

«THE POWER OF MOTHERHOOD [...], FREE OF OBSTACLES, WILL AMPLY FULFIL ITS ETERNAL MISSION». ¹ FEMINISM AND MOTHERHOOD IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY SPAIN

«LA FUERZA MATERNAL [...], LIBRE DE TRABAS, PODRÁ CUMPLIR CON AMPLITUD SU ETERNA MISIÓN». FEMINISMO Y MATERNIDAD A COMIENZOS DEL SIGLO XX EN ESPAÑA

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Abstract

Historical analysis carried out on feminism in early 20th-century Spain has emphasised its social nature. Similar to other feminisms of the time in Southern and Central Europe, Spanish feminism advocated women's social rights (education, equal pay, workers' protection) over suffrage, at least until the First World War. This article aims to contribute to the debate on social feminism from a notion of *the social* as the epistemological frame pervaded by social hygiene and social medicine, in which historical feminism and its demands could conform and deploy. With this analytical horizon in mind, the specific meaning with which motherhood was endowed at the

1. (Galindo, 1917, p. 2). Own translation. All primary source quotes have been translated by the author. This article has been written thanks to the Grant PGC2018-097232-B-C22 funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and by "ERDF A way of making Europe".

beginning of the 20th century is explored, not only as one of the core values of womanhood as understood by feminists but also as a nuclear argument articulating their demands for civil, social and political rights. In order to offer a contextualised depiction and hopefully a more accurate explanation of *social* feminism, different feminist voices will be heard through their writings, press articles and conferences. The major conclusions of this analysis points to the active role of motherhood in fashioning and presenting feminism as a social and national movement for reform and regeneration through women–mothers. Motherhood orientated feminist action and objectives towards women and children’s well-being and healthcare, and it was used to legitimate and demand civil and political rights. But defining women’s interests, demanding social rights, as well as including mother and child protection in their programmes, were not a natural tendency of women or feminists, but the product of a complex historical construction in which the new rationality of the social, pervaded by gender differences, generated a new space for intervention from different knowledges and practices

Keywords: historical feminism; Spain; motherhood; the social; hygiene; social reform

Resumen

El análisis histórico sobre feminismo en España a comienzos del siglo XX ha puesto énfasis en su naturaleza social. Similar a otros feminismos del momento en el sur y el centro de Europa, el feminismo español defendió derechos sociales para las mujeres (educación, igualdad salarial, protección de las trabajadoras) antes que el sufragio, al menos hasta la Primera Guerra Mundial. Este artículo pretende contribuir al debate sobre el feminismo social desde una noción de *lo social* como un marco epistemológico impregnado por la medicina y la higiene social, en el cual el feminismo histórico y sus demandas pudieron configurarse y desplegarse. Con este horizonte teórico en mente, se explorará el significado histórico específico que se le confirió a la maternidad a comienzos del siglo XX, no solo como uno de los valores centrales de la feminidad, tal y como lo entendieron las feministas, sino también como un argumento nuclear que articuló sus demandas de derechos civiles, sociales y políticos. Las principales conclusiones de este análisis apuntan al papel activo de la maternidad en modelar y presentar el feminismo como un movimiento social y nacional para la reforma y la regeneración a través de las mujeres-madres. La maternidad guió la acción y los objetivos feministas dirigidos al bienestar y salud de mujeres y niños/as, y también sirvió para legitimar y pedir derechos civiles y políticos. Pero el hecho de definir los intereses de las mujeres, solicitar derechos civiles e incluir la protección de madres y niños en sus programas no fue resultado de una esencia feminista o femenina, sino el producto de una compleja construcción histórica en la que la nueva racionalidad de

lo social, imbuida de diferencias de género, hizo posible la emergencia de un nuevo espacio para la intervención desde diferentes conocimientos y prácticas.

Palabras clave: feminismo histórico; España, maternidad; *lo social*; higiene; reforma social

1. SOCIAL FEMINISM

This article examines motherhood as a changing discourse which shaped historical feminism and its claims in the specific context of early 20th-century Spain. Namely, I will explore how feminists understood motherhood throughout this period and how it functioned in their arguments about women's place in society, social reform, feminist *raison d'être*, vindications and women's rights. It should be noted that these understandings of motherhood and their place in feminist rhetoric, debates and practices were neither static nor natural, but the product of new discursive coordinates which enabled historical feminism to conform.

Consequently, my analysis aims to contribute to the understanding and explanation of historical feminism in early 20th-century Spain, drawing from the excellent work of scholars such as Mary Nash and Nerea Aresti. Since the publication in 1994 of Mary Nash's article on the subject, many contributions have underlined the vitality of feminist discussion in the early 20th century and the social nature of feminism in Spain (Aresti & Llonca, 2019, pp. 359–378). Following Karen Offen's proposal (1988; 2000) of considering Southern European feminisms as «relational feminism», Nash concluded that given the embeddedness of modern gender differences and the undermining of individual suffrage by a highly corrupt electoral system, Spanish feminism was more social, and feminists did not claim the vote until the First World War.

