

Hidden Sewing Spaces.
**Visualizing the housing and sewing workshops of *les jaqueteres* of
Benimaclet (1940-1975)**

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Abstract

Despite women working “two-thirds of the world's working hours, producing half of the world's food,” their labour often goes unrecognized, underpaid or even unpaid, and hidden away in the private sphere. This history thesis seeks to make visible the untold story of les jaqueteres, the women that sew jackets and the spaces where they used to work as seamstresses. Particularly, it focuses on the neighbourhood of Benimaclet, in northern part of the city of Valencia, Spain. This work had not been carried out in the neighbourhood before 1939, as they used to make a living in agriculture. During the post-Spanish Civil War period (post 1939), women were forced to turn to this form of subsistence due to the tense economic situation and contribute to the family income. The houses became workshops, the living rooms served as sewing stations and bedrooms as storage spaces. Yet, the productive activity of sewing jackets, and the conditions in which it was done, were kept hidden from public view. The women went from sewing to cooking or looking after the children, practically without seeing the light of day. Through the analysis of interviews and declarations of some jaqueteres, archival images and fieldwork, this thesis explores the hidden spaces in where these women were sewing. This thesis attempts to shed light on how the houses were reconfigured to become ateliers, the spatial qualities where the work was being done, and the relationship between the public and private spheres. Ultimately, this thesis not only aims to reveal the critical importance of women's work to the history of humanity, but also to demonstrate the lack of spatial conditions for performing feminised works

Keywords: *jaqueteres, hidden spaces, sewing, work, Benimaclet, visualizing*

1. Introduction

Women's working rights have been a subject of long-standing controversy and debate. Despite contributing significantly to the development of welfare states in the Western world, their work tends to be undervalued and unrecognized or underpaid. In the early 21st century, during an anthropological study of human rights, Walter Kalin, Lars Müller and Judith Wyttenbach, activists, lawyers and designers from Europe, discovered that while "working two-thirds of the world's working hours, producing half of the world's food, and earning only 10% of the world's income", their labour often goes unrecognized and is hidden away in the private sphere.¹ The reasons for this ongoing issues are deeply ingrained in societies, and the roots of the problem must be understood in order to address this situation of inequality. This historical thesis focuses on one specific case that illustrates the burdens faced by women in the public and private spheres imposed by a repressive patriarchal society from an architectural and spatial perspective: les jaqueteres from Benimaclet.

Les jaqueteres from Benimaclet, a neighbourhood in the northern border of Valencia, Spain, were a group of young women, teenagers, and children, who typically started working by sewing jackets between the ages of 9 and 12, during the post-civil-war period. The name comes from the Valencian word *jaqueta*, meaning jacket, which were the goods they produced. Working in the informal economy was an attempt to alleviate the severe economic hardship faced by their families under the authoritarian regime of Franco (1939-1975). It is worth noting that the people from Benimaclet had not previously been involved in the textile production and would not continue this business afterward. The phenomenon of les jaqueteres took place in a very concrete period, from around 1939 to 1975. Those are probably one of the reasons why the spaces where they used to work were not designed for sewing. In a brief period, the women transformed their domestic spaces into workshops, which was accomplished with minimal financial resources. This happened throughout the whole neighbourhood, with almost every house having an atelier, as in almost every house there was a *jaquetera*. Therefore, the question arises as to why their story and spaces have remained hidden, despite it happening all over the town. Why was it just women the ones sewing the jackets? How were the spaces they were using for sewing? How did this new job and responsibility affect their lives and daily tasks?

As these women worked hidden in the interior of their homes, little was documented about them. Also, since the neighbourhood was very poor, only few pictures from this period are preserved, and those that exist only capture special events such as weddings or religious

¹ Walter Kalin, Lars Müller, and Judith Wyttenbach, *The face of human rights* (Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2004), 130.

processions. The title of the thesis, *Hidden Spaces*, reflects the scarcity of visual documentation and therefore, the challenge of documenting their history. Regarding the neighbourhood and its urban development, this history thesis gathers secondary sources from published books, as well as primary sources such as historic maps, legal reports, newspaper and magazine articles and first-person accounts. Those sources have been preserved in the municipal library Carola Reig Library, the Archivo Histórico de la Comunitat Valenciana [Historic Archive from the Region of Valencia] and different online archives managed by neighbourhood associations, such as Benimaclet Entra [Benimaclet Enters] and Benimaclet Conta [Benimaclet Narrates].

Especially important for this research are the semi-structured interviews from the short film *Estirant el fil* [Pulling the thread] and the anthropological research *Descosint la invisibilitat* [Unsewing the invisibility]. Both sources were directed, researched and written by the sociologists Arantxa Alfaro Hernandez and Isabel Gadea i Peirò in 2012. To the testimonies of the here interviewed women, conversations by the author with two former *jaqueteres* can be added. Mari Carmen Alpera (1941) and Lola Serra (1942), both from Benimaclet, have been the main source to learn about the work of *les jaqueteres* and life (hi)stories. Thus, qualitative methods such as oral history have been proven indispensable. As most of *les jaqueteres* are elderly women or have passed away, the testimonies of the few remaining ones are extremely essential. Their memories and anecdotes have been indispensable to develop the narrative of the thesis.

Consequently, the initial part of the thesis provides an overview of Benimaclet's urban, social, and political history since its founding in 1594 until 1975. This encompasses its founding as a Muslim farmhouse, further its attachment to the city and its history until the 1970's. In the second part of the research, representing the post-war period (post-1939) during which *les jaqueteres* phenomenon occurred, the critical analysis of the socio-political and economic tensions under Franco's regime are examined through a feminist lens. Furthermore, a more detailed explanation of *les jaqueteres* is provided, including who they were, what they did, why their history remains untold, their role in the economy. Also looking into why there was only one generation of them, and what it meant to be a working woman during that era. These questions will lead to the third part of the thesis, a spatial analysis of their working spaces/houses, where two distinct spheres intersected: the reproductive sphere, where women did all the labour, and the productive sphere, where *les jaqueteres* produced the jackets. The typology of those houses remained the same, but the function changed. Through the stories of the interviewed *jaqueteres*, these spaces will be retraced and brought to light.

In closing, the primary aim of this architectural historical thesis is to shed a light on *les jaqueteres*, with a focus on analysing the spaces in which they worked. Looking into how the architecture of Benimaclet had an influence on their daily life and kept their work from being

unrecognized, unpaid, and unvalued. Giving them a voice will enable the recovery and preservation of women's history.

2. Benimaclet, a neighbourhood with a voice

2.1. The importance of l'horta

Located on the north side of Valencia, Benimaclet was created back in 1594 as an isolated farmhouse, consisting of only a few houses. Named after the Muslim family it belonged to, indicated that the head of the farm was named Maclet/Majlad. With the prefix "Beni" meaning "sons of" in Arabic, everyone else living there was considered his sons. This idea of family, community and looking out for each other comes back further on in many cases in the history of Benimaclet.

The neighbourhood's identity "has always been tied to its productive structure, characterized by being surrounded from farming fields" (Figure 1).² Daily, "hundreds of carts full of goods were coming out" to go sell the goods in the city.³ The traffic of carts displays the clear division between Benimaclet and Valencia. During the 20th century, the period in which this thesis is based on, it was still badly connected to the city due to the farming fields in between. Referred to as l'horta [farmland in Valencian], it is one of the most characteristic elements of the city. Both in the past and present times, l'horta is a simile for Valencia. Barracