

Inbal Ofer\*

## ➤ **Fragmented Autobiographies: a Style of Writing or Self-Perception? The Case of Pilar Primo de Rivera**

**Summary:** Recently published contributions to theories of literary criticism have revealed the richness and distinctiveness of women's autobiographical production, greatly advancing research by tracing apparently similar linguistic and literary phenomena which seemed to rupture the "traditional" genre of men's autobiographical writings. But at the same time they once again simplified the complex reality which lay behind such phenomena by attributing them mostly to the general condition of women's self-perception as subjects, at times losing sight of the specific historical and cultural conditions in which each process of self-representation was grounded.

In the paper that follows I will examine such points of rupture and contradiction in the autobiography of Pilar Primo de Rivera, Jefe Nacional of the Feminine Section of the Spanish Falange. By locating the differing discourses of identity with which Primo de Rivera engaged, and by finding out how exactly the category of gender operated in each of them, I will try to understand the nature of such ruptures, as well as the relation between the author's self-perceptions and her techniques of self-representation.

### **Introduction**

My first encounter with the autobiography of Pilar Primo de Rivera (1983), Jefe Nacional of the Sección Femenina de la FET (henceforth SF), took place almost three years ago, when I was starting to look into the way political and gendered self-perceptions of SF members were reflected in the rhetoric of the organization's national leadership. What I expected to be one of my most important sources turned out to be a most disappointing reading experience. The text, which was published in 1983, and which I expected to be a highly revealing hindsight account of the way Primo de Rivera saw herself, her life's work and those who either promoted or hindered that work, turned out to be something completely different. To me, the text's 346 pages seemed like one long apology for things done as well as possible, but never perfectly, and a eulogy for those no longer alive, most importantly her long dead brother José Antonio Primo de Rivera. It was filled with silences, discontinuities, and contradictions – the most important of these being that between the enormity of Primo de Rivera's 43-year project and her own self-perception.

---

\* *Inbal Ofer is a doctoral student of contemporary Spanish history in the School of History at Tel Aviv University, Israel. Both her MA dissertation and doctoral research deal with the national leadership of the Feminine Section of the Spanish Falange during the years of the Franco regime.*

Three years later, having finished my research into the SF's rhetoric, and having discovered the same ambivalence, silences, and contradictions in almost all the material I looked at, I returned to Primo de Rivera's autobiography. I discovered that the text's inability to provide me with substantially meaningful information was due to my own inability to read it properly.

As recent contributions to theories of literary criticism have demonstrated, types of autobiographical writings, with their emphasis on the writing subject and his / her experiences, have long held an attraction for women. Groundbreaking work conducted in the past 20 years in this field, and in the field of linguistics, have revealed both the richness of women's autobiographical production, and its distinctiveness.<sup>1</sup> These works have greatly advanced research by tracing apparently similar linguistic and literary phenomena in women's autobiographies (such as the lack of self-naming, uncertainties concerning the authority of both text and author, and problematic views of agency), which seemed to rupture the "traditional" genre of men's autobiographical writings. But at the same time they once again simplified the complex reality which lay behind such phenomena by attributing them mostly to the general condition of women's self-perception as subjects. Whether we choose to see these "ruptures" as unconsciously reflecting the authors' shaky self-perception as subjects or as conscious acts of resistance against a masculinist genre, we are nonetheless in danger of losing sight of the specific historical and cultural conditions in which each such process of self-representation is grounded. We also run the risk of forgetting that similarities in self-representation do not necessarily mean similarities in self-perception. What I would like to do in this paper is to look at such points of rupture and contradiction in Pilar Primo de Rivera's *Recuerdos de una vida*, still using gender as my central analytic category, but in a more historically and culturally specific manner. By doing so I hope to gain a better understanding not only of the way Primo de Rivera represented herself and her life, but also of the self-perceptions which underlined such representations.

I would like to suggest that Pilar Primo de Rivera, even though not familiar with the term "gender" as such, was aware of the difference between the sex one sees and the gender one is. As will be briefly shown below, Primo de Rivera was only too conscious of the fact that terms such as "femininity" and "masculinity" were, at least partially, socially constructed. With such awareness came the realization that there was more than just one, mutually accepted answer to questions concerning the essence of femininity and of what it meant to be a woman, and that the so-called "accepted" definitions did not fully represent the way she perceived herself. As I will show, Pilar Primo de Rivera and other high ranking Falangist members constructed a "discourse of femininity" in response, which differed from other available discourses in Franco's Spain, and which better fitted the way they viewed themselves and their lives. But in the case of Primo de Rivera (as probably in the case of others as well), such changes in the definition of femininity often came into direct conflict with other discourses about "truth" and "identity" which she was not willing to undermine completely. Such unwillingness should be read, of course, in the light of both the manner in which those discourses defined other elements

---

<sup>1</sup> See for example Kosta (1994); Cosslett/Lury/Summerfield (2000).

of her self-perception (political, religious, cultural), and of the way participating in them provided her with a position of power vis-à-vis others (other women, men of differing political or social affiliation etc). Looked at in this way, points of rupture and contradiction in the autobiographical text come to signify the junctions where Primo de Rivera, who knew and recognized herself to some degree through her culture's gender codes, critiqued precisely those same codes and their implications.

