²⁵⁰ Low 1-2

²⁵¹ Camino 161

²⁵² Voltes 183

development. Yet Dolores Ibárruri, for all of her public prominence, could not escape the numerous constraints of her time period. These were largely based on her gender. What emerges from her personal history, then, is not a woman who managed to avoid these constraints, but rather an ambitious and intelligent individual willing to sacrifice in her personal life for a career and public life. Among the sacrifices she made in this rebellion against the norm one could count the acceptance of her family, time with her children, and societal acceptance more broadly.

The study of Ibárruri's autobiography and interviews also prompts interesting textual and theoretical concerns. The contradictions and tensions in the various stories she told point to some of the difficult and life-altering moments of her history. Her autobiography seems to reflect Stoll's concern that "when a person becomes a symbol for a cause, the complexity of a particular life is concealed in order to turn it into a representative life. So is the complexity of the situation being represented."²⁵³ Yet the long life that Ibárruri lived led to numerous opportunities for interviews later in her life, some of which contradicted some of the seamless tale of a proletarian woman's coming to consciousness developed in *They Shall Not Pass*. This textual richness points out the importance of bearing Stoll's concern in mind, yet also grants the historian some insight into issues that bear further consideration, beyond the tale told in the autobiography.

Furthermore, Ibárruri's autobiography raises some interesting issues regarding women's autobiography, specifically. One scholar of female autobiographers noted that "an exceptional woman, by virtue of that exceptionality, becomes subject to a double constraint: masculine responsibilities and feminine sensitivity."²⁵⁴ Certainly this seemed

²⁵³ Stoll xi

²⁵⁴ Nancy K. Miller, "Writing Fictions: Women's Autobiography in France," in Brodzki and Schenck 50

to be the case for Dolores and her life story. This appears nowhere more clearly than when she discussed her role as a mother and how that interacted with her role as a political militant. For example, her story about losing her son Rubén at a Party meeting²⁵⁵ showed this double constraint clearly. She showed the reader her sensitivity and recognition as her role as primary (indeed, often sole) caregiver to her children, and the impact that her public life had on them. Yet she also had to carry on with going to those meetings, just as the men did, if she wanted to have a political career.

While Ibárruri's memoir revealed many of the issues surrounding women's autobiography, one of the contentions of some scholars seems to be refuted in Ibárruri's work. Miller argued that "it should come as no surprise that for women determined to go beyond the strictures of convention, conventionally female moments are not assigned privileged status."²⁵⁶ While to a limited extent this holds true for Pasionaria (she does not, for example, go into any great detail about her health during her pregnancies), she does privilege her role as a mother. This may well reflect the type of strategy she used in her political activities to such effect. Never denying her essential femininity, Ibárruri mobilized women within their traditional roles, and from that perspective got them involved in politics.

These types of issues reveal the essential complexity of this woman, and help to explain the continuing fascination with her multifaceted life story.

²⁵⁵ Ibárruri 80-81

²⁵⁶ Miller 51

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