Moreover, historians have shown the centrality of motherhood in feminist claims for women's rights by different ideological strands (republicanism, socialism, Catholicism); it was also used as a mobilising resource until the Spanish Civil War (Aguado, 2010; Blasco, 2003; Moral, 2012; Ramos, 2019; Sanfeliú, 2008). Even anarchism, which challenged hegemonic pronatalist thought and defended women's rights over their bodies, and to sexual

and reproductive freedom, was embedded in the biological and moral regeneration of humanity that led them to assign women a reproductive role in social transformation and to underpin female nature as maternal (Andrés, 2020, p. 20). Discourse on women's social duties and rights rested on modern gender difference (the ontological existence of two completely different biological sexes in a complementary relationship) and reserved a central place for motherhood, which was at the very heart of feminist rhetoric of the time, also in Europe (Allen, 2005; Cova, 1997). As Miren Llona recently stated:

The reassertion of a positive female nature with particular qualities and reappraisal of motherhood assisted the emergence of a feminist movement that aimed to reform society, occupy the public sphere and gain political influence, though without attaining equality with men which entailed women integrating male features to their personality. (Llona, 2020, p. 25)²

That gender views around modern sexual difference were shared by every political culture from the Restoration to the Second Republic has been confirmed by Nerea Aresti in her assessment that from all of them emerged «the desire to renegotiate gender, an aspiration that might be described as feminist» (Aresti, 2015, p. 85). She also complicated the discussion on historical feminism by offering a discursive analysis of feminism, drawing from Michel Foucault's concept of «anchoring points for critique» and from Joan Scott's idea that feminists articulated (supported) their demands for equality on arguments based on gender difference (Aresti, 2015, pp. 86–87)³. As in other countries, feminists had «difficulty separating the demand for equality from the matter of the difference of sex» (Scott, 2018, pp. 107–108). Consequently, they could maintain that the mind has no sex, while defending matters relating to family, mothers, children and health as being specific female interests that should be represented nationally and on which they could speak and act because their experience as women qualified them to do

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2. Worthy of note are exceptions to these views during the 1920s and 30s, including those of the socialist María Cambrils and anarchists such as Lucía Sánchez Saornil. Carmen de Burgos also changed her opinion on the subject in 1926.
 3. As Scott put it: «feminists argued in the same breath for the irrelevance and the relevance of their sex, for the identity of all individuals and the difference of women. They refused to be women in the terms their society dictated, and at the same time they spoke in the name of those women» (1996, p. 11).

so. Some pushed the notion of male/female complementarity for the government, arguing that only women could bring balance, order and peace to the nation. Finally, Aresti has placed gender conceptualisation and models, and the emergence and development of feminism within the context of debate and controversy around the deployment of scientific knowledge, positivism and the displacement of religious views and explanations by the authoritative voice of medical profession (Aresti, 2001, pp. 17–65).

Although I agree with Nash, Llona, Aresti and others, I want to introduce a somewhat different approach. Besides validating the presence (and intertwined dynamic) of ideas on gender equality and difference (saturated by maternal traits) that articulate historical feminism in Spain, or describing feminists' involvement in social matters and social reform (women's education, mother and child care, and attention to the disadvantaged), I will explore why and how social feminism became possible. In my explanation, the rise of the social as a (gendered) domain is central to understanding the very conditions that enabled social feminism to emerge. In other words, social feminism was social because of the kind of demands it formulated and because it shaped, shared and fed a notion of society as a realm for intervention. Scholarship treats the social as a new knowledge domain consolidated during the second half of the 19th century as the result of a new set of rationalities (Cabrera Acosta, 2019; Cabrera Acosta & Santana, 2006; Donzelot, 1984; Poovey, 1994)⁴. Women became linked to the social domain, thereby affecting the way feminism was understood and how feminists formulated their claims for rights. For Denise Riley, the rise of the social offered a field for women's involvement between the public and private. It then opened the path to women's work helping other women (poor, working class and prostitutes), families and children (Riley, 1998, p. 108). In a similar vein as in other European countries, from 1900 to 1931, Spanish feminists of a different ideology accepted the importance of the social, as defined by reformers, though they approached its intervention and transformation in a variety

4. This approach to the social (nominal rather than adjectival) is rooted in Foucauldian thought. It was linked to nascent disciplines such as psychology, public health, criminology, social medicine and anthropology and boosted a new governmentality based on intervention pervading families, the workplace, prisons and schools, as well as new forms of self-governance and subjectivities.

of sometimes competing ways. Subsequently, they participated as writers, teachers, and labour and education inspectors in social reform debates and policy, understanding feminism, at least partly, as a way of reforming/regenerating society. They collaborated in defining the meaning of social reform and in implementing social policy. In the 1990s, the debate around «maternalist women» by historians exploring the origins of gendered welfare in Europe and the United States led Koven and Michel to conclude, with others, that «maternalist women put an unmistakable stamp on emerging welfare administration» (Koven & Michel, 1990, pp. 1107; Bock & Thane, 1991)⁵. Although equating feminism and maternalism would be simplifying for the time, it is undeniable that many Spanish feminists relied on maternalist views and advocated maternalist politics.