### **The Feminine Section of the Spanish Falange and its “Discourse of Femininity”**

No analysis of Pilar Primo de Rivera's autobiography could be complete without providing at least some background information concerning the SF's position in relation to the Spanish Falange, and outlining the way the organization viewed its members and their appropriate place within Francisco Franco's “New Spain”. The Spanish Falange was established in Madrid in November 1933 by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, son of the former Spanish dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera. The movement was founded in an attempt to offer new solutions to the severe social and political problems which assailed Spanish society throughout the years of the Second Republic (1931-1936), and to the perceived inability of the conservative right to effectively face the growing threat to Spain's religious and territorial unity.<sup>2</sup> The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War turned the Falange from a small and relatively insignificant political movement into a central pillar of the emerging Franco regime. The Sección Femenina of the Falange was founded in June 1934, and existed for 43 years under the leadership of Pilar Primo de Rivera (sister of José Antonio), reaching at its height a membership of over 600,000.<sup>3</sup>

From the moment of its establishment, the activities assigned to SF members were based on a highly conservative understanding of the appropriate division of gender roles. Yet already during the last months of the Second Republic a certain shift could be sensed in that respect. Members of the Falange's national leadership found themselves relying more and more on the assistance of sección feministas in carrying communications and weapons into and within Spain. During the civil war itself the activities of the SF evolved so as to include an independent propaganda apparatus: regiments of nurses, who operated alongside military doctors and independently of them, and the Auxilio Azul, a clandestine organization which smuggled Falangists and churchmen from the republican zone into nationalist territory. The SF, which, from April 1937 was supposed to function as the sole secular organization for women in nationalist Spain, managed throughout its 43 years of existence to seize control over large sectors in which women operated, and monopolize, amongst others, the Spanish Syndicate for (female) University Students (SEU); the teachers and nurses' syndicates; and the Social Service for Women (Servicio Social).

But the growing discontinuity between the style and contents of the activism required of high ranking SF members, and the way they were viewed by the highly conserva-

---

<sup>2</sup> For Works on the Spanish Falange, see Pecharromás (1997); Ellwod (1984); Payne (1997).

<sup>3</sup> For general works on the SF, see Gallego Méndez (1983); Sánchez López (1990); Suárez Fernández (1992).

tive and chauvinist society in which they operated, made them acutely aware of the distinction between the purely biological and the socially constructed elements of their experience as women. Such awareness propelled women like Pilar Primo de Rivera to try and formulate (consciously or not) a “discourse of femininity”, which would attempt to bridge, at least to some degree, the growing gap between the way they perceived themselves and were perceived by others (be it by other nationalist women, the Spanish Catholic church or men of differing political affiliations). This discourse was developed and solidified politically and culturally through its use of a series of historical and contemporary female models acceptable to the Franco regime. The feminine identity whose appropriation such a discourse encouraged was based on biological differentiation, which in the day-to-day reality of Spanish society necessarily dictated a certain degree of inferiority. However, one must not therefore conclude that the perception of women as inferior was in itself an integral part of the SF’s rhetoric. The organization’s gender-related discourse divided the world and its characteristics into three categories: feminine, masculine and universal. But in a move which completely exceeded traditional views of femininity, it re-defined the borders between the feminine and masculine. And it was this new definition which enabled the feminine to embody a measure of real strength, by recognizing women to be intelligent, active, and courageous by reason of their humanity. The recognition that an identity is also gender-related and therefore based on social and cultural attributes which could be changed and worked around in different ways, was what enabled SF members to sever the biological from the social and adopt so-called virile attributes (such as intelligence, forcefulness, tenacity, heroism and so forth) without “losing” their femininity. As I have argued elsewhere, the fact that women like Primo de Rivera chose to appropriate such characteristics in conjunction with other, more pronouncedly feminine attributes (such as being affectionate, compassionate, self-sacrificing etc), points to the fact that they were being appropriated not due to their “virile” nature, but rather because they were considered to be free of gender connotations, in which case their exhibition could not possibly undermine one’s femininity (Ofer 2002). Obviously, members of the SF’s leadership, by nature of their upbringing and political and social background, had to be extremely careful in challenging the “manliness” of such characteristics, but by legitimizing their everyday public exhibition by women this is in effect what they did.

