



# PI<sup>♀</sup>NEERING FEMALE JURISTS

## *Remembrance and Memory*

*In Memory of my Mother*

## Pioneering Female Jurists: Introduction

The presence of women in the legal field is a reality today: women are in the majority in Faculty of Law classrooms in Spain, they account for half of lawyers and the judiciary and their presence is increasing in all the legal professions. However, they are still far from executive positions and the epicentre of legal power. There is still a long road ahead. But somebody paved the way: the pioneers. The struggle for equality in the world of law began with them.

Concepción Arenal, *the* key pioneer, attended class disguised as a man in the nineteenth century and never finished her Law degree. Women were not welcome in Law faculties in Spain without restrictions until 1910. And after the classroom, then what? Law was a career with few women, unlike medicine, for example.

A woman could study law, but she could not work in the legal profession. Socially, it was frowned upon. Legally, a prohibition in a text from the thirteenth century, *Las Partidas*, prevented women from being lawyers. Some people debate whether that prohibition actually had legal backing, but the fact is that the first women were only able to join professional Bar Associations after 1920.

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The website [Pioneering Female Jurists: Remembrance and Memory](#), November 2022, was created as part of the teaching innovation and quality improvement project of the UAB 2021. Main researcher: María Jesús García Morales. Funding number GI515402.



The reform of the Statutes of these Bar Associations, with Madrid in the lead (1920) and Barcelona later (1921), decisively opened up women's access to lawyerdom. Later, another door was opened: access to the public service in the judiciary. During the Second Republic, women were allowed to be judges, notaries or property registrars, but the dictatorship once again restricted these jobs to men. The ban on women accessing these professions was not lifted until the 1960s.

This website aims to bring visibility to 20 pioneering women jurists, the first generation: from Concepción Arenal to those who worked in the legal profession or started or finished studying Law in the Second Republic. Between these two periods, 90 years spanning two centuries, was a 'seed period' in which we mostly find women's access to lawyerdom, as well as the first magistrate, judge and prosecutor, and access to doctorates and scholarly life as law professors.

Drawing up the list, selecting them, has been a concerted group effort. The story of one of them led us to discover the names of others. Apart from the most famous (Concepción Arenal, Victoria Kent and Clara Campoamor), the majority are unknown, even among jurists and even those from Catalonia. Therefore, we have included some of the first lawyers in Catalonia (Maria Soteras, Leonor Serrano and Teresa Argemí) and the first woman to be appointed a judge here, was posted in Granollers (Maria Lluïsa Algarra).

In this website –published in three languages (Catalan, Spanish and English)– biographical notes led by the women's names and photographs, along with period documents that bring them visibility and tell us about them, recall the lives and careers of these pioneering women jurists with both an informational and an educational purpose. Written by 15 authors from different universities and disciplines, which ensures the transversality of the contents (civil, criminal, procedural, business, labour, constitutional law and the history of law), each note includes basic references to scholarly, literary or general-readership works. Links to videos and podcasts are also cited, if they exist.

There are still very few studies on these women, when they do exist they are recent, and many of them are doctoral theses, a format that does not reach the public at large. But one thing is clear: there can be no dissemination without prior research, and this latter means diving into primary sources to stitch together the remnants of their lives in academic records, applications for Bar Associations stored in university archives, associations and

the press from their period, and in some cases also following their tracks in exile. This is a slow, methodical process in a world addicted to speed.

This website compiles a list of pioneering female jurists who appear in chronological order (by date of birth), although the digital format enables each of them to be viewed individually. Each life is a microcosm, but this project also aims to offer a vision of these women as a whole in that they represent even more women and shed light on gender-based discrimination in lawyering and the legal profession.

History tends to silence and stereotype women. Not only is reviving the memory and visibility of these women jurists legal tantamount to archaeology on women's access to the legal field; their memory also provides female referents in a sector that for centuries was reserved solely for men. They are inspiring profiles about overcoming obstacles which should empower women and future women jurists. Not only did they deal with difficulties, but they also changed the rules and made law more egalitarian. Bringing visibility to their names and recalling their lives is a pedagogy of equality, which may be a fundamental right even though real equality still does not exist.

Who were these women? Why are they worth knowing? **THESE WOMEN** are:

1. **Concepción Arenal Ponte** (1820-1893). *Prison activist and pioneering feminist. Defender of disadvantaged people* (Carmen Navarro Villanueva, Associate Professor [Profesora Titular] of Procedural Law, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona).
2. **Isabel Oyarzábal Smith** (1878-1974). *First woman labour inspector and first woman Ambassador of Spain* (Olga Paz Torres, Associate Professor [Profesora Agregada] of History of Law and Institutions, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona).
3. **Clara Campoamor Rodríguez** (1888-1972). *Much more than the female vote* (María Jesús García Morales, Associate Professor [Profesora Titular] of Constitutional Law, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona).
4. **Matilde Huici Navaz** (1890-1965). *The importance of education* (Miriam Cugat Mauri, Associate Professor [Profesora Titular] of Criminal Law, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona).
5. **Carmen Cuesta del Muro** (1890-1968). *The first woman PhD in Law in Spain* (Fernando Rey Martínez, Full Professor of Constitutional Law, Universidad de Valladolid).
6. **Leonor Serrano Pablo** (1890-1941). *First female lawyer to appear before the Court of Appeal of Barcelona* (José Santiago Yanes Pérez, PhD in Law, Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria).
7. **Victoria Kent Siano** (1892-1987). *First lawyer in Madrid, deputy and director general of Prisons* (Gonzalo Quintero Olivares, Full Professor of Criminal Law, Universitat Rovira i Virgili).