Moreover, probably since its origins the social had been understood *scientifically* and had been pervaded, in particular, by medical and biological but also demographic, health and hygienic discourses. The social as a domain of intervention met social medicine and hygiene, as well as an increasing nation–state pride to provide a particular response to the impact of urbanisation, industrialisation and the free market (Vázquez, 2009, pp. 201–222). For that reason, almost every discussion around the *social question* related not only to economic and workers' affairs but also to hygiene and health. More specifically, the dissemination of theories on physical and moral human decline, such as degeneration theories (Campos, 1998), concerns about high mother and child mortality rates, and other health/social/moral dangers/diseases such as alcoholism, syphilis and prostitution, placed women as mothers at the centre of reformist discourse and policy (Accampo, 1995, pp. 7–9; Labanyi, 2011, pp. 75–116). All of them provided a particular and

5. For a recent approach that invites a rethinking of maternalist politics, see Van der Klein, Plant, Sanders and Weintrob, 2012, pp. 1–21. Although it is an analytical concept (not used as such as historical subjects) and has been considered, following Jane Lewis, «a slippery concept» (1994, p. 120), Koven and Michel's definition is still used by historians: «Ideologies that exalted women's capacity to mother and applied to society as a whole the values they attached to that role: care, nurturance, and morality. Maternalism was the central and defining core of some women's vision of themselves and of politics» (1993, p. 4).

complex epistemological frame for reformulating the notion of motherhood and for the emergence of feminism itself.

Whereas social reform policy was infused by health and hygienic discourse, all policy was pervaded by modern notions of sexual difference, family, sexuality, class and morality. These notions were modified in the course of social reform implementation and debate, inasmuch as they all became public matters and the object of state legislation. Feminists complied with the context of the epistemological frameworks of social hygiene, eugenics and population concerns, the social question, the national crisis and health issues. They envisioned women and gender relations embedded in these imaginaries, along with their vindications. My contention is that outside this framework, feminism would have been something different to what it eventually became. The understanding of the social as a domain pervaded from the outset by the language of health and hygiene and fitted to the intervention of women, enabled and framed the articulation of feminist demands and the way they identified and were represented as feminists. This explains why discourse on social duties and rights was one of the principal grounds for demands for equality until the 1930s.

Following on from this rough summary of the broad theoretical coordinate outlining my analysis, I will disentangle the ways in which motherhood was defined, understood and changed, as well as how it worked in feminist writings and shaped feminisms from 1898 to 1931. Whereas medical and social reform, public hygiene and population debates framed feminist arguments and demands, feminists managed these references and contributed to formulating ideas on motherhood and social/hygiene reform, debates and practices. In the thirty years under scrutiny, I focus on two moments when feminist debate intensified: the *fin de siècle* crisis during which national identity was affected by the loss of the last overseas colonies and by criticism of the corrupt functioning of the liberal political system, leading to several national and social regeneration projects in which women became the subjects and objects of intervention; and the context of the First World War and its aftermath, the international background of the Restoration regime crisis and Primo de Rivera's dictatorship (1913–1931), during which regeneration projects had renewed visibility and feminist associations experienced a boost never before seen.

My analysis of feminist interventions (articles in the press, books and conferences) will examine three crucial ways in which motherhood featured in feminist writings, arguments and demands. All of them represented something new compared to the conception of motherhood held in the 19th century, although its roots in an enlightened liberal conception can be identified. First, although motherhood continued to be central to womanhood and women's experience, it was redefined and understood as a biological and social function of increasing national importance. Because of their capacity for mothering, women were designed as social regeneration subjects able to counteract the failure of men's management of the world. Moreover, the rhetoric and concern for hygiene in the face of increasing infant mortality and weakness underscored a reformulation of mothers as desirably aware, scientifically informed and medically advised. Lastly, motherhood became an argument through which to demand civil and political rights.

2. FEMINISM AS A SOCIAL REGENERATION MOVEMENT BY WOMEN AND MOTHERS

In Concepción Gimeno's eyes, because women and men were equal in intelligence and morality, both should have the same rights and duties. Gimeno asserted that «intelligence and heart have no sex, [...] rights and duties ought to be the same for everybody» (1908, p. 6). She understood that sexual difference in childhood was irrelevant and only increased from puberty due to the different ways of life led by men and women. Her assertion that the difference between men and women was not a meaningful argument for women's exclusion from rights and duties should be understood as a response to women's differences being judged as inferior, an evaluation already made through medical and scientific knowledge throughout the 20th century and which became radicalised with the spread of scientific positivism in the latter third of the century (Aresti, 2001, pp. 17–68).

These statements coexisted with claims for women's performance in a different role as educators of children given that «maternal love is more generous than all other love» or that «children need a mother's love» (Gimeno, 1900, p. 226). Because only mothers could inspire morality and virtue in children, children's education was seen as a mother's duty to society. Mothers

were especially suited, necessary and responsible for the moral standards of the future of the nation. In a sort of continuity with the old, enlightened discourse, Gimeno demanded instruction for women to become better mothers.⁶ Concepción Arenal had already defended women's education so that society would benefit from the motherly qualities attributed to women based on a binary gender scheme and governed by the complementarity of functions (Arenal, 1892/2009; Aresti, 2010). Krausism, which influenced Arenal's ideas (for several years, she was the only author of the *Boletín de la ILE* (Journal of the Free Institution of Education), also managed and spread the same notions of gender differences that paved the way for the defence of women's education and the performance of differentiated social functions.