### **Woman and Text – Fragmented Life, Fragmented Writing**

When turning from the more general history of the SF to Primo de Rivera’s text, one is struck first and foremost by the manner in which that history takes almost a life of itself within the autobiographical narrative. Out of the 30 chapters making up the book only the first 12 follow the chronological order of Primo de Rivera’s life. The other 18 are divided thematically according to the SF’s fields of action, with the last two centering on the final days of the Franco regime. Like Primo de Rivera herself, I wish my analysis to follow a thematic rather than a chronological order, and in order to do that I would like to take my first cue from the text’s starting point. More than any others, the opening paragraphs of the autobiography provide us with important clues, not only to the timing and reasons behind the writing process, but also to some of its major themes.

Published in November 1983, Primo de Rivera's autobiography was written in the final stages of the Spanish "transición". The transition to democracy looms large throughout the text, if for no other reason than for the mere fact that the dismantling of the SF on 1 April 1977 terminated Primo de Rivera's political career and brought about the writing of the text itself. Yet the term "transition" is never mentioned in the first chapter, which is entitled "By Way of Presentation". When explaining her reasons for writing, Pilar Primo de Rivera simply stated:

I am writing this book because I do believe that, having lived through much, I must leave a testimony of the efforts of three generations to serve Spain. This should not be done in a passionate, personal manner, but rather with the understanding that it was simply life itself, which put me, since my infancy, in the privileged position of a witness. [...] I will only explore here those events which I lived through directly. I will not narrate those events which I did not experience directly, since I cannot provide an accurate and authentic account of those, but more importantly, because I will only be repeating what others have already written, and with less accuracy at that (Primo de Rivera 1983: 10-11).

Central to these paragraphs are several points. The first is concerned with the life whose story is being told, and in this regard the reference to "three generations" is not accidental, and surfaces again in the final pages of the text. When describing the ceremony during which the SF was disbanded in April 1977, Primo de Rivera wrote in pained amazement:

[Alfonso Osorio] then turned to me and said – thank you Pilar, nothing less and nothing more. [...] How can you liquidate forty years of service with 'thank you Pilar'? How can you dismiss like that the life's project of three generations? (Primo de Rivera 1983: 332-333).

The "three generations" are, of course, not generations in the temporal sense but rather refer to Miguel Primo de Rivera (1870-1930), the former Spanish dictator, and José Antonio Primo de Rivera (1903-1936), founder of the Falange – Primo de Rivera's father and elder brother. In the text, the frequent reference to those "three generations" has a clear function. Through such a reference Pilar situated herself squarely within a defined political tradition. Despite their clear differences, there were also many points of similarity and continuity between the rather disordered legacy of "Primoverism", handed to Spanish society by Miguel Primo de Rivera, and José Antonio's Falangist doctrine. Pilar Primo de Rivera was forever aware of her double role as a symbol and protector of those two legacies, but also of the added authority they provided her with, an authority which could not be underestimated in the highly conservative and chauvinist society in which she operated.

Another point has to do with the manner in which Pilar Primo de Rivera viewed both her life and the way it should be narrated. The non-personal and duty-bound manner of those sentences in which she refers to herself is a striking and constant element of her writing. Such a style of self-representation has several explanations in my view. The first of these is a general form of expression adopted by Primo de Rivera and other *sección femenistas*. By severing style from essence, transferring the agency from themselves to others or to their environment and by downplaying their actions, those women achieved a high level of independent action in a society where they would otherwise

have been severely censored. One must not forget that the general preference of Falangism for collective action and values, and the valorization of the group over the individual, also caused many Falangist men to frame their goals and aims in a non-personal and duty-bound manner. Yet in the case of the women, this was often more than a mere form of expression – this was quite simply the strategy which enabled them to carry on their work. The fact that this was not necessarily a conscious strategy did not change the fact that it greatly affected the way most SF members presented themselves and their actions.

The extent to which such a strategy spilled over to private, non-official writings depended on the author's personality of course; yet after more than 40 years in the public eye one must wonder to what degree such forms of expression also *became* an integral part of the way sección feministas perceived themselves. This is especially relevant in the case of Primo de Rivera, who, unlike many others, continued to publicly endorse Falangism up to her death in 1991. She did not feel the need to apologize for her life's project, yet neither was she able to claim the agency which was rightfully hers. Her description of two events in particular point to this possible blurring between strategy and self-perception. The formation of the SF was doubtless the most prominent event in Primo de Rivera's life, yet in the paragraph in which she describes it she is completely absent:

The severe persecution which the Falange suffered at the hands of the political parties, and the government itself [...], was what finally brought about the formation of the SF [...] It was created in order to care for the prisoners, their families, and the families of the fallen. [...] Sometime later Quesada and Perez Sopeña of the S.E.U, of which we were all affiliates, met in order to name the leadership of the SF [...] Jefe Nacional: Pilar Primo de Rivera (Primo de Rivera 1983: 65).