8. **María de la Ascensión Chirivella Marín** (1893-1980). *First woman lawyer in Spain* (Manuel Cachón Cadenas, Full Professor of Procedural Law, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona).
9. **María del Carmen López Bonilla** (1898-1958). *The one who could have been Spain's first woman lawyer but wasn't* (José Santiago Yanes Pérez, PhD in Law, Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria).
10. **María Lacunza Ezcurra** (1900-1984). *Professional integrity as a hallmark* (Arantza Libano Beristain, Associate Professor [Profesora Agregada] of Procedural Law, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona).
11. **Julia Álvarez Resano** (1903-1948). *First woman appointed to serve as a magistrate* (Elisa Simó Soler, PhD in Law, Department of Procedural Law, Universitat de València).
12. **María Soterias Mauri** (1905-1976). *First practising woman lawyer in Catalonia and example of repression on the basis of sex* (Daniel Vallès Muñío, Associate Professor [Profesor Agregado] of History of Law and Institutions, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona).
13. **Concepción Peña Pastor** (1906-1960). *One of the first practising women lawyers in Spain, Law professor in exile* (María Jesús García Morales, Associate Professor [Profesora Titular] of Constitutional Law, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona).
14. **Sara Maynar Escanilla** (1906-1986). *First law professor at a Spanish university and early woman lawyer* (Belén Causapé Gracia, PhD in Gender Relations, Universidad de Zaragoza).
15. **Elvira Fernández-Almoguera Casas** (1907-1938). *First woman prosecutor in Spain* (María Mercedes Serrano Pérez, Associate Professor [Profesora Contratada Doctora] of Constitutional Law, Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha).
16. **Teresa Argemí Melián** (1907-1994). *Jurist and lawyer from Barcelona. The first to celebrate 50 years in the Barcelona Bar Association* (María Jesús Espuny Tomás, Professor Emeritus of History of Law and Institutions, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona).
17. **María Palancar Moreno** (1910-1970). *Labour law and social security vocation* (María Jesús Espuny Tomás, Professor Emeritus of History of Law and Institutions, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona).
18. **Mercedes Formica-Corsi Hezode** (1913-2002). *Pioneering lawyer and defender of women's rights* (Juan Manuel López Ulla, Associate Professor [Profesor Titular] of Constitutional Law, Universidad de Cádiz).
19. **María Telo Núñez** (1915-2014). *The lawyer of equality who was determined to change the Civil Code, and did* (María Jesús García Morales, Associate Professor [Profesora Titular] of Constitutional Law, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona).
20. **Maria Lluïsa Algarra Coma** (1916-1957). *First woman judge. Playwright and screenwriter* (María Jesús Espuny Tomás, Professor Emeritus of History of Law and Institutions, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona).

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### *Suggested citation:*

García Morales, María Jesús (dir.) (2022). *Pioneering Female Jurists: Remembrance and Memory* [Electronic resource], Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, November 2022. In: <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/268649>





# CONCEPCIÓN

*Arenal*

## Concepción Arenal Ponte

*Prison activist and pioneering feminist. Defender of disadvantaged persons*

**Ferrol, 1820 - Vigo, 1893**

It is practically impossible to condense the enormous social and intellectual efforts of Concepción Arenal in just a few lines. The number of works she published and the range of topics covered trouble any attempt to summarise her biography and legacy. This great nineteenth-century thinker devoted many of her works to criminal law and prison improvement, but she also wrote on sociology, pedagogy and science, and the common thread in all her writings was her concern for excluded persons and the social improvement of women.

Concepción Arenal was born the same year as the 'Pronunciamiento de Riego' which started the Liberal Triennium and the restoration of the Constitution of Cádiz, and she died under the government of Mateo Sagasta, who was curiously the director of *La Iberia*, the newspaper where both Concepción Arenal and her husband Fernando García Carrasco published numerous articles. The following figures reveal the tumultuous historical period in which Concepción Arenal lived: 5 different constitutions, 3 Carlist wars, the proclamation of the First Spanish Republic, the reign of 6 different monarchs and countless governments of all political stripes.

Given her aversion to revealing personal information ('I don't want my life to overshadow my work', Arenal said), we shall focus on several relevant aspects of her facet as a jurist. In 1863 and 1865, she was a prison inspector, which enabled her to learn about the situation of the imprisoned population *in situ*. The first edition of her *Cartas a los delincuentes* (Letter to Criminals) was published in 1865, but days later she was suddenly stripped of her job. However, that did not prove to be an impediment to Concepción Arenal continuing her struggle to improve prisons, and in 1867 she published *El reo, el pueblo y el verdugo o la ejecución pública de la pena de muerte*.

After the 1868 Revolution, she was once again appointed Inspector of Women's Correctional Centres, a job she held until 1873. In parallel, in 1870 she founded the biweekly magazine *La Voz de la Caridad*, in which she wrote around 500 articles which often contained condemnations of situations she viewed as unjust. With her elaborate reports, she participated in Penitentiary Congresses in Stockholm, Rome, Saint Petersburg and Antwerp and garnered extraordinary international recognition. Arenal died in 1893 before she was able to see the Spanish version of her last work, *El visitador del preso*, published.

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### *Suggested citation:*

Navarro Villanueva, Carmen. Concepción Arenal Ponte, *Pioneering Female Jurists: Remembrance and Memory* [Electronic resource], Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, November 2022. In: <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/268649>



# ISABEL

*Oyarzábal*

## Isabel Oyarzábal Smith

*First woman labour inspector and first woman Ambassador of Spain*

**Málaga, 1878 – Mexico City, 1974**

With a highly diverse and heterogeneous facet as a feminist and republican activist, Isabel Oyarzábal developed to her utmost potential in a men's world. She educated herself in humanism and was part of the bourgeois and feminist cultural circle in Madrid in the early decades of the twentieth century as a prominent member of the Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Españolas (National Association of Spanish Women) and the *Lyceum Club*.

Both are spaces which promoted new social gender relations, the dignification of women's work and comprehensive education from a bourgeois vantage point which translated into a kind of acknowledgement of female authority in public and private spaces, albeit not without reservations. The education of working-class women was a particular focus of her international lectures and essays (1920-1929).

With her multifaceted education and her strong political connections, she was a member of the UGT trade union and the PSOE political party since 1931, and earned the personal trust of politicians the likes of Francisco Largo Caballero, Luis Araquistáin and Julio Álvarez del Vayo. She focused on criticism of the overall lack of social assistance with a combative discourse in which she exposed the shortcomings of social laws, the miserable living conditions of the working class and their repercussions on woman and children.

She was the first Spanish woman to secure a position as a Provincial Labour Inspector (1933) and the first woman ambassador of Spain who occupied the post of envoy and ambassador of the Second Republic in the Spanish legation in Sweden and Finland (1936-1939). She also participated as an expert in international laws on child and female labour at the International Labour Organisation (1931) and the Society of Nations' Committee of Experts on Slavery (1934-1938). Her contributions were aimed at dealing with issues related

to child slavery, forced labour and the condemnation of slavery practices which some ventured to call undercover prostitution.

She was the author of autobiographical novels and evoked her inner life with some anguish in three major publications written in exile, *I Must Have Liberty* (1940), *Smouldering Freedom* (1945) and *Alexandra Kollontay* (1947), which are a perfect synthesis of an exile's experience. Her status as an exiled republican intellectual took root in Mexico, where she was a member of and spokesperson for the Junta de Cultura Española (Spanish Board of Culture). Her life history is a paradigmatic example of a republican who was left without a republic.

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### Suggested citation:

Paz Torres, Olga. Isabel Oyarzábal Smith, *Pioneering Female Jurists: Remembrance and Memory* [Electronic resource], Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, November 2022. In: <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/268649>



# CLARA

## *Campoamor*

## Clara Campoamor Rodríguez

*Much more than the female vote*

**Madrid, 1888 - Lausanne, 1972**

On 1 October 1933, Spanish women voted for the first time, later than women in Finland (1906), Great Britain or Germany (1918) but earlier than those in France (1944), Italy (1947) or Switzerland (1971). Clara Campoamor has gone down in history as the mastermind behind the female vote in Spain.

