

Duch Plana, M. (2024). *Pa i roses. Píndoles per a una altra història del segle xx*. Editorial Base

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REBUT: 18/06/2024 | ACCEPTAT: 18/06/2024

Bread and roses. Medicine for a different history of the 20th century

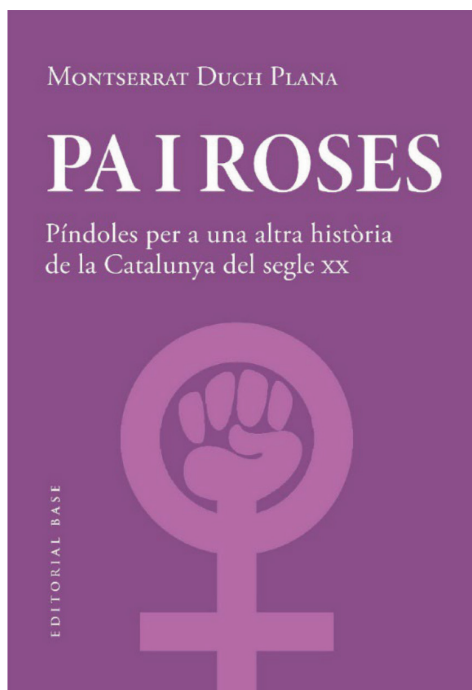
“Bread and roses” and “We want bread and roses too” were political slogans. They originated from a speech made by the American suffragette Helen Todd in which she said “bread for all and roses too”. This was part of the campaign in June 1910 by the Chicago Women’s Club for the right to women’s suffrage in the state of Illinois. The slogan spread and was included in the poem *Bread and Roses* by James Oppenheim, published in 1911¹. One year later, the women’s textile workers’ strike in Lawrence (Massachusetts), now known as the “bread and roses” strike, took place. The workers used the slogan during their struggle, as they demanded not only an improvement in their labour rights but also the recognition of their human rights. In this way, the slogan would become synonymous with the left up to the present day as it demands both fair wages (bread) and decent living conditions (roses).

The slogan is adopted by Dr Montserrat Duch Plana (Tarragona, 1959), professor of Contemporary History at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili, as the title of her book. This is a compilation of articles published in the last decade that encourage us to take another look at Catalonia in the twentieth century, at a different history that has been hidden, silenced and self-sacrificing. Thus, the author allows us to recover and bring to light the “untold stories”. She rightly refers to them as “medicine for a different history”, because she presents each one as a different pill that

1 OPPENHEIM, *Bread and Roses*, in *The American Magazine* (Crowell-Collier Publishing Company, 1911).

we can take to help us rethink and revise Catalan history through a polyhedric analysis of reality. It is a history based on three fundamental axes that are critical for an updated version of the discipline: class, gender and nation. It also focuses directly on the feminist struggle. In the end, the title takes on its meaning because “Bread and roses” became a slogan of revolutionary feminism.

Figure 1. Cover of the book by Montserrat Duch Plana
Source: Editorial Base. <https://www.editorialbase.es/>



In her poem *Cau de llunes*, Maria-Mercè Marçal gave us the well-known quote: “I thank chance for three gifts: being born a woman, working class and of a member of a repressed nation. And the uncertain fate of going three times a rebel”². With these lines she tried to reflect the triple

² MARÇAL, *Divisa*, in *Cau de llunes* (Proa, 1977).

oppression she suffered, which would become the central axis of her literature. A triad that revealed oppression and which led to rebellion, to feminism. Taking her lead from Maria-Mercè and her three gifts, Duch focuses her research on women, class and nation.

Duch begins with a chapter on the history of women, a field of study that has made it possible to name and make visible leading women in history. The historian acknowledges contemporary Catalan women historians and their research and problems, and describes the times they lived through, when history was written through a male filter and with androcentric expectations, values and cultural canons. She thus takes the opportunity to highlight the contributions of women historians and in doing so undermines the invisibility of women and offers a complex exploration of past societies, of the relations of production, of power and of experience between men and women.

The following chapters explore the motto: women, class and nation. In her long career studying social and women's history, Dr Montserrat Duch has focused on examining past societies through social categories that are useful for historical analysis and thus contribute to the enrichment of the discipline.