An uninformed reader coming across this passage would never have guessed, of course, that by that time Primo de Rivera had been involved with the activities of the Falange for over 10 months and it was to a large degree through her insistence that the SF was formed as a separate entity.

The publication of the Decree of Unification, which in April 1937 forced all political bodies within nationalist Spain into what was to be known as the Falange Española Tradicionalista (FET) and the Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista (JONS), was also no doubt a decisive moment in Primo de Rivera's life. Contemporaries such as Ramon Serrano Suñer, Dionisio Ridruejo, and others, have all mentioned that in the first hours before accepting the reality of unification the focal point of Falangist resistance was to be found around the one member of the Primo de Rivera family who was free and active within the nationalist zone – Pilar. Serrano Suñer figuratively described her in those hours as a “high priestess offering tribute to the sacred memory of her brother” (Serrano Suñer 1977: 42). Yet in her autobiography Primo de Rivera refused the leading role attributed to her by others:

Marichu and myself hurried to Salamanca, finding the town in uproar due to the [unification], we decided to join the opposition as well. The [house] on Plaza San Julián turned into a focal point of rebellion, a place where all those non-conformers hurried to (Primo de Rivera 1983: 110).

By using verbs in the plural form and all but transferring agency to the house itself, she once again faded herself into the background. When trying to decide just how much of this refusal to attribute agency to herself is merely a result of a Falangist style of expression, other autobiographies –those of Falangist men and women– become a useful point of comparison. And it is when reading other men writing about their lives, during roughly the same years, that one becomes aware that the Falangist style did not affect everyone equally. We must, of course, make allowances for the opinion that certain people are simply more secure and out-spoken than others, regardless of their gender, and would more easily situate themselves at the center of their own text. Yet the fact that this happens more often in autobiographical texts written by Falangist men suggest that Falangist women were more constrained by the dictates of that non-personal and duty-bound style.<sup>4</sup>

As can be seen throughout her 43 years of public service, Pilar Primo de Rivera was a woman who defined herself first and foremost through her political affiliation. But being a woman and a leader of a nationwide women's organization, and living in a society which adhered to strict cultural and sexual divisions, she inevitably perceived herself through gendered perspectives as well. What I would like to do now is explore the way Pilar Primo de Rivera chose to represent herself as both a woman and a Falangist. While doing that I will try to look at the way self-representation both reflects and affects self-perception and vice versa.

From a political perspective, the first chapters of the autobiography, which do not relate directly to Primo de Rivera's experiences within the Falange, but rather to events such as the disaster of 1898, the war in Morocco, and the years of her father's dictatorship, provide us with as much information concerning her views and identifications as a Falangist as those preceding them. In a paragraph describing the years following the loss of Spain's last colonies, Primo de Rivera created a clear affiliation between the workers and the military, who, according to her, suffered the most as a result of the events of 1898 and the war in Morocco, while describing the life of both the higher and middle classes as "easy and amiable". In another place she repeated the popular Falangist distinction between the Socialists who "as time went by fought with more and more vigor for the just rights of the workers" and the Anarchists who "promoted conflicts and assassinated members of the Royal family" (Primo de Rivera 1983: 15). Expressing contempt for conservatism and a direct sympathy for the socialist cause was, of course, far easier when referring to the 1909 events of the "semana trágica" than to the days of the Civil War or the Franco regime. But even when referring to events of the 1940s and 50s Primo de Rivera never stopped making the point that:

For us, the enemy is not only those whom we fight with a weapon in our hands, but also and maybe foremost those who wish to take advantage of the blood of our dead in order to promote situations of which they would not have approved. [...] After 15 years we find ourselves still debating false interpretation of what is the Falange, and what is worse, we mix and mingle with those who do not have sufficient mental clarity in order to understand us (187).

---

<sup>4</sup> For autobiographies written by Falangist men during the same years, see, for example, the memories of José Luis Arrese (1982), former secretary general of the Falange. For an analysis of the autobiographical writings of Mercedes Formica, a lawyer and high-ranking SF member, see Legott (2001).

Another important aspect of her self-perception, to which Primo de Rivera often alluded, has to do with religion. The position of Falangist doctrine concerning religion was rather vague. Most Falangists, especially the women, declared themselves to be devout Catholics. Yet in his writings José Antonio made several references to the distinction between Catholicism and clericalism, from which one can understand that he viewed the behavior of many clerics as problematic and responsible for the alienation of the lower classes. In the light of that, the mentions Pilar Primo de Rivera did make of religion in her autobiography are meaningful. In a chapter describing the choice of friar Justo Pérez de Urbal as the spiritual guide and confessor of the SF, for example, she wrote:

Thanks to him, and through devoted yet limited acts and gatherings, we all entered a world which brought us closer to God. [...] It was he who introduced us to the use of the missal, almost unknown then [in Spain] (134).