So who was Campoamor? Her father was an accountant and her mother was a seamstress. Her father's death forced her to work at an early age as a dressmaker, a shop clerk, a civil servant as an assistant at Telégrafos and later a teacher at the Escuelas de Adultas.

She finished her Law degree at the age of 36. She was the third woman to join the Bar Association in Spain, in Madrid and would later be the second women to join the Bar Association in San Sebastián and the first in Seville, Alcalá de Henares and Vitoria.

A multifaceted jurist, she participated in creating the International Federation of Women in Legal Careers and showed a particular predilection for civil law, where she fought against women's '*impersonalidad*' (lack of legal standing) in the laws of the period, especially married women, as they lost their rights and were treated as minors upon marriage. She was the first woman lawyer to appear before the Supreme Court on matters related to women's legal status.

Politics led her to be one of the three female MPs in the 1931 Constituent Courts (along with Victoria Kent and Margarita Nelken), when women did not yet have the right to vote, although they could be elected. There, she promoted reforms for legal equality which transformed the lives of women, such as her passionate, solo defence in favour of the female vote. Her party, the Partido Radical (Radical Party), abandoned her. One famous historical episode is

her vibrant parliamentary clash with another woman, Victoria Kent, who was against introducing women's suffrage at the time because, Kent maintained, they would not vote for the Republic because they were influenced by the Catholic Church. Two clashing women... the press nicknamed 'la Clara y la Yema' (a play of words on 'clara', meaning egg white, and 'yema', meaning egg yolk).

The female vote won: 161 votes in favour and 121 against. And the 1931 Constitution called for equal electoral rights for men and women. Campoamor also participated in the Divorce Law, the Civil Marriage Law and the Law on Legitimacy of Children Born out of Wedlock.

Women voted in 1933, but Clara Campoamor did not earn enough and lost her seat in parliament. A prolific writer, two of her emblematic books are *El voto femenino y yo: mi pecado mortal* (1936) and *La revolución española vista por una republicana* (1937, initially published in French). When the Civil War broke out, when went into exile in France, Buenos Aires and Switzerland, where she died after a life devoted to fighting for women's rights. The Franco regime never allowed her to return to Spain.

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### Suggested citation:

García Morales, María Jesús. Clara Campoamor Rodríguez, *Pioneering Female Jurists: Remembrance and Memory* [Electronic resource], Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, November 2022. In: <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/268649>



# MATILDE

*Huici*

## Matilde Huici Navaz

### *The importance of education*

**Pamplona, 1890 - Santiago de Chile, 1965**

Matilde Huici lived an intense political and cultural life in the Krausist Madrid of the early twentieth century. She arrived there in 1916 from her birthplace, Navarra, and found her first accommodations in the Ladies' Residence run by María de Maetzu. Just like so many other women of her time, her first degree was in Education, which enabled her to earn a living for the first time, and again for the last time in her life when she was living in exile in Chile. However, her education did not stop there. She continued to gain new knowledge, which she would later bring to the enterprises in which she got involved.

In line with the Krausist universalist ideal, she mastered many languages, which not only provided her with useful tools on the countless missions in which she represented Spain but also became a helpful source of income in exile.

She was also one of the first women to graduate from university (with a Teaching Degree in Higher Education in 1919 and a Law degree in 1926) and one of the first to work as a lawyer. She was the third to join the Bar Association in Madrid, after Victoria Kent and Clara Campoamor, which enabled her to serve as an attorney in the Juvenile Court and see firsthand the importance of education in the forging of criminals.

With both enthusiasm and solid legal technique, she was committed to many causes through her professional work, memberships in organisations and texts written for the press in favour of the female vote, minors' rights and the rights of refugees, even when she herself was bound to go into exile.

The professional respect that she garnered was recognised by the government of the Second Republic, where she held public posts, most importantly as a member of the Legal Advisory Committee which came up with the draft Constitution of the Republic.

In her fifties, the Civil War truncated her promising career. She had to go into exile in 1939, just like her master Jiménez de Asúa, as well as Stefan Zweig, fleeing from Nazism, but that was not the end of her. In Chile, she found fertile ground for embarking on a new period which she seized to continue educating children and teachers, which is what she is remembered for even today.

It is unclear why she never earned the same recognition in Spain as her contemporaries like Kent and Campoamor, but the best way to reflect on this is to read the essential biography by San Martín Montilla, who for that very reason describes her as the 'third woman'.

What remains of Matilde Huici today is her belief in education and her passion for action.

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### *Suggested citation:*

Cugat Mauri, Miriam. Matilde Huici Navaz, *Pioneering Female Jurists: Remembrance and Memory* [Electronic resource], Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, November 2022. In: <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/268649>



# CARMEN

Cuesta

## Carmen Cuesta del Muro

*The first woman PhD in Law in Spain*

**Palencia, 1890 - Madrid, 1968**

Carmen Cuesta del Muro, the first woman PhD in our country, is a historical figure who was as interesting as she is obscure. She read her doctoral thesis entitled *La sociedad de ganancias* on 7 December 1928 at the Universidad Central de Madrid, currently the Universidad Complutense, the only place in the entire country where she was able to, and earned 'outstanding' marks. She had previously earned her Law degree at the Universidad de Valladolid, my university, on 25 February 1926.

I have been able to see her academic record in Law in the university's historical archive: she earned impressive marks, almost all outstanding, as well as distinctions. Back in the nineteenth century, there had certainly been several dozen women who had graduated from university and even five PhDs, including her fellow Palencia native Trinidad Arroyo (in ophthalmology), but they were almost all in Medicine or the Humanities.

The progressive revolution of 1868 tentatively opened universities' doors to women, although they needed special permission given 'men's superiority', which was permanently abolished in 1910. From then on, women stormed into an arena that until then had been off-limits to them because the prevailing culture (or lack thereof) relegated them to the household and caregiving, instead of exercising a profession.

In order to understand Carmen Cuesta del Muro as a pioneering woman in the conquest of the right for equality with men, we must not only acknowledge her impressive intelligence but also situate her within her particular context as a leader of Catholic feminism in that period, as the subtitle of the wonderful book on her by Miguel de Santiago states. Indeed, she was one of the first and main collaborators of an extraordinary reformer of Spanish pedagogy with a Catholic approach, Pedro Poveda, the founder of the Institución Teresiana,

who disputed the values of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza while also sharing many of them and advocated the intellectual and professional promotion of women.

Carmen Cuesta del Muro was a teacher and headmistress of schools and 'ladies' residences' (similar to the Institución Libre), an educational administrator (in Spain and many Latin American countries), a Catholic orator and activist, a feminist and a brilliant jurist. She defended the female vote, women's participation in politics, women's access to the university and all professions and the reform of the Civil Code so that women could truly be the subjects of law and not merely dependent on their fathers or husbands.