The novelty at the turn of the century was linked to the social regeneration and patriotic enhancement women as a group could accomplish as a result of their supposed natural condition as mothers and teachers. In Gimeno's appeal for social regeneration, a gendered evaluation of the past, a diagnosis of the present and a vision of the future led to the opening up of a space for women's action. For her, the world was divided into two sexes, and social life («civilisation») needed, and was the responsibility of, both of them. But she considered that because past male action had failed and had been wasted, women's yet unpolluted skills, energies and virtues were essential for social regeneration. In her view, society «needs lively, healthy forces and men's are worn down: a woman's spirit is young because it has not been burdened by the weight of past civilisations [...] and it is not eroded by scepticism» (Gimeno, 1908, p. 27).

The main obstacle for harnessing these unwasted energies was the loss of the current female contribution because womanhood was superficial, unenlightened and obedient, and therefore socially unaware. Her call for «teaming women up for national life» derived from this deeply gendered analysis (Gimeno, 1903, p. 35). Society became an entity imagined by feminists like Gimeno as a space for regeneration by women. First, they would educate children at home before becoming involved in social action and in what came to be known as women's interests and needs. In fact, the presentation

6. As Accampo suggests, following Joan Landes' exploration of republican motherhood and its legacy to politicians of the Third Republic in France (1995, pp. 12–13).

of society as the domain for women’s action both inside and outside the home was underpinned as a result of the national crisis unleashed by the loss of the last overseas colonies in 1898 (Blasco, 2017, pp. 106–109; 2018, pp. 109–110). Her reference to the «last disaster» was suffused with mentions of «irreparable decline» or «deterioration of race» (Gimeno, 1908, p. 11), which could be explained by the impact of social Darwinism and degeneration theories in Spain (Campos, 1998). This analysis also spread a view of society as an organism (organicism) that required (gendered) attention and care (Accampo, 1995). In the process of locating women (always regarded as potential mothers) in a social field of intervention and responsibility, motherhood was reformulated. Gimeno described the task as multidimensional, involving interwoven physical, moral and intellectual qualities, which could only be carried out by women/mothers.

Therefore, taking care of different aspects of the social realm considered as social problems motivated (middle-class) women to invest their unwasted energy and motherly sensitivities in social reform. For Gimeno, modern woman (implicitly and initially middle class and educated) was an apostle reborn. She was inspired by redeeming ideas, the driving force behind institutions for humanity and a moraliser of individuals through anti-alcohol and temperance campaigns, anti-pornography and anti-prostitution initiatives, and protests against duels and the war, reminiscent of 19th-century women’s movement in other countries, such as the UK or the USA, which Gimeno knew and followed. Modern woman should base her generous moral action on the study of the needs of women workers and the injustices of which they were victims (Gimeno, 1908, p. 8). Feminist social reform discourse retained a strong moral (and individualistic) component as part of the diagnosis and resolution of social problems. But attention to women workers helped shape a group whose special and diverse needs and interests (deriving from their potential maternity) would receive the attention of female social reformers.

In a similar vein, Carmen de Burgos was concerned about protecting women workers as mothers. In *La mujer en España* (1906), she opposed women’s work in an ideal world in which women/mothers stayed at home. She believed that a married woman’s work should always be to help the family and not be detrimental to her duties as a mother (Burgos, 1906, p. 21). But, because the employment of women was inevitable, she called for

laws to protect working mothers, especially unmarried mothers (given the high rate of infant mortality of illegitimate children and infanticides), and paternity investigation. Her concerns about women’s welfare filtered through this vision of the sexual division of labour led her to investigate and suggest, following other countries’ legislation, maternity leave for women workers. In *Misión social de la mujer*, the publication of a conference given by De Burgos in Bilbao in 1910, she stated that the «well-being and education of a woman [...] is the best factor for enhancement», because when «educated, we will be able to fight against tuberculosis and alcoholism. The patient task of every mother will shape the spirit of future generations» (Burgos, 1910, p. 7). Like Gimeno, De Burgos conflated women and mothers, their task being educating children and solving social problems as part of their womanly and motherly qualities⁷.

These arguments were still in place in 1914, during discussions at the Athenaeum of Madrid (Ateneo de Madrid, an important cultural institution of the time) around the «feminist problem»⁸. Recognising the value of women in the social order, that is, their involvement in the same way as men in every aspect of life, was what Julia Peguero, one of the founders of the Spanish Women’s Association (*Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Españolas*—ANME, 1918), understood as feminism⁹. Women were considered equal to men (if they received a proper education, they would have the same understanding) and should fight against inferiority, but without losing their delicate nature in the process. In fact, the difference stemmed from their «exquisite sensitivity», the source of their contribution to a better society, and to the

7. At that time De Burgos rejected «feminism which tends to make a woman masculine», and her defence of equality was under the condition of not diminishing womanhood or fighting for freedom, dignification of «our sex», a feminism compatible with household duties. But by 1927 she had become critical, heaping praise on the motherly role which she now viewed as a mechanism «to encourage women, by piquing their vanity, not to refuse to perpetuate the species» (Burgos, 1927/2007, p. 219).