And in another place:

Our religious formation followed the norms expressed in the II Concilium of the Vatican, and was always oriented towards the liturgies [...] from the start it was of a voluntary nature, except for mass on Sundays (159).

The use of the missal, which of course meant conducting or at least following the service in Spanish, and the insistence that mass should be optional except on Sundays, coupled with the organization's position on issues such as physical education for girls, higher education for women etc. all led to rather tense relations with the Catholic hierarchy. Only too aware of that, Primo de Rivera wrote when commenting on a trip to Rome in which she met with the Pope, Pius XII:

I gave the Pope copies of all our norms of formation, so that he could know for sure what it is that we were doing in Spain, since there were those who actually recoiled from the way we proceeded. [...] After a while the Pope asked me if we were following through with these norms and if I myself was still heading the SF, all of which led me to believe that these (the norms) were not repulsive to him (211).

These quotations point only tentatively to the extremely conflictive nature of relations between the SF and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church.<sup>5</sup> Adopting very much the same style she used in her official correspondence as Jefe Nacional, Primo de Rivera did not directly criticize the church's position even at the time of her writing in 1983 – by presenting the opposing position of the SF as the natural option, she went as far as she ever would in declaring the Spanish hierarchy wrong. I feel that such vacillation must be seen in the light of two important facts: the Franco regime's ideas concerning the essence of "true" Spanishness and of Spain's national destiny rested on the discourse of Natio-

<sup>5</sup> For more information on the conflicting positions of the SF and the Catholic hierarchy concerning the legal and social position of women in Franco's Spain, see Alcalde (1996: 65-84).



nal-Catholicism, which drew alternately (if not equally) on the discourses of the Spanish Catholic Church and of the Falange concerning such issues. As a high-ranking functionary of the regime, and a Falangist, Pilar Primo de Rivera solidified her political and bureaucratic position through simultaneously adhering to certain elements of the Church's discourse on "identity", and rejecting others. Such vaguely formulated issues as Spain's national destiny, the need for territorial and religious unity, and the avoidance of class conflict generated less conflict between the SF and the Church. More specific concerns, such as the precise ways to avoid class conflict and the exact shape that the division of gender roles and hierarchies should take, were more problematic, and caused much friction between the two organizations. By adhering to the former elements Primo de Rivera actively endorsed some of the political "themes" of which she became aware in her familial context. She also positioned herself within the regime's sphere of influence and in a position of power vis-à-vis other non-conformant Spaniards. By rejecting, at the same time, the undue influence of the clerics on Spanish society and insisting on the "Spanishness" of ex-republican men and women despite their non-conformity, she identified herself as an "authentic Falangist" within the almost endless political spectrum of National Catholicism. Such a need to self-position did not necessarily grow weaker with the dismantling of the Falange and the SF, and the transition to democracy.

When we proceed to analyze the way Pilar Primo de Rivera represented the conflict between the SF and the Catholic Church concerning issues of gender roles and hierarchies, there is another fact to be taken into account. If in her misgivings concerning the Church's position on religion and class Pilar Primo de Rivera was firmly backed up by the Falangist discourse on such matters, she was on far shakier ground when confronting gender related issues. Her self-perception as an independent, intelligent, and politically active woman, the SF's attempt to foster similar perceptions in its members, and the manner in which the organization fashioned a somewhat more open and positive way for young Falangist girls and women to view their bodies through the implementation of physical education for girls and competitive sports for women – all of these were not elements of the official Falangist discourse on women and femininity. It would be more than reasonable to assume that many Falangists felt the SF's stand on such matters to be undermining their own public position and self-perceptions as men. Pilar Primo de Rivera, aware of the fact that she had no officially accepted discourse on whose support she could draw here, was trapped within a contradiction which went far beyond representational techniques. Her contradictory and ambivalent style of writing was a mere allusion to the discourses and counter discourses which fashioned her position and self-perceptions as a Falangist, a Catholic and a woman.

When moving from the strictly political aspects of Primo de Rivera's autobiography to the text's gender related dimensions one is faced with even more problems. If one wishes to gain a perspective on the way Pilar Primo de Rivera perceived herself as a woman, the best way of doing that would be to look at the way she viewed other meaningful female figures in her life, since she says very little directly about herself. Through the information she provided on the lives of both her mother and two aunts, one can glimpse something of what it must have meant to be a woman for her. Having lost their mother at a very young age, the Primo de Rivera children were raised by their aunts, the one being a widow and the other married without children. Although both of them lived with the memory of what they did not have (the one a husband and the other children) they carried

relatively independent and active lives, according to Pilar. As far as her mother is concerned, though, the most substantial reference is to her death, of which she wrote:

Hers was a Christian and heroic death, in keeping with the way she lived. She very possibly knew she was going to die if she gave birth to that baby, but she no doubt felt she was abiding by her duty as a married woman, and this is what her conscience as a Christian dictated that she do. [...] She would never have agreed to the legalization of abortions (Primo de Rivera 1983: 17).