She advocated women's civil rights in her doctoral thesis and in front of the institution of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship which resembled a parliament. Her words in a speech at the Seminary of Palencia on 1 July 1918 are unforgettable: 'There still exists in Spain the belief that by force a woman who delivers speeches... is a strange bird, an overly masculine woman... But as far as I'm concerned, nothing could be further from the truth. I support a kind of feminism (...) that only energetically raises its voice to protest abandonment and injustice, as I believe, gentlemen, that we all have the right to life'.

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# LEONOR

*Serrano*

## Leonor Serrano Pablo

*First female lawyer to appear before the Court of Appeal of Barcelona*

**Hinojosas de Calatrava (Ciudad Real), 1890 -Madrid, 1941**

Leonor Serrano Pablo was a teacher, primary school inspector (1913-1937) and lawyer (1930-1938), who, according to the press, became the first woman lawyer in Spain to appear professionally before the Court of Appeal (Audiencia Provincial) of Barcelona.

She was born in Hinojosas de Calatrava, in the province of Ciudad Real, on 23 February 1890. She pursued her baccalaureate at the Instituto de Huesca and graduated on 7 October 1927, which enabled her to access university Law studies during the period 1927-1930, first at the Universidad de Barcelona (six courses passed) and later at the Universidad de Zaragoza, where she took all the courses from the second to fifth year in just two academic years. She earned her Law degree there in 1930 at the age of 40, making her just the second woman to earn a Law degree in Zaragoza.

That same year she returned to Barcelona, and on 27 September 1930 she requested admission to the Bar Association of Barcelona to work in that profession. The Governing Board agreed to allow her to join on 6 October 1930.

Her first professional act before a court (Court of Appeal of Barcelona, Audiencia Provincial) was on 22 April 1932, and according to the press (*El Luchador: Diario Republicano* and *El Sol*, both in the 22 April 1932 editions), it was the first trial in which a woman served as a lawyer: 'Yesterday morning was the debut of Mrs Leonor, the first woman lawyer in our city to appear before the Courts of Justice'. Also through the press, we learn that that same year she was appointed a member of the Juvenile Court of the province of Barcelona (*La Vanguardia*, 21 February 1932). She was one of the only three women lawyers appointed to participate in the *I Congreso Jurídico Catalán* in 1936.

The Civil War truncated her career in both Education (1937) and Law (1938). She was taken off the register of the Bar Association of Barcelona on the agreement of its Governing Board on 17 August 1938 because she had failed to pay the fees. She went into exile in France, returned to Madrid on 4 April 1939, unable to exercise her profession, and survived by teaching private classes. Leonor Serrano Pablo died in Madrid on 24 April 1941.

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# VICTORIA

Kent

## Victoria Kent Siano

*First lawyer in Madrid, deputy and director general of Prisons*

**Málaga, 1892 - New York, 1987**

The professional and political life of Victoria Kent Siano was quite interesting. In 1906 she joined the Escuela Normal de Maestras, a teaching school, and earned her degree in 1911. From there she went to the Instituto Cardenal Cisneros of Madrid, where intellectuals like Jiménez Fraud and Bergamín taught. She moved into the Ladies' Residence run by María de Maeztu, who had a considerable influence on her. In 1920 she entered the Faculty of Law at the Universidad Central de Madrid, where her professors included prestigious names like Jiménez de Asúa and Felipe Sánchez-Román. She graduated in June 1924, earning her doctorate with a thesis on prison reform.

In January 1925 she joined the Bar Association and began to appear in court. She was the first woman lawyer in Madrid. During the Republic she was one of the three women deputies in the Constituent Courts. She was also the director general of Prisons, albeit only for a brief period, but long enough to resume the humanising work of Concepción Arenal and improve prisoners' living conditions by instating freedom of worship, permits for family matters, a ban on shackles and chains (one moving story is that she ordered a bust made in memory of Concepción Arenal with these smelted shackles and chains, which is at the Secretary of State of Penitentiary Affairs) and the creation of the female corps of prison workers.

A series of prison conflicts, coupled with a constant campaign against her in the press, led her to submit her resignation.

After the war, she went into exile, first in Paris. There she met the woman who would become her sentimental companion, Louise Crane. They set out for Mexico together and ultimately reached New York, where she worked in the UN. She and Crane founded the magazine *Ibérica por la Libertad*, which became a mouthpiece for exiles between 1954 and 1974. She

managed to return to Spain in 1977, like some other exiles, although she did go back to her residence in New York.

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# ASCENSIÓN

## Chirivella

## María de la Ascensión Chirivella Marín

*First woman lawyer in Spain*

**Valencia, 1893 – Mexico City, 1980**

Ascensión Chirivella was the daughter of an attorney of the courts, Manuel Chirivella Merseguer, and of Ascensión García. She pursued her baccalaureate at the Instituto de Valencia between 1906 and 1910 and later studied Philosophy and Humanities at the Universidad de Valencia, where she graduated in 1914. She was the first woman to earn this Bachelor's degree at that university. She simultaneously pursued studies at the Escuela Normal de Maestras teachers' college in Valencia.

Between 1918 and 1921, she earned a Bachelor's in Law from the Universidad de Murcia (1918-1920) and the Universidad de Valencia (1920-1921). She had taken the three subjects in the Preparatory Studies for the Bachelor's in Law at the Universidad de Valencia in academic year 1910-1911.

Ascensión Chirivella earned her Bachelor's in Law from the Universidad de Valencia in September 1921. She was the second Spanish woman to earn this degree (the first was Carmen López Bonilla, who earned hers in May 1921 at the Universidad de Madrid).

On 21 December 1921, Chirivella applied for admission into the Bar Association of Valencia and was admitted on 12 January 1922. Chirivella thus became the first woman lawyer in Spain.

During the Second Republic, she worked intensely with the Radical Republican Party alongside her husband Álvaro Pascual Leone Forner, a lawyer and MP. Chirivella was a fervent supporter of the republican constitutional system, and at the end of the Civil War she had to go into exile and moved to Mexico, where she could no longer work as a lawyer.

Chirivella was on the vanguard of the Spanish feminist movement in the immediate post-war years and also stood out for her defence of the rights of disadvantaged persons.

On 15 December 1935, Chirivella delivered a speech at the Paraninfo auditorium at the Universidad de Valencia which condensed her political and legal views, primarily aimed at protecting the rights of women and defending equality before the law.

She advocated the difference between the male and female perspective in the practice of law: 'women are not inferior to men: they are absolutely different (...) lawyerdom is an activity with broad prospects for women; their mission is not the same as that of male lawyers'. In their legal work, women should 'defend the humble, encourage the fallen, protect children'. She also advocated paternity investigations and social legislation that would adequately protect the working class, and she praised the principles enshrined in the Republican Constitution, 'which have courage to love, protect and defend all Spaniards equally, regardless of their age, sex, status or state'.

