The Franco Dictatorship, 1939–75, is known for its repression of the defeated forces and sympathizers of the Republic and the suppression of their voices. Only in the past few decades have the stories of the vanquished emerged, aided by the broadening of historiographical frontiers and methods to include women's history, oral history, and other new techniques to access the history of the marginalized. Recent studies of the Civil War have focused on the quality of memory and its relationship to the formation and understanding of identity and the role of agency—or the perception of agency—in such a process. Oral testimony provides the opportunity to explore these questions. In their pioneering work, historians Alessandro Portelli and Luisa Passerini have explored the possible deepening of our understanding of historical events through the contribution of oral histories. Individual case studies also offer a challenge to rigid binary concepts of gender, racial, and national identity as one seeks evidence of agency at the individual level. In this spirit, this chapter offers segments of an interview with Consuelo, or Chelo, Muñóz Monasterio, a former member of the Sección Femenina (the Women's Section, abbreviated here as SF) of the Falange. It took place on January 13, 1989, when Spain's first elected socialist government was in power. It is not surprising that Chelo voices some bewilderment at the new experience of being marginalized from the mainstream as a former member of the Falange living under the very changed political and social circumstances of post-Franco, democratic Spain.

I interviewed Chelo in her home in Madrid. She had been an important functionary in the Women's Movement of the Falange during the 1930s and later in the Francoist government. Influenced by my liberal teachers Gabriel Jackson and David Ringrose, I was prepared for an uncomfortable, forced dialogue with someone with whom I had nothing in common. I found a charming, intelligent, reflective woman of 89 years of age who openly talked with me about her life during Spain's years of ordeal, during and after the Civil War, and of her reflections. Chelo spoke at length and her account of her life challenges certain common assumptions: that as a member of the SF she was politically a member of the Spanish “far Right”
and opposed the coming of the Republic; and that as a religious Catholic she was a “traditional” Spanish woman who opposed women’s progress. It is through her own words that we sense the ambiguities of her empirical situation in the early 1930s in Spain and the choices open to her; and her account of her experiences expresses her belief that her life was full of agency and her pride in a fully developed self-identity, further challenging common stereotypes.

The interview with Chelo was one of a series I had with former members of the Sección Femenina, nearly all of whom have passed away. The interview was organized around several main themes. In a discussion of her family background, Chelo described what kind of youth were attracted to the Falange and why. Then, as she recounted how she came into contact with the Falange and its women’s support group, the Sección Femenina, she repeatedly underscored the importance of José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the founder of the Falange, and his sister Pilar, as models for youth. As she described the loss of her novio, or fiancé, who was a member of the Falange, it becomes clear that this traumatic, but also catalytic, event fixed those youthful values for the rest of her life. They inspired her work with the Sección Femenina, which she describes in detail. Through her words, the true extent of Spain’s devastation during and after the war became tangible. These years were followed by her long years of work in social services for the Franco government. Chelo clarified that she worked in the SF from 1937 until 1940 as a teammate, then with a post within the SF until 1950. She was with Social Security from the 1950s until her retirement in 1984, just four years prior to our conversation.

Finally, some fifty years after the war, and after Franco’s death and her retirement, she pondered about these experiences. Her reflections were

---