As Aurora Morcillo rightly pointed out in her book *True Catholic Womanhood – Gender Ideology in Franco’s Spain*, some of the most powerful writings which influenced the construction of “femininity” in Franco’s Spain were the 16<sup>th</sup> century essay by Fray Luis de León *La perfecta casada* (1583), and Pope Pius IX’s encyclicals entitled *Divini Illius Magistri* and *Casti Connubii*, published in 1929 and 1930 respectively (Morcillo 2000: 40-42). Such writings reached a relatively wide public through their repeated publication and discussion in journals such as *Razón y Fe*, *Ecclesia* or *Senda* and no doubt influenced the way women perceived themselves and their lives, and were perceived by men. When using phrases such as “her duty as a married woman” and “her Christian conscience” in reference to her mother, Primo de Rivera must have been aware of the images she was evoking. Casilda Sáenz de Heredia was no doubt a shining example of the perfect married woman of which Luis de León had talked. In her death she embodied Pius IX’s words in *Casti Connubii* “Who will not admire extraordinarily, a mother who gives herself up to a certain death, with heroic strength, to preserve the life in her womb?” (Morcillo 2000: 42).

Pilar Primo de Rivera was aware that in the society in which she lived the only way to be both a good wife and a good Christian was to live the life her mother lived. But what if there was a way to avoid that life and still be considered a good Christian and a good Spaniard? What if she could find a way to fulfill her heroic duty without being married? In the process of over-reduction and simplification of canonical texts by the Franco regime it was all too easy to forget that Fray Luis de León had himself signaled a way out of the good wife, good Christian equation when he stated that for women, the excellence of virginity was greater than that of marriage. In that respect the life-style of a high-ranking SF member provided the perfect solution, binding the women who chose it to a service of a higher cause, and providing them with the perfect pretext for staying single – if the nuns Fray Luis de León had in mind when writing dedicated their lives to God, than SF members dedicated theirs to the Patria. And this exact notion received its official sanction in a decree published by Primo de Rivera herself in 1938 where she demanded that all SF members from the position of “jefe provincial” upwards be unmarried, since “the situation of a married woman with children and a husband to take care of [...] is different to that of a widow or a married woman without children, and completely different to that of a single woman, who is completely free” (Alcalde 1996: 58).

Surprisingly enough though, for sección feministas, being unmarried did not necessarily mean being single, and some high-ranking SF members, Pilar Primo de Rivera amongst them, had male companions throughout their lives. Primo de Rivera made only one mention of her male companion in her autobiography, and despite the fact that those brief words speak volumes, they can easily escape the eyes of a reader who does not know what to look for:

During those times in Burgos, we often used to go to the Hotel Condestable, to get some word on the [progression] of the war. And it was there that we met a group of sailors, an event that, for some of us, was of transcendental importance. Later on we all went our separate ways, but for me at least, that meeting constituted the most important event of my life (Primo de Rivera 1983: 134).

The sort of reading involved with such a paragraph corresponds to what D. Hymes calls, in her 1996 book *Ethnography, Linguistics, Narrative Inequality: Towards an Understanding of Voice*, “textual architecture” – the art of having to scrutinize an author’s use of language and try and read between her / his lines (Hymes 1996). Primo de Rivera said enough for those who are aware of her almost 40-year relationship with an obscure Spanish sailor to know that she did acknowledge it, but even in 1983 she was unable to directly talk of that “most important” event in her life. One can easily see how exposing such a relationship prior to 1975 would have cost her both her public image and political position, but the carefully guarded language she employed in her autobiography implies that there was also a different and higher price to such a revelation, a price she was not willing to pay, even after the regime’s collapse. By publicly going against Francoist gender codes she would have dislodged herself from other lifelong political and cultural affiliations to which she staunchly adhered. Being unable and unwilling to adopt some of the new affiliations offered to her by the transition to democracy she would have found herself in an impossibly isolated position, socially, politically and mentally.

### **Self-Perceptions – the Gendered versus the Political**

Now that I have briefly explored the way Pilar Primo de Rivera viewed herself and her life in the light of certain categories of affiliation and identification (such as those relating to gender, political and cultural positioning etc), I would like to look at the way these different identifications related to each other. I intend to do that, specifically, by analyzing the way she chose to represent her role in the promotion of both Falangist and gender related issues.

The close cooperation of the SF with the Franco regime and the latter’s constant attempts to silence and exclude women from political, legal and economic arenas, helped portray the organization itself, in the years following 1975, as one which to a large degree ignored the needs and issues concerning Spain’s female population as a simple vehicle through which the Franco regime intended to carry out its policy regarding that population. A more general analysis of the rhetoric of the SF’s national leadership also reveals more concern for political issues and the fact that to a large extent these women saw themselves first as Falangists and only then as women. Yet a comparative examination of the way Primo de Rivera represented her role in promoting both Falangist and gender related issues might question such straightforward interpretation. While there is ample mention throughout the autobiography of events of clear political orientation (such as those concerning the outbreak of the civil war, the decree of unification, José Antonio’s funeral and so forth), and despite the fact that Pilar Primo de Rivera played an active role in all these events, she chose to frame her activism in rather ambiguous terms.