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Yanes Pérez, José Santiago. María del Carmen López Bonilla, *Pioneering Female Jurists: Remembrance and Memory* [Electronic resource], Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, November 2022. In:

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# CARMEN

López

## María del Carmen López Bonilla

*The one who could have been Spain's first woman lawyer but wasn't*

**Madrid, 1898-1958**

María del Carmen Basilia López Bonilla is the character in a story that has been used to claim that she may have been the first woman to join the Bar Association in Spain. She was born in Madrid on 28 February 1898, the daughter of Lorenzo López Martín, from Mazarambroz, and Aquilina Bonilla Torralva, a native of Malpica. She completed her baccalaureate at the Instituto Cardenal Cisneros in Madrid on 21 June 1915 with the outstanding marks. Her diploma was issued on 8 March 1916.

She joined the Faculty of Law at the Universidad Central de Madrid in academic year 1915-1916 (preparatory). She completed her Bachelor's in 1921 (according to Guil and Flecha). She applied for her Bachelor's diploma on 4 April 1922, which was issued to her on 12 April and collected on 11 July 1922. She studied Law and earned outstanding marks on the exams, not without some hardship, given her father's scant economic resources, as he apparently worked as a doorman at the headquarters of the Ministry of Grace and Justice.

She requested assistance from a women's association (*Cruzada de Mujeres Españolas*) to pay the fee for the issuance of her diploma, as deduced from the interview that Cristóbal de Castro held for the *Nuevo Mundo* (Madrid) magazine issue on 13 January 1922, entitled 'Las mujeres: la primera abogada', along with a close-up photograph by Padró in which she is wearing the professional cap and gown.

Faced with the prospect of joining the Bar Association but also with the need to pay its fee, she had apparently been requesting assistance for this since the year before she completed her degree. In 1921, Carmen López Bonilla 'will start the process of becoming a Bar association member in the Madrid branch', Manuel Góngora Echenique anticipated the new member in his article 'La primera mujer abogado: Señorita Carmen López Bonilla', with a

photograph of her, published in issue 33 of the *Boletín del Colegio de Abogados de Madrid* (third quarter, 1921).

On 31 October 1921, the Governing Board of the Bar Association of Madrid agreed to decide when the application for entry was formally submitted. Meantime, on 5 January 1924, Carmen López Bonilla submitted a petition to the president of the Military Directorate requesting '(...) that a Royal Decree be published authorising woman to sit for civil service tests in the Property Registry, corps of Notaries, etc., when they hold a Bachelor's degree in Law issued by state universities (...).' The request was rejected by the Royal Order dated 24 April 1924.

She finally submitted her application to join the Bar Association of Madrid on 25 November 1930 and was accepted at the Governing Board session that same day, to take effect on 2 December. As she acknowledged years later in her application, the reason she had not submitted an application to join the Madrid association in the 1920s was because she was married on 16 August 1922.

She joined in August 1925 as an administrative warden (*vigilante administrativo*) at the Directorate General of Security. Between 1936 and 1938, she served as the senior officer at the Court of Constitutional Guarantees, which issued a proceeding against her on the charge of hostility to the regime, without sanction, on 4 May 1938. The *Boletín Oficial del Estado* dated 3 August 1939 reported Carmen López Bonilla's permanent removal from the National Investigation and Surveillance Corps of the Directorate General of Security because she had not appeared at work before the authorities of the new regime. Finally, she was readmitted to her job in the presidency of the government without sanction by the Order dated 7 December 1939. She died in Madrid on 24 July 1958; her stated profession was 'lawyer'.

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Yanes Pérez, José Santiago. María del Carmen López Bonilla, *Mujeres juristas pioneras: recuerdo y memoria* [Electronic resource], Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, November 2022. In:  
<https://ddd.uab.cat/record/268649>





# MARÍA

## Lacunza

## María Lacunza Ezcurra

*Professional integrity as a hallmark*

**Pamplona, 1900 - Valencia, 1984**

María Lacunza started studying Law in Saragossa and continued her university degree in Madrid (staying at the Ladies' Residence run by María de Maeztu). In both Faculties she was the only woman student in the classrooms.

She became one of the first women that joined a Bar Association in Spain –one of the few female jurists that appeared before the Courts prior to the Second Republic– and was the first woman admitted to two Bar Associations (in 1927: Pamplona and San Sebastian).

She left the practice of Law in 1931 and moved to Madrid. In 1932 she became a civil servant in the State Administration (Ministry of Agriculture, Industry and Trade). Shortly thereafter she was appointed a member of the Study Commission charged with the intended agrarian reform, for which she travelled to several countries. This is another area in which María Lacunza was an innovator, as at that time it was highly unusual for women (jurists) to travel outside Spain for professional reasons.

After the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936, the authorities decided to dismiss her, as a result of the mistrust generated in the Republican government by a civil servant who was not affiliated with any party (leftist) and was not of significant public relevance. She was later asked back to work in the city of Valencia, where she was somewhat marginalised by being given secondary, minor tasks.

Once the Civil War was over, because she had served as a civil servant in the Second Republic, a purge proceeding was opened against her (1940), even though María Lacunza had always acted based on strictly professional criteria. The literal wording of the decision which concluded the proceeding was: '... this Ministry has determined that this civil servant

be admitted to state service with the disqualification sanction for holding managerial positions or those of trust, a forced transfer with a ban on applying for vacant posts for a two-year period and a two-year deferral.’ Days later she was notified that her new professional post was in Seville.

María Lacunza did not take her new (imposed) job and instead preferred to remain in Valencia with her husband and son. She thus abandoned her professional activity, which has not stopped her from earning accolades for her integrity and independence.

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Libano Beristain, Arantza. María Lacunza Ezcurra, *Pioneering Female Jurists: Remembrance and Memory* [Electronic resource], Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, November 2022. In: <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/268649>



# JULIA

Álvarez

## Julia Álvarez Resano

*First woman appointed to serve as a magistrate*

**Villafranca, 1903 – Mexico City, 1948**

Born in a village in Ribera de Navarra in 1903, Julia Álvarez Resano spent a quiet childhood within a context of extreme inequality, which determined both her professional development and her political participation linked to a steadfast commitment to social causes.

After earning her Education degree in 1921 as the valedictorian of her graduating class, she passed the civil service exams two years later. She combined her work as a teacher with Law studies, which she completed in 1927. In December 1933, she was admitted to the Bar Association of Pamplona, becoming the second woman member in Navarra, five years after María Lacunza. That same year, she ran as a candidate of the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, PSOE) for Navarra and Guipúzcoa, although she did not garner enough support to win. In 1936 she was sworn in as an MP for Madrid, the first woman from Navarra to become an MP.

Her milestone as the first woman to achieve this was repeated in the coming years. In 1937, in the midst of the Civil War, she was the first woman in Spain to become a civil governor, of Ciudad Real. After she resigned, she occupied two legal jobs in the judiciary: she was one of the first woman judges of Spain, as an interim judge in the Court of First Instance and Investigation in Alberic (Valencia), and as an interim magistrate in the Central Court of Espionage and High Treason during the Republic, becoming the first woman magistrate in Spain, even though she only served a little over a month there.