The first category she refers to is gender. Examining dichotomous categories through the complex lens of gender highlights the power and social relations between men and women. In this sense, Dr Duch examines the degree of secularisation in the parishes of the Camp de Tarragona area. The author states that the feminisation of religion created the discursive possibilities for the socio-political mobilisation of Catholic women. And, at the same time, she also takes advantage of the feminisation of Catholicism, arguing that religious initiatives encouraged the politicisation of women and their visibility and presence in the public sphere. Another important contribution is her research into the sexist obstacles to women's access to education, for example, the exclusion of women from universities until 1910. The desire for knowledge was forbidden to women, but genealogy reveals to us spaces of female freedom among the cracks of power, thus defying the sexist imaginary.

The second category is class. A class perspective reveals how social and productive relations operate, how society is organised and how biases,

power relations and inequality can be observed. It also allows us to look at the phenomena that derive from them, namely individual and collective identity, consciousness and belonging. Duch, principal investigator of the consolidated research group ISOAC³, talks about specific forms and strategies of gender repression under the early Franco regime in Catalonia, for example, the collective guilt apportioned to the women of the Reds and their children. Another aspect that the book deals with is the work done by girls in domestic service, which was a feminised sphere occupied by lower-class women, and a job understood as an inherently female obligation. The feminisation of domestic service in the 19th century, as the author explains, led to precariousness in the sector and a fall in its social position. In this line of research on women's work, she studies the purges of Catalan teachers during the Franco regime and their process of exclusion. She observes once again this gender-specific repression, since the emphasis on women was already present in the antecedents and alluded to factors such as nationalism, irreligiousness, morality and Republican militancy.

The last historical category is that of the nation. Through this we perceive the construction of the nation, the cultural, linguistic or religious ties and the feelings of belonging and nationalism. In this section, the author analyses the traumatic memory of Catalan women during the civil war and emphasises the usefulness of oral sources, which are an open, living and valuable spring of "unsaid words". It gives us access to perception, to life stories and to the knowledge of the meaning of the events for those who lived through them. She also studies women's citizenship rights in political Catalanism and the main representatives of Catalan feminism at the beginning of the 20th century, a contribution that relates to arguments about women and the national imaginary. The role of gender and sexuality in the construction of nations is central. Women were national reproducers and, at the same time, they were excluded from the rights of citizenship, this forming the bedrock of their subordination. The author offers reflections for thinking about the gender of nations, identities and the importance of national sentiments.

3 For more information on the ISOAC consolidated research group: <https://isocac.blogspot.com/>

In the last chapter, she reflects on feminism, a joint struggle that has allowed women to gain recognition, create collective identities, be political subjects and have agency. She takes a look at the Catalan feminist movement throughout the 20th century, beginning with suffragism, moving on to workers' movements and female citizenship, and then analysing the interwar period and autonomous Catalonia during the Second Republic. It also shows the specificities of the second western feminist wave in the territory, under the stranglehold of Franco's dictatorship, and focuses on the feminisms of the transition. In this way, it offers a complete trajectory of the feminist struggle in Catalonia.

This work is important because it allows us to rethink the teaching and learning of history. The author incorporates a more complex, critical and incisive vision of the discipline, which allows for reflection on and the construction of historical narratives other than the existing ones. Traditional historiography has often focused on a political and elite history, where "the nobodies", as Galeano would call them⁴, had no place. This book gives us the tools to interpret social reality and human societies in a comprehensive way and, at the same time, it shows us the contribution of social movements to achieving citizenship rights. It also provides the keys to teaching and learning the social and civic history of Catalonia, to situating precedents and to taking a look at the present, helping students to understand how historical precedents have influenced the current reality. Understanding this history is essential for promoting democratic values in the classroom and for constructing a more plural, fair and inclusive citizenship.

In short, this book is a valuable tool for teachers and students, as it provides the keys for reinterpreting history in a critical and inclusive way. It promotes a fuller understanding of social dynamics and struggles for justice. The work contributes to the construction of a society that is more aware of and committed to democratic values.

In addition, we find the axes of Marçal's literature, which are in line with those of Duch's historical account. Militant poetry and social history, committed and with an impact: women, feminisms, class and nation.

⁴ GALEANO, *Los nadies*, in *El libro de los abrazos* (Siglo XXI, 1989).

Thus, both are aware of living in an unequal world, their poems and histories dealing with these themes. In short, the author offers a work that examines historical accounts from a class, gender and national perspective in order to rethink the history of the past century, so that all voices are heard and that history can be made from below, as Thompson (1963, 1966) proposed, or by the subaltern classes, as Gramsci (1975) would have had it.

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