It is almost as if she was trying to acknowledge her presence on the scene but deny her agency. She did so mainly by avoiding the use of the pronoun “I”, choosing instead plural forms, and when she could not do so, by applying to herself mostly passive verbs. The result of such language use is, of course, a sense that at times the figure most absent in the autobiography is the author herself. It is important to note, though, that on one or two occasions of a political nature Primo de Rivera did emerge differently in the text. The most prominent of those is when quoting a letter she sent in April 1946 to the head of the national radio, regarding a program commemorating the 1939 victory of the nationalist forces:

The above-mentioned broadcast, organized in commemoration of our victory, had falsely ignored the contribution of the Falange to the national movement. This could only have been done out of ill faith or total ignorance of the facts, and in either case this vouches very little for the competence of the radio’s directors. [...] In saying that I do not speak as the sister of José Antonio, *whom you did not mention even once*, but as a Falangist, whose comrades’ heroic participation in the war was forgotten by the directors of this radio (Primo de Rivera 1983: 292. Italics in the original text).

Since all other occasions where Primo de Rivera resorts to such forceful words are also ones in which she was called to defend the memory of her dead brother, José Antonio, I would speculate that it was deep emotion, and a deep awareness of being the “official” bearer of her brother’s memory, which caused her not only to stray from her usual style of expression at the time of the incidents, but also to include these divergences in style to the full in her autobiography.

When looking into those sections describing Primo de Rivera’s promotion of and activity on behalf of gender related issues, the result is pronouncedly different. Suddenly the person behind the writing comes to life – becoming active and purposeful. The most representative of such paragraphs is the one discussing the SF’s promotion of the Law of Political, Professional and Working Rights for Women, which was processed through the Cortes between 1961-1966 and of which Primo de Rivera wrote:

One of the most important successes of the SF was the formulation of the Law of Political, Professional and Working Rights for Women, which was processed through the Cortes in 1961 and defended by myself. [...] Some restrictions still remained concerning positions in the judicial system, but these too were eliminated by a second law, which I presented before the Cortes, and which was equally approved in 1966 (194-195).

The difference in writing style between those passages concerning Pilar Primo de Rivera’s activism on behalf of Falangist issues and those concerning women or gender related issues has in my opinion several explanations. The most obvious explanation that comes to mind has to do with the time in which the text was written. Having written her autobiography after the transition to democracy, it would have been more “politically correct” for Primo de Rivera to downplay her role as a Falangist and emphasize her contribution to the promotion of women’s issues. This would have been a sufficient explanation if not for the fact that in the years following the publication of the autobiography, and up until her death, she remained a staunch defender of Falangism and its goals and highly critical of Spanish democracy. Another, more plausible explanation is that despite

the manifested primacy of political over gender related issues in the rhetoric of the national leadership itself, women such as Primo de Rivera felt more at ease and secure when promoting gender issues than “purely” political ones. The linguistic insecurity manifested by Primo de Rivera when trading political issues is in itself not surprising if we take into account the precarious position of all women within the Francoist political system. What is surprising, if one takes into consideration the SF’s image as an organization, which did not work for the advancement and welfare of women, is the clearly positive and active attitude she adopted towards them. Situated, as she was in 1983, at a crossroads between changing “truths”, affiliations and perceptions of self and society, her former work on behalf of women’s issues did not conflict, as it did in the past, with other meaningful discourses in her life. The bureaucratic framework of the Franco regime was disbanded, and the regime’s former “families” were all in a process of deciding what new elements they would choose to reject or assimilate into their changing discourses of identity. Large sectors of the Spanish Church no longer adhered to the notion of “separate and only relatively equal” when it came to the female members of their congregations, and the Falange was fighting for the survival of some of its political and economic notions, through an integration into other bodies – an integration which in its turn necessitated adjusting its conceptions on gender codes and hierarchies. Hence, unlike the story of her personal relations as an unmarried woman, the story of Primo de Rivera’s activism on behalf of women and gender issues could have been told in 1983 without greatly disturbing other elements central to the way she perceived herself and her life.