After the defeat of the republican troops in 1939, she was forced to go into exile in Mexico. In 1945, the Court of Political Responsibilities sentenced her with a fine of 3,000 pesetas and completely disqualified her from public office because of her role as a socialist MP and civil governor.

Julia Álvarez Resano is one of the woman jurists from the Republic who managed to access legal jobs and professions reserved for men for the first time from different political positions. More than half a century would have to go by before another woman entered the judiciary. We recall Julia Álvarez Resano as a champion of equality and remember that ceilings, either visible or invisible, can be broken on behalf of dignity and social justice.

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Soler Simó, Elisa. Julia Álvarez Resano, *Pioneering Female Jurists: Remembrance and Memory* [Electronic resource], Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, November 2022. In: <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/268649>



# MARÍA

Soteras

## María Soteras Mauri

*First working woman lawyer in Catalonia and example of repression on the basis of sex*

**Barcelona, 1905 – Mexico City, 1976**

María Soteras Mauri was the first woman who joined the Bar Association of Barcelona as a working lawyer, on 30 September 1927, and she remained a member until 1929. In 1932 she married Antoni Vilalta i Vidal, a fellow lawyer and member of the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, who became a Barcelona city councilman with prominent public responsibilities. A little over two months after the Civil War started, María and her family went into exile first in Brussels and then in Mexico.

But in July 1939, María was charged by the Provincial Court of Political Responsibilities of Barcelona, which accused her and her husband, a member of the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (Republican Left of Catalonia) political party, of sowing 'leftist propaganda and being enthusiasts of red ideas', etc.

The same proceeding was met with proof and testimony that María had never belonged to any political party and had never been involved in any political activities; she was merely married to Antonio, who had. Even the prominent right-wing historian Ferran Valls Taberner sent the court a letter of indemnity in favour of María, yet nonetheless, on 15 December 1939 María was fined 300,000 pesetas, disqualified from holding any public office for ten years and confined to the Balearic Islands for five years.

Living in Mexico, she paid much of the economic sanction and was pardoned of the other parts of the sentence in 1952. In the repressive proceeding, María always appeared as the 'wife of' and was condemned for her husband's political actions. In fact, the pardon proceeding did mention the lack of proof of María's political activity and evidence and documents in her favour. For this reason, as the 'wife of', we can conclude that she was a

victim of repression on the basis of sex, because she was a woman and because she was the wife of a republican politician.

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### *Suggested citation:*

Daniel Vallès Muñió. María Soteras Mauri, *Pioneering Female Jurists: Remembrance and Memory* [Electronic resource], Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, November 2022. In: <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/268649>



# CONCHA

Peña

## Concepción Peña Pastor

*One of the first practising women lawyers in Spain, Law professor in exile*

**Ciudad Real, 1906 – Panama City, 1960**

Concepción Peña Pastor, or Concha Peña, was one of a small group of practising women lawyers during the Second Republic. She was also a politician, writer, lecturer and educator. She was a nationally-qualified teacher at the Instituto San Isidro and Cardenal Cisneros, institutions that were influential in Madrid's social and political life. She earned three Bachelor's degrees, in Philosophy and Humanities, Medicine and Law. She spent time in the classrooms of the Faculty of Law of Zaragoza and perhaps completed a Bachelor's from the Universidad Central de Madrid. There she earned a PhD in Law. She was one of the first women to join the Bar Association in Madrid in 1928.

The press of the period shows that she was politically prominent. In July 1930, *La Esfera*, one of the top journals of the day, published an article on women's access to the working world entitled 'El fin de la esclavitud: Mujeres emancipadas', which referred to the women lawyers 'Clarita Campoamor, Matilde de Huici and the fashionable criminal lawyer, Miss Conchita Peña' (edition 864, 26 July). The press also reported on her facet as a lecturer, with a variety of talks on topics like divorce in the ancient world and a tribute to Pi i Margall.

She was the first woman to join the Real Academia de Jurisprudencia y Legislación (Royal Academy of Jurisprudence and Legislation, second section) in 1923, where she became Secretary in 1929. She was also visible in political life. She was a member of the Agrupación Femenina (Women's Group) of the party Acción Republicana (Republican Action), where she defended women's rights and particularly women's suffrage. She was a candidate with the Partido Republicano Democrático Federal (Federal Democratic Republican Party) in the elections to the Constituent Courts in 1931, but she was not elected.

She went into exile in Paris, where she met her husband, a Yugoslavian language teacher, with whom she had a daughter. With the outbreak of the Second World War, they moved to Panama, where she lived since 1938. She was a professor of Civil Law (1941-1942) and Roman Law (1942-1944) at the Universidad de Panamá and director of the National Library (1951). She continued to publish literary creations and many articles in the press in prominent Panamanian journals.

Her name appears on a plaque in the Simón Bolívar library at the Universidad de Panamá, devoted 'To the Spanish professors who at the dawn of the Universidad de Panamá generously contributed to creating an institution where freedom of thinking and teaching prevailed'. A Spanish woman jurist who is unknown in Spain, she is also included in a book on the suffragist movement in Panama, *Mujeres que cambiaron nuestra historia*, which attests to and acknowledges her life. She died in exile in 1960 at the age of 54.

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*Suggested citation:*

García Morales, María Jesús. Concepción Peña Pastor, *Pioneering Female Jurists: Remembrance and Memory* [Electronic resource], Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, November 2022. In: <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/268649>



SARA  
Maynar

## Sara Maynar Escanilla

*First women law professor at a Spanish university and early woman lawyer*

**Zaragoza, 1906 - Burbáguena (Teruel), 1986**

In 1929, Sara Maynar Escanilla was the first woman to earn a bachelor's in Law in Zaragoza, the first woman member of the Bar Association of Aragon and the first woman in the Legal-Practice Academy of Aragon. Her role as a pioneer includes being the tenth female member of the Bar Association of Spain, in the same decade as Victoria Kent, Clara Campoamor, Matilde Huici and Concha Peña. Furthermore, she was the first woman professor —assistant in practical classes— at a Law faculty in Spain in academic year 1930-1931, affiliated with International Public and Private Law, as well as the first woman professor in Administrative Law in 1940-1941.

The daughter of a famous civil law expert from Aragon, her large family's wealth, the legal and pro-Esperanto ambiance in which she grew up and the early death of her elder brothers may have spurred her career in law. Although some sources attribute her Bachelor's in Law to the sole motive of satisfying her father's desire, claiming that it was in no way her vocation, the facts point to a much more complex reality:

Her brilliant academic career, with her two Bachelor's degrees (Law and Humanities) was particularly notable in the Faculty of Law, where she earned an academic record full of honours and ended with an extraordinary Bachelor's award first and then assistantships; she attended for years the board meetings of the Real e Ilustre Colegio de Abogados de Zaragoza (Royal and Illustrious Lawyers' Association of Zaragoza, RelCAZ), of which she was a member —although she did not practise after 1930— until her death.