8. For women’s involvement at the Ateneo of Madrid, see Ezama, 2018.

9. By 1920, ANME was composed of a president: María Espinosa de los Monteros; vice-president: Dolores Velasco de Alamán; general secretary: Julia Peguero de Trallero; vice-secretary: Luisa Salina de Gorostidi; treasurer: Ana Picar; book-keeper: Benita Asas Manterola; and board members: María Valero de Mazas, Isabel Oyarzábal de Palencia, María Martos de Baeza, Pilar Gutiérrez, Julia Pérez Baza, Natividad Albertos, Emilia Pastor and Isabel Alda.

refinement and improvement of humanity (Peguero, 1914, p. 5). Reproducing the conference given by Julia Peguero, then secretary of ANME, the press underlined her belief in an «enlightened woman». A woman who could be expected to support social regeneration, by exerting a direct and positive influence on humanity, previously not possible because of her state of submission and general ignorance. The influence of women who lacked culture and freedom was sterile and harmful (La mujer en el Ateneo, 1922, p. 2). Society and the family were envisioned as connected spaces for feminist intervention. In fact, Peguero understood feminism not as the cause of the crisis of the family or household (the result of immorality and egoism), but as a mechanism for regeneration:

A natural manager and mother, the woman will bring practical rules to public life through her involvement in state matters, by breaking with old norms and procedures, and transforming official life in the simplest and most rational way. Her energy, equal to a man's, will bring society the well-being in which it is of such need (La mujer en el Ateneo, 1922, p. 2).

ANME's programme reveals how various discourses were combined to model a specific notion of women's' interests. Claims for civil and political rights to overcome inferiority and exclusion cohabited with the drive to contribute as mothers. Once those rights were given, that drive was directed at keeping the peace and, through education (also as mothers), at moralising a disorientated society. An expression of this was the three-fold definition of feminism provided by the organisation (it was then important for them to establish a concrete definition): redemption from inferiority established by law and customs; the perfection of society; and the elevation of humanity. It was hoped that the political and social intervention of women, given that the moral education of children was in their hands, would lead to laws that would moralise men (Espinosa, 1920, p. 10). Subsequent analysis will examine how rights were claimed in order to put an end to inferiority and to enable women to better accomplish their role as mothers.

The socialist Margarita Nelken, who was very critical of conventional morality infused by religious values, shared with *neutral* feminists the idea that women should devote themselves to solving (or alleviating) women's social problems, including childcare, women workers' protection, maternity care and the abolition of prostitution. Her difference with them rested upon

her emphasis on the inadequate and insufficient training for public, social and political activities of women and her critical stance on a charity informed by Catholicism, which lacked *social sense* and featured condescending paternalism. Her proposal was to organise labour in order to provide freedom for women. As we will see, social sense and responsibility were central to her understanding of women as political subjects and for legitimating political rights. They implied an awareness of the social situation, (technical) knowledge and responsibility, the same qualities required for being a proper rather than a thoughtless mother, as we will see later.

3. CONSCIOUS MOTHERHOOD AND CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Social reform and health issues (embedded in a discourse on hygiene) increasingly infused feminist rhetoric, thereby affecting women's understanding of motherhood. They were not immune to a context where, as Mary Nash showed, «doctors intervened significantly in the dissemination of a modernised gender discourse based on the reconceptualisation of motherhood as women's social duty» (Nash, 1999, p. 33). One of the major concerns of doctors, social reformers and also feminists (influenced by studies on population and the spread of statistical techniques and quantitative data as representative of scientific and objective truths) was infant mortality rates. Infant mortality was approached through the lens of national backwardness and slow progress, which led to the conclusion that in Spain it was higher than in other civilised countries. Whereas in France emphasis was placed on decreasing fertility rates invoking the ghost of depopulation and national decline, in Spain fertility rates were not of special concern until the expansion of neo-Malthusianism (equated to birth control), which was considered to have triggered the fall in birth rates in the 1920s (Offen, 1984).

Increasing concerns about infant mortality and the urgent need for medical guidance to confront it led Gimeno to reformulate motherhood by validating doctors' diagnoses on the causes of infant mortality and training mothers in health knowledge and practices. Notions of health, guided by doctors, were recommended for mothers to improve their maternal skills:

In order to apply the triple aspects of maternity—physical, moral and intellectual—woman should be enlightened; she shapes the child's psyche more

than the father. An educated woman who understands hygiene, the basis of disease prevention, will know how to make children stronger. When they fall ill, she could be an important doctor's auxiliary, reporting on the aetiology of the disease. I have heard several doctors remark that one of the most important causes of infant mortality is the ignorance of women (Gimeno, 1903, p. 32).

Attention to children's health and to women's and mothers' training in health and hygiene at home (particularly for children) was spread through different initiatives driven by feminists such as the republican Violeta (the pseudonym of Consuelo Álvarez). In late 1906, she wrote a section in the daily newspaper *El País* («Carnet femenino. Observaciones a las madres») on practical advice for mothers on nutritious food for all ages, emphasising the importance of sport and exercise for strong, healthy children. Violeta understood the vital significance of this maternal task, given that healthy adults would be the first step towards the regeneration of Spain. She recommended training at the school for mothers of the Centro Iberoamericano de Cultura Popular Femenina, directed by the Marquise of Ayerbe (María Vinyals, later María de Lluria) since 1905. This centre prepared women to become better mothers and to have access to a profession and economic emancipation (Ezama, 2015). The dilemma mothers/workers was irrelevant, since economic independence was considered necessary for a balanced and equal relationship at home, which would provide a good setting for adequate childrearing.

