

Julia Hermosilla Salcedo "La Paquita"

¡He pasado hasta ocho de una vez! (referring to the Spanish republicans who were being persecuted by the new regime and whom she helped to flee the country) *¡Ay los judíos que he pasado yo!* (some of the people she helped to cross the border were Jews escaping from Franco's dictatorship).

Today we are telling you about a woman who dedicated her entire life to fight, first against the Franco Regime and later, after the arrival of democracy to Spain, for the rebuilding of the CNT, an anarcho-syndicalist labor union. We are talking about Julia Hermosilla Sagredo, also known as "Paquita", who was born in 1916 in Sestao (Euskadi, Basque Country). She inherited the leftist spirit and the interest in politics from her parents, and became an active member of the CNT when she was only 14.

Julia Hermosilla Sagredo wasn't an innate fighter. Born on April 1st, 1916 in Sestao — Biscay, the daughter of Carmen Sagredo and Juan Hermosilla had always been interested in performative arts, such as singing and acting, from an early age. She was also moved by politics and activism, highly influenced by her father's affiliation with the CNT, the National Confederation of Labor. At age fourteen, her passions were merged by her militant participation in the Libertarian Youth and the Confederate Artistic Group of Santurtzi. She soon developed many tasks related to the distribution of anarchist press, and met her lifelong companion, Julián Ángel Aransáez, who also came from a family with strong Anarcho syndicalist ties.

At ages sixteen and seventeen, Spain's tumultuous political scenario had a profound impact in Julia's life. Firstly, she found herself personally implicated for the first time with politically persecuted peasants that participated in the 1933 Anarchist insurrections around Spain, who feared the risk of getting arrested for their implication. She took upon herself the task of guiding several participants from La Rioja to the Basque Pyrenees frontier to seek refuge.

The Second Republic, now governed by a center-right coalition in 1934, encountered popular



resistance to the proposals of moderating and undoing the political and social reforms made during the foundation of the Republic. Soon, socialists and several anarchists started waves of strikes in protest, resulting in a revolution in the neighboring region of Asturias and affecting several other mining and agricultural epicenters. The repression was almost immediate, and she gave support to the prominent anarchist figures in the Basque Country of Vicente Cuesta and the Aransaez family, the relatives of her partner.

Hermosilla became a militiawoman in the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. She was sent to the front in Otxandio with the anarchist battalion in which she served. There, she witnessed the bombing of Otxandio, the 22nd July 1936, in which tens of people were killed, including several civilians. Hermosilla was injured by the bombs. Before this episode took place, she had been entrusted with a mission: she had to go to the territory that had been occupied by the risen-up army and save the anarchist doctor Isaac Puente. She couldn't accomplish her mission, since Puente was executed before she had the opportunity to release him.

In 1937, she was involved in cultural resistance activities: she performed as an actress for the Confederal Artistic Group.

When Euskadi fell under fascist control, Hermosilla fled the country with her family. She was in exile in France for only two months. After that, she came back to the front; this time, though, she was posted in Catalonia.

With the fall of Catalonia in the hands of the risen-up side, Hermosilla went again into exile to France. During her second exile, she found it very difficult to settle in France, since she first had to deal with rejection and after that she had to stay in refugee camps. It was not until the end of the Second World War when she could meet Aransáez again. After that, they established themselves in Bayona. From there, they helped many Spanish republicans who were fleeing their country because of the repression they suffered after the end of the Civil War by the new regime. One of the groups they helped to escape were the Jews, who were persecuted by the Franco regime too. Hermosilla's resistance was very active during her exile: she did not only help many republicans to escape, but she was also a defender of freedom and cooperated with the Spanish Republican Government in exile as a CNT member.



After World War II, Julia Hermosilla was reunited again with Julian Angel in Bayonne, France and continued her activism in the CNT. At that time, she and the CNT also collaborated with the government of the Spanish Republic in exile.

Regarding the anti-fascist, especially anti-Francoist activity, she served as a connection with Spain as a spy, undertaking numerous secret missions. In 1948, she participated in one that involved an attempt to assassinate Franco. This group was led by Laureano Cerrada, and the plan was to bomb Franco's yacht with a plane purchased in France while the dictator was in San Sebastian. They meticulously planned this plot by studying the terrain and the coast of the city, that was possible thanks to the foundation of a cover company named Transportes Galicia, which organized trips to San Sebastián. Although everything was fully planned, on that day there was a group of airplanes from the Spanish Air Forces, and they were forced to turn around.

Years later, in 1969, she was involved again in another attempt to kill the dictator, this time along the route to one of his palaces. Her partner, Julian Aransaéz, was in prison when he met Julian Kerman de Madariaga, one of the founders of ETA, Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, an armed basque nationalist group. They agreed to plan another attack against the dictator together. Julia was tasked with studying the landscape, placing the bombs, and ETA would detonate them when Franco and his entourage crossed the path. However, ETA members didn't detonate the bombs, since Franco wasn't present; only his wife, Carmen Polo. Subsequently, they sent Julia to deactivate the bombs to avoid causing innocent deaths, as she was the only person who knew how to do it.

For the rest of the years of the dictatorship, she didn't participate in another attempt to kill Franco, but she worked in libertarian press from exile. When Franco finally died, she helped to rebuild the CNT in the Spanish Basque Country.

Hermosilla died when she was 92. Given that she had been politically active since the age of 14 and that she kept cooperating with libertarian organizations in her sixties and seventies, we perceive her as a very committed woman to what she believed in and who never stopped fighting. In 2006, her actions during the Spanish Civil War were recognized and honored in a



public tribute with other anti-Franco actors in Artxanda (Euskadi, Basque Country), where she remembered her assassinated relatives during the war. The theater play named “Les Solidàries” honors several relevant women; one of them is Hermsilla. Her life has been featured in a book published in the year 2011.

We would like to end this podcast with the words that Hermsilla usually used to define herself: *"Rebelde siempre, CNT siempre y Aransáez siempre"*.