In 1979 she was distinguished as an Honorary member of RelCAZ. The press from the 1930s contains her statements that she wanted to practise Law. She started her doctoral studies in Madrid, in contact with the intellectual milieu of the Ladies' Residence. In 1939, she went

with her father, at that time the dean of RelCAZ, to the Provincial Prison of Zaragoza, where a civil servant forbade her from entering because she was a woman, even though she was a RelCAZ member. After several letters of complaint from the dean and the board, the last one addressed to the Minister of Justice, it was clarified that the regulatory ban did not extend to women lawyers.

The social-juridical reality must not have been easy for young women pioneers with a practical mindset in terms of their professional performance, like Maynar Escanilla, who ended up earning a Bachelor's in Philosophy and Humanities in 1942 and redirecting her career to secondary education, where she became a renowned, award-winning professor, chair and secondary school headmistress.

A city councillor and lieutenant mayor in her older years, Sara Maynar earned merit upon merit which make her an essential part of the *other story* about Law in Spain.

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# ELVIRA

## *Fernández-Almoguera*

## Elvira Fernández-Almoguera Casas

*First woman prosecutor in Spain*

**Herencia, 1907- Albacete, 1938**

Elvira Fernández-Almoguera Casas is a pioneering woman with a legal career in an overly short life. From her village in La Mancha, she moved to Albacete to pursue her baccalaureate at 'Bachiller Sabuco' school in 1923, where she earned her baccalaureate in 1924 and then furthered her education at the university.

Fernández-Almoguera enrolled in two different degree programmes, one in the sciences and the other in the humanities. She only finished her Law studies, but her enrolment in traditionally opposing fields shows her passion for broad learning and her zeal to be comprehensively educated. She completed her Law degree between Murcia and Madrid in 1928.

While studying at the university in Madrid, she was enriched by staying at the Ladies' Residence, which advocated university education for women in Spain and encouraged them to join the working world. Without a doubt, living at the Residence with some of the most prominent women in the era must have even further shaped her as the independent, pioneering woman that she was.

In 1929, she returned to Albacete and joined the Bar Association in the capital, the first woman to do so (the second followed her in 1970). Her office was located on Pasaje de Lodaes in a gem of an Art Nouveau building which even today seems frozen in that period. She joined the rotation of lawyers working for the poor on criminal matters for crimes with sentences of less than six years, as well as for civil matters.

In the months leading up to the Civil War, she was appointed president of the 'Socorro Rojo Internacional' in Albacete and interim director of the maternity ward of the Hermanas de la

Caridad in the same city. She was a member of the Unión Republicana (Republican Union) and travelled around the province participating in rallies drumming up votes for the Frente Popular (Popular Front).

The war also altered her career, and due to the pressing needs in the profession, she was appointed interim prosecutor by the Ministry of Justice, becoming the first woman to legally and organically occupy a post in the Public Prosecution Service. That is, she was the first female prosecutor. In 1937 she worked as such in the People's Court (Tribunal Popular) of Granada, located in Baza, and later, in January 1938 the Attorney General's Office (Fiscalía General) of the Republic suggested that she be transferred to the Regional Court of Albacete. Shortly thereafter, in August of that same year, she died at home from a severe heart condition.

She was a pioneering woman jurist in a difficult time whom we are rescuing from oblivion today by recognising her value as she deserves.

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# TERESA

Argemí

## Teresa Argemí Melián

*Jurist and lawyer from Barcelona. The first to celebrate 50 years in the Barcelona Bar Association*

**Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 1907- Barcelona, 1994**

"I always wanted to be a lawyer because it was a very human career that touched people's souls", declared Teresa Argemí to the newspaper *La Vanguardia*, as a feminist and a lawyer. She was born in Las Palmas, she was the daughter of a Catalan serviceman and a mother from the Canary Islands. She moved to Barcelona in 1924. She studied law at the University of Barcelona and graduated in June 1935. She began to practice law in two renowned law firms in the Catalan capital city: Xavier Regás and Fernando Benet.

An anecdote of her professional life is her work with Niceto Alcalá Zamora for the recognition of the right of women to participate in the competitive examinations for the Judiciary, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Judicial Secretariat and to be able to occupy these positions. The Minister of Justice at that time rejected the request.

She participated in the first Catalan Legal Congress (1936) organized by the Academy of Jurisprudence and Legislation of Catalonia, where she acted as secretary of the fourth section chaired by Joan Moles i Ormella. She was admitted to the Academy of Jurisprudence and Legislation of Catalonia (1936), although the civil war curtailed this appointment, which would have made her the first woman to be admitted to this institution.

In 1937 she married Josep Alguer i Micó, Civil Law Professor at the University of Barcelona, who died prematurely five months after her marriage. In 1941 she opened her own law firm in Barcelona and made the practice of law compatible with academic teaching, as an Assistant Professor to the chair of Administrative Law at the University of Barcelona, under the supervision of Josep M. Pi i Sunyer. She was the first woman to be awarded the gold

medal of the profession to celebrate her 50 years in a bar association and received the medal of *Sant Raimon de Penyafort*.

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## María Palancar Moreno

### *Labour law and social security vocation*

**Madrid, 1910-1970**

A graduate and Doctor in Law from the University of Madrid, she was head of the Women's Section of the Madrid Placement Office after passing a competitive examination. She married Professor Eugenio Pérez Botija, a fellow student and an effective collaborator.

Both started working in the field of Administrative Law, but her first articles already justify this interest in labor issues that would later become Labor Law. An example is the extraordinary prize *Naturaleza especial de la legislación obrera*, which she shared with Eugenio Pérez Botija and José Luis Santaló Rodríguez de Viguri.

She founded, with her husband, the *Revista del Trabajo* and participated with a series of national and foreign publications within a juridical-public orientation where the relationship between Administrative Law and the new Labor Law was consolidated. They received numerous recognitions for their professional work.

It is worth mentioning the article "La mujer y el trabajo", published in 1947 in the *Revista de Política Social* where he criticized the forced leave of absence of working women upon marriage, according to the requirements of Franco's legislation. His concern for occupational medicine is evident in *Los Médicos del trabajo (notas al decreto de 21 de agosto y reglamento de 22 de diciembre de 1956)*, Madrid, 1956, and *El nuevo Reglamento de los servicios médicos de empresa*, Madrid, 1958. Other works related to positive law are *La Legislación laboral española en sus quince últimos años*, Bologna, 1953; or *Reglamentación de los consejos de empresa en España*, Bologna, 1953.

Unfortunately, and despite the innovative work and career of this pioneering jurist, it has not been possible to find a photograph of her.