Doctors such as Manuel Tolosa Latour collaborated with the Centro Iberoamericano. *El Pensamiento Femenino* reviewed a lecture by Tolosa in which he defined social maternity, claiming that «in her pilgrimage in the world, a woman doesn't always create a family or inevitably have children; but her maternal instinct makes her inspire initiatives wherever she goes» (*La dinámica del hogar*, 1914, p. 5). For him, a constant reminder to women of their role as mothers should be bolstered by financial independence and the right to maternity protection (Barbero, 2014, pp. 38–41). Female teachers and pedagogues shared this view of social feminism, influenced by the rhetoric of hygiene and mother/child protection, collaborated in implementing social reform policy and took an active part in child protection/health campaigns. For example, Encarnación de la Rigada, co-founder of the Centro Iberoamericano and promoter of the Escuela de Madres de Familia worked as

a member of the Sociedad Española de Higiene for the approval (1904) of an Infancy Protection Law drawn up by Tolosa Latour¹⁰. As vice-president of the Women’s Popular Hygiene Committee (*Comité femenino de Higiene Popular*), María Encarnación de la Rigada aimed to spread and improve hygiene practices. She was an enthusiastic campaigner against infant mortality (resulting from mothers’ ignorance, but also poverty) and for childcare training for mothers (Cabrera Pérez, 2019, p. 3). In 1919, a good friend of María de Lluria’s, Margarita Nelken, founded the Casa de los Niños in Madrid, as a day-nursery for workers’ children aged one to five years and also offering activities to older children (library, gym, singing, gardening, etc.) (Por la Casa de los Niños, 1919, p. 15).

After the First World War, some of the best known feminists featuring in public discussion in the press and at cultural venues such as the Athenæum of Madrid continued the discourse and practice of social/health reform, and supported and fostered institutional initiatives on the matter. Beatriz Galindo (the pseudonym of Isabel Oyarzábal) praised the mayor of Madrid, José Francos Rodríguez, for promoting a course on maternology and childcare. In his prologue to the book *Primera escuela de maternología*, a collection of lectures given to mothers and daughters, and pupils at local and national schools by Doctor Luis Heredero (assistant manager of the Institución Municipal de Puericultura, Municipal Institution for Childcare), Francos Rodríguez provided reliable and eloquent figures on infant mortality (40% of children died before the age of five; of them, 20% through lack of food). For this reason, multiplying *Gotas de Leche* and childcare tasks and training was strongly recommended¹¹. Rodríguez campaigned for the nationwide institutionalisation of schools of maternology «to teach and protect Spanish mothers to defend their children’s lives, the nation’s children»

10. The *Comité* was first (1911) led by Sofía Casanova, who was followed by Doctor Concepción Alexandre and later Milagros Sanchís, Manuel Tolosa’s sister-in-law. Because they are already well known, we will not focus on the tensions (between acceptance and contention, according to case) that Gregorio Marañón’s ideas stirred up among feminists, particularly those concerning *Tres ensayos sobre la vida sexual* [*Three essays on sexual life*](1926). (Aresti, 2001, pp. 235-248).

11. *Gotas de Leche* were establishments founded in the late 19th century based on the French model to reduce high infant mortality rates and malnutrition.

(Francos Rodríguez, 1920, p. 10). Galindo shared this view, declaring that the only way to stop that «horrible plague causing destruction and death that daily plucked from hundreds of Spanish homes the happiness that should have been the future prosperity and strength of the homeland» (Galindo, 1918a, p. 3) was by spreading precepts of hygiene for children unknown by most of the population. In line with reformers' findings, she detected the main cause of the plague of infant mortality (higher in Spain than in other «civilised countries») in the ignorance of mothers (Galindo, 1918a, p. 3)¹².

Nelken envisioned girls receiving sensible training about the female condition, particularly with regard to their future mission of motherhood. She agreed with her colleague, Eduardo Andicoberry, who declared in the newspaper *Diario de La Coruña* (as cited by Nelken, 1919b, p. 5) that feminists should focus on teaching women to be mothers. And she pinpointed the defence of the rights of mothers and children as the first feminist challenge. She understood maternology as a way of facing the ignorance and embarrassment about women's bodies deriving from the leverage exerted by Catholicism over morals, childhood education and charities. In her view, maternology should be institutionalised in Spain in the same way as in France or Germany under the guidance of sociologists and doctors. Girls would be trained naturally and scientifically about their future role as mothers. Equipping them with knowledge about pregnancy would subsequently lead to knowledge about their bodies (Nelken, 1919b, p. 5)¹³.

Discussion on feminism held at the Athenæum of Madrid at the end of the First World War was embedded in social reformist and health concerns, for which motherhood and women's social action were fundamental. Although various feminists had diagnosed the problem of the lack of social sense (one symptom was the poor functioning of charitable institutions) of Spanish women in comparison to other European women, some considered

12. For Matilde Eiroa, Oyarzábal's proposal was «a sort of politicised motherhood in which mother was an educator and an agent for socialisation and engagement of their children in society» (2017, p. 369).