But it is nonetheless important to remember that behind Pilar Primo de Rivera’s positive representation of such activism lies a reality which was far more conflictive. Highly aware of the way her actions were viewed at the time, she wrote in another place in the autobiography:

All those things which the war gave rise to such as physical education, certain social reforms, a more open, yet strictly correct way of life, were being eliminated with postures of shortsightedness, which we fought at a great cost (Primo de Rivera 1983: 223)

I feel that the “fight” and the “great cost” to which she referred were all part of Primo de Rivera’s life-long struggle (at times conscious and at times unconscious) to bridge the gap which I mentioned before. The SF’s discourse of femininity was an attempt to bridge the gap on a rhetorical level between the sex one was born into and the gender one constructed. That “more open way of life”, which women like Pilar Primo de Rivera lived and promoted, was an attempt to bridge that same gap on a practical, day-to-day level. It was not necessarily a conscious political and social bid for freedom –the result of a feminist perspective on equality of the sexes– but rather a more basic attempt at integrating differing, and at times conflicting, aspects of one’s self-perception.

## Conclusion

Like any other autobiographical text, Pilar Primo de Rivera’s *Memorias de una vida* should be seen in the light of the author’s attempt to reach “composure”. That is, to simultaneously create accounts of experiences and constitute oneself as the subject of

those experiences.<sup>6</sup> Such a process of reviewing one's life attempts to bring together the differing, and at times contradictory, discourses of identity on which one draws, and its final aim is to achieve both a coherent narrative and a version of the self with which the author can live in relative comfort. Looked at in this way an autobiographical text is a constant interplay between self-representation and self-perception – two processes which, as I previously indicated, are not necessarily a simple reflection of each other.

The fragmented style which marks Primo de Rivera's process of self-representation, should, in my opinion, be analyzed through the prism of gender. But using gender as our main analytic category should not mean simply attributing the text's fragmentation, and its breaking with other more traditional and masculinist styles of autobiographical writings, to some generalized self-perception of Primo de Rivera as a woman. If one wishes to come closer to capturing the complexity of a woman who stood out in every respect, one must look at each point of fragmentation as a point of departure from which questions should be formulated. One must locate the differing discourses of identity with which Primo de Rivera engaged at each stage, and by finding out how exactly the category of gender operated in each of them, try and understand the shape such engagement took (assimilation, rejection, partial acceptance, etc), and the consequences each choice held for the way she perceived herself and her life. I feel that only such a form of reading and analysis can evoke the perceptions of a Falangist fighting for an ideology which could never accept her and her followers as equals, and of a Catholic woman breaking many of the established gender codes of the society in which she lived. It is through tracing Pilar Primo de Rivera's differing affiliations, and the way she also transcended these, that we come to see the exact processes of self-perceptions underlining her techniques of self-representation.

## Bibliography

- Alcalde, Carmen (1996): *Mujeres en el Franquismo – Exiliadas, nacionalistas y opositoras*. Barcelona: Flor del Viento.
- Arrese, José Luis (1982): *Una etapa constituyente*. Barcelona: Planeta.
- Cosslett, Tess/Lury, Celia/Summerfield, Penny (eds.) (2000): *Feminism and Autobiography – Text, Theories and Methods*. London: Routledge.
- Ellwod, Sheelagh (1984): *Prietas las Filas – La Historia de Falange Española 1933-1983*. Barcelona: Crítica.
- Gallego Méndez, María Teresa (1983): *Mujer, Falange y Franquismo*. Madrid: Taurus.
- Hymes, Dell (1996): *Ethnography, Linguistics, Narrative Inequality: Towards an Understanding of Voice*. London: Tylor & Francis.
- Kosta, Barbara (1994): *Recasting Women's Autobiographies – Women's Counterfictions in Contemporary German Literature and Film*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Legott, Sarah (2001): *History and Autobiography in Contemporary Spanish Women's Writings*. Lewiston: Emeller Press.
- Morcillo, Aurora (2000): *True Catholic Womanhood – Gender Ideology in Franco's Spain*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion on the meanings and use of the term "composure" in analysis of autobiographical texts and in oral history, see Summerfield (1998: 16-23).

- Ofer, Inbal (2002): *A "New Woman" for a "New Spain" – The Feminine Section of the Spanish Falange and the Construction of a New Feminine Identity*. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University (MA dissertation).
- Payne, Stanley (1997): *Fascism in Spain 1923-1977*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Pecharromán, José Gill (1997): *José Antonio Primo de Rivera – Retrato de un Visionario*. Madrid: Ediciones Temas de Hoy.
- Primo de Rivera, Pilar (1983): *Recuerdos de una vida*. Madrid: Ediciones Dyrsa.
- Sánchez López, Rosario (1990): *Mujer Española: una sombra de destino en lo universal*. Murcia: Universidad de Murcia.
- Serrano Suñer, Ramón (1977): *Entre el silencio y la propaganda, la historia como fue – memorias*. Barcelona: Editorial Planeta.
- Suárez Fernández, Luis (1992): *Crónica de la Sección Femenina y su tiempo 1934-1977*. Madrid: Asociación "Nueva Andadura".
- Summerfield, Penny (1998): *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.