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Espuny Tomás, María Jesús. María Palancar Moreno, *Pioneering Female Jurists: Remembrance and Memory* [Electronic resource], Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, November 2022. In:

<https://ddd.uab.cat/record/268649>



# MERCEDES

*Formica*

## Mercedes Formica-Corsi Hezode

*Pioneering lawyer and defender of women's rights*

**Cádiz, 1913 - Málaga, 2002**

Mercedes Formica entered the Faculty of Law in Seville in 1932. She was one of the first women to study Law and work as a lawyer in Spain. She combined her professional activity with a fertile literary career. Her most prominent books include *Bodoque* (1945), *Monte de Sancha* (1950), *La ciudad perdida* (1951), *A instancia de parte* (1955), *Visto y vivido 1931-1937*, *Pequeña historia de ayer* (1982), *Escucho el silencio* (1984), *Memorias* (1984) and *Espejo roto y espejuelos* (1998).

As a lawyer and also from the platform of her books, she stood out as a defender of women's rights and stated her critical position regarding the legal status of women during her day. In *A instancia de parte*, she writes: 'the law is a trap for us women to fall into'.

She was educated by professors at the Institución Libre de Enseñanza and was a personal friend of García Lorca, which did not stop her from being a member of José Antonio Primo de Rivera's Falange from 1933 to 1936, that is, from the ages of 20 to 23. She soon distanced herself from this political party, especially after Franco unified Falange members and traditionalists in 1937, which she described as a 'monstrous amalgam'. Around the same time, she expressed her feelings about the war with expressions like 'no end will justify this bloodshed'.

In an article published in *ABC* in 1953, Formica criticised the Civil Code's unfair treatment of women and warned about the difficulties of wives 'who are going through the hardship of requesting a separation'. Her comment captured the attention of the international press. In July 1956, a Madrid court found in favour of a woman she was representing and forced her husband to leave the home.

That was the starting signal of a major reform of the Civil Code which Formica had been calling for a long time and which was approved in 1958. In fact, this amendment is popularly known as the *re-Formica*. It ushered in the disappearance of the 'woman's deposit' during separation, which forced the woman to leave the family home and be 'deposited' in an external home, always under the watch of a 'depository'. The concept of 'husband's domicile' also vanished, as it was replaced by 'conjugal domicile'.

She was ahead of her time as both a jurist and a writer, and worked within the Franco regime to combat discrimination on the basis of sex.

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### *Suggested citation:*

López Ulla, Juan Manuel. Mercedes Formica-Corsi Hezode, *Pioneering Female Jurists: Remembrance and Memory* [Electronic resource], Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, November 2022. In: <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/268649>



# MARÍA

Telo

## María Telo Núñez

*The lawyer of equality who was determined to change the Civil Code, and did*

**Cáceres, 1915 - Madrid, 2014**

The daughter of a military officer and later notary, she also wanted to become a notary; however, this profession was solely for men. She started studying law in Salamanca, but the Civil War broke out when she was only two classes away from finishing, and exams were suspended. She finished her degree in Zaragoza in 1940. She was unable to become a notary, as the Franco regime still only allowed men to exercise this profession.

In 1944, she secured a civil service post at the Technical Corps of the Civil Administration in the Ministry of Agriculture. She married the lawyer José Manuel Fernández-Baldor and had a daughter. Four years later, in 1949, she was widowed. In 1952, she joined the Bar Association in Madrid and opened her own law office.

She was indignant by the way the Civil Code treated married women, just like one of her touchstones, Clara Campoamor, whom she later met at the International Federation of Women in Legal Careers. There she condemned the legal status of women in Spain, with major repercussions. In 1969 she organised the organisation's annual board meeting in Madrid, where she discussed the topic 'Women in Civil Law'. This was the seed of the reform of the Civil Code and Commercial Code in 1975.

The 1975 law on the legal status of married women and husbands' rights and duties gave women back the capacity to exercise their rights. Achieving this during the Franco regime was a true feat. Until then, married woman had no rights. They were on par with minors, the mentally ill and the deaf and blind who were unable to write. Their husbands represented them in everything, and they needed a 'marital license', their husband's permission, to work or open a bank account.

In 1976 she joined the General Codification Commission –the top consultative body of the Ministry of Justice created in 1843 and in charge of revising and improving the legal system– along with three other women, Concha Sierra, Carmen Salinas and Belén Landáburu. Only one woman, Concepción Arenal, had participated in this commission earlier in the twentieth century. On that Commission, and in her 40 years of legal work, María Telo devoted her life to legally fighting discrimination against women in the legal field, as recounted in her book *Mi lucha por la igualdad jurídica de la mujer* (2009).

In her speech when she was awarded a Doctora Honoris Causa at the University of Salamanca, she recalled that legal equality does not mean actual equality. Men and women have to internalise equality: ‘The challenge of the twenty-first century lies in mindsets, and women have to be involved to achieve it’.

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### Suggested citation:

García Morales, María Jesús. María Telo Núñez, *Pioneering Female Jurists: Remembrance and Memory* [Electronic resource], Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, November 2022. In: <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/268649>



# MARIA LLUÏSA

*Algarra*

## Maria Lluïsa Algarra Coma

*First woman judge. Playwright and screenwriter*

**Barcelona, 1916 – Mexico City, 1957**

The career of this pioneer can be reviewed from two approaches: one as the first woman judge, although she was only in office for two months, and the other as a playwright with a brilliant career in Mexico, where she arrived fleeing the Spanish Civil War.

She was the daughter of a wealthy Catalan family. She studied law at the Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona (name adopted by the University of Barcelona during the Second Republic), a degree she completed at the age of twenty. Her career as a playwright began with her first play, *Judith*, which won a prize in a university competition and was performed in 1936 at the Teatro Poliorama.

The first women judges, magistrates and prosecutors were appointed during the civil war. Maria Lluïsa Algarra was the first woman judge appointed on 2 December 1936 by the Minister of Justice of the Generalitat de Catalunya, Andreu Nin, a member of the POUM (*Diario Oficial de la Generalitat de Catalunya*, n. 339, 4 December 1936, p. 844). It is recorded that she was a law graduate at the time, although certain people doubt it.

When the PSUC took over the Department of Justice of the Generalitat, she was dismissed by Rafael Vidiella in February 1937. She attended the first National Women's Congress, held on 6 and 7 December 1937 at the Palau de la Música in Barcelona.

It seems that after Barcelona fell to Franco's troops, she went to France and from there to Mexico. There are various versions of her membership of the French Resistance or whether she was sent to one of the French exile camps (Argelès, Bacarès or Saint-Cyprien).

It is recorded that she entered Mexico on 29 April 1939 and arrived there on 21 April. She had an extraordinary and brilliant career as a playwright in Mexico, where she married the Mexican painter José Reyes Meza. She died prematurely in 1957. In Granollers there is a street named after her.

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### *Suggested citation:*

Espuny Tomás, Maria Jesús. Maria Lluïsa Algarra Coma, *Pioneering Female Jurists: Remembrance and Memory* [Electronic resource], Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, November 2022. In: <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/268649>