13. This article was reproduced, in addition to her lectures given at the Paediatrics Society of Madrid supported by Manuel Tolosa Latour, in the chapter «Maternología y Puericultura» of her famous and controversial book, *La condición social de la mujer en España*.

this absence to be the main obstacle to Spanish women’s suffrage. In addition to her open critique of Catholic charitable institutions as anachronistic, paternalistic and obsessed with imposing Catholic dogma and morals, Nelken established an implicit link between modern social duties and political rights. In her opinion, in Spain women could not ask men to imitate their European counterparts by considering women who display high social sense to be worthy of being their fellows, «women who have fulfilled the duties imposed by social sense» (Nelken, 928, p. 4). María de Lluria (María Vinyals) was more explicit when stating that most women were in «a state of unfortunate ignorance not only of their rights but also of their duties» (Lluria, 1918, p. 4).

Social sense was an ambiguous concept when applied to women, since it could relate to their duties as mothers as much as women’s/feminist social duties and engagement in modern social and hygiene reform. In her review of the conference given by her good friend Margarita Nelken at the Ateneo in 1918, De Lluria supposed a natural continuity of both obligations when she wrote:

Spanish woman has neither social sense, nor understanding of her enormous responsibility in the future of the race. Woman is mother twice over, as a procreant and educator, and in both cases her children’s health depends upon her efforts; then, she must study everything related to improving the human species and keep abreast of every advancement. (Lluria, 1918, p. 4)

Social action and motherhood were connected inasmuch as motherhood was conceived as the (major) social contribution of women. Social awareness and responsible motherhood appeared then as interrelated and deeply connected fields. Nelken and De Lluria maintained that only a cultivated minority of women escaped backwardness and ignorance, afflictions affecting the majority, composed on the one hand by high society ladies and on the other by the working masses who lived in ignorance (Nelken, 1919a, p. 3). This classification was framed and appraised against a European model that Spain should ideally work towards, abandoning prejudice, ignorance and superstition (Lluria, 1918, p. 4). Unenlightened, irresponsible and unaware motherhood—as well as social and charitable action—was contrasted with responsible, aware and conscious motherly agency. As other historians have already pointed out, throughout the 20th century diverse public voices

(doctors, pedagogues, hygienists) evolved a discourse on guilty and ignorant motherhood, which was mostly associated with the lower and upper classes (Palacio, 2003). Feminists were influenced by it and were involved in shaping it by differentiating between conscious/unconscious motherhood, simultaneously structured by other binaries such as animal/human and biology/culture. As María Martínez Sierra explained, despite her understanding that the social significance of motherhood fitted with biological evolution,

Voluntary and conscious motherhood, desired and perfect; motherhood that not only gives birth to a child, but raises, educates and prepares that child for a full, useful and happy life, is a glorious task and mission without equal; but ignorant maternity, imposed by chance or by circumstance, without responsibility, without an educational function, without a progressive ideal, does not distinguish between [...] the merely physical maternity of animal species (Martínez Sierra, 1916/2003 , pp. 47–48).

4. MOTHERS' DUTIES AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Motherhood was linked to social duties and social reform, as well as to women's rights. In fact, one of the strongest arguments brandished by many feminists for demanding civil and political rights was that the *vocation* or mission of motherhood entailed duties that could only be properly accomplished when some rights were given¹⁴. That became one of the main arguments for demanding equal rights in the household as a condition for a good education for children, alongside a liberal view on the family, as a contract of equals, as well as an important unit for social life. In 1911, Carmen de Burgos presented herself (rejecting the perception of others) as an advocate of family and marriage:

The sanctity of the union of two beings who will create a home means so much to me that I wish nothing other than that they be joined together for love and mutual esteem. A marriage that would not enslave people but would join their souls. This is why women should be independent, with no

14. Several decades ago, Temma Kaplan (1990) had already pinpointed the focal nature of the claims for rights rooted in hegemonic gender expectations, based on the exercise of rights as mothers and caregivers, in the popular protests of the early 20th century.

need to marry out of necessity. They should have the right to choose and be aware of their actions (Burgos, 1911, p. 17).

In other words, women were born to build family and home, and for motherhood. However, if the home were to be happy, equal sovereignty was required for both parents (in economic and educational matters). Overcoming inequality inside marriage was a requirement for a better family and better mothering. Previous enlightened and liberal discourses emphasising women's education appeared to be inadequate, in the new framework of social and health reform, if mothers/women were to perform their now social mission. Feminists demanded equal rights and economic independence, as illustrated in ANME's programme. ANME member María Valero de Mazas put it clearly when answering Diego María Crehuet's lecture against feminism given at the Royal Academy of Jurisprudence and Legislation (Real Academia de Jurisprudencia y Legislación) in February 1920. She defended civil and penal code reforms to place women in a situation of equal rights and duties at home, which would allow them to fulfil their mission with dignity and efficiency (*Charla por las mujeres y para los hombres*, 1920, p. 10). Instead of Crehuet's conception of feminism as the dissolution of the home (*En la Academia de Jurisprudencia*, 1920, p. 2), Valero envisioned it as a way of regenerating the family.

In a context featuring the new social (and national) significance of children and their health, the family also became a space for intervention and change. The liberal ideal of the self-regulated and self-controlled family, imagined by liberal social reformers as being central to social order (Burguera, 2012, p. 131), went into crisis. As Jo Labanyi (2011 p. 116) has asserted, following Jacques Donzelot's approach, in the late 19th century, the family became a space that required reform (by doctors, sociologists, hygienists, etc.). Some feminists shared this image of the family as the backbone of a society in need of change and improvement through the balancing of the duties and rights of both sexes. Mariucha's (Dolores Velasco de Alamán) article, «Maternidad», published in *El Pensamiento Femenino* in July 1914, staked an important claim for educating men to perform their duties as fathers, in addition to calling for women's rights so that they could accomplish their duties. Underpinning this view was a diagnosis of a society, along with the family, damaged by disasters arising from a disorganised and essentially

male civilisation. The key for a more balanced family life, and fertile and healthier parents, to attain peace and counter the culture of war to which men had led humanity resided in giving rights to women. Sweden was cited as an example. This happiest of countries had no wars, hatred or fighting because the spirits of both sexes were united: neither prevailed over the other (Mariucha, 1914, p. 4).

María Martínez Sierra was aware of the tensions that motherhood could arouse and its importance for the feminist question. Motherhood could be interpreted as a reason for denying rights for women (an old conservative discourse), but Martínez Sierra explained it more clearly from a feminist angle:

A statement that antifeminists use as a supreme argument: 'The only career for a woman is marriage. A woman must be wife and mother'.

A feminist statement proclaimed by a distinguished woman in an American journal for women: 'The true heart of female current affairs is raising and educating children, and making a home for them' (Martínez Sierra, 1917, p. 101).

Departing from a notion of motherhood as the highest obligation and mission, the responsibility for the continuation of the species/humanity («Woman has the future of the species in her hands»), she reflected on the duties involving this «vocation» and the rights needed to adequately fulfil it (Martínez Sierra, 1917, pp. 102–103)¹⁵. Those rights were the logical legal outcome of applying a liberal (and hygienic) notion of subject to mothers: education and culture, *patria potestas*, health, authority, responsibility, freedom, culture and independence were required to properly accomplish their duties as mothers (Martínez Sierra, 1917, p. 102). In other words, woman was born for home, motherhood and family. However, a happy and socially useful household required equal rights for men and women; equality laws were demanded to improve the family and humanity.

The primary civil right called for by Beatriz Galindo (1918b), was the legal personality of married women, necessarily accompanied by paternal

15. Alda Blanco affirms that with *Nuevas cartas a las mujeres de España* (1932), María Lejárraga moderated her essentialism and sexual difference, and with them the idea that women's contribution to society had a different quality and that rights were to be gained to better accomplish it (2009, p. 75).

responsibility (through paternity testing). She applauded a reform of the civil code in Argentina worthy of imitation as the path to creating the conditions for women to better accomplish their mission and for the biological improvement of the population, children especially: «How much misfortune would be avoided if projects such as this one took hold in every country! How much stronger and more vigorous would certain elements of the race become [...]! A good woman, of maternal feelings [...], would have the chance to fulfil her mission» (Galindo, 1918b, p. 6). As for political rights, women’s suffrage was conceived as a way to support men who were engaged in dealing with women’s interests, that is, the necessities of «those two big forces of nation which until now have been subjected to many others less important: woman, as effective or probable mother, and child, hope of the future» (Galindo, 1917, p. 2). In practice, what was understood as women’s interests involved their health and their children’s well-being. Through the vote, women were then expected to support politicians who introduced measures such as legislating work at home, protecting women’s work in factories, launching state relief for pregnant and breastfeeding women, and legislating equal pay. Moreover, political rights were requested for the moral improvement of humanity, given the underused potential of women as mothers and in domestic roles (Martínez Sierra, 1917, p. 304).

5. CONCLUSION

Historical scholarship has demonstrated that motherhood was central to shaping Spanish feminism and its demands in the early 20th century. This paper examines how motherhood was an inherent part of feminist rhetoric. It had an active role in fashioning and presenting feminism as a social and national movement for reform and regeneration through women–mothers. Motherhood orientated feminist action and objectives towards women and children’s well-being and healthcare, and it was used to legitimate and demand civil and political rights. The reason for the centrality of motherhood, and its contents and workings, was not a natural inclination of feminists (or of women) towards childcare, nor the existence of timeless and fixed *women’s interests*. Defining women’s’ interests, demanding social rights,

as well as including mother and child protection in their programmes, were the product of a complex historical construction.

In order to disentangle this construction here, we have suggested the usefulness of understanding social feminism as a movement in defence of social demands resulting from its emergence within a nascent rationality that was critical of liberal individualism. From the outset, as a new space for intervention from different knowledges and practices, state legislation included, the social was pervaded by gender differences as understood by liberal-modern ideas and by the deployment of social medicine and hygiene (and the concerns with biologically healthy bodies). At the beginning of the 20th century, feminists argued and acted within those discourses of social hygiene and reform. Through them, it was possible to outline the pressing problem of rising infant mortality, whose consequences were so disastrous for national health and whose resolution was mostly dependent on the responsibility and (hygiene) instruction of women. Through them, feminists took part in a reformulation of motherhood as a social mission and the responsibility for the biological reproduction of (quality) human beings. Once conceived that way, a reformulated motherhood not only became central to female identity understood as irreconcilably different and complementary to male identity, but a primary argument to uphold women's social and political rights. Lastly, this complex discursive frame made it possible for feminists to collaborate (informally and through various channels such as private initiatives, women's and general press, lectures and associations, and through debates around the feminist question) in shaping a gendered arguments and practices of social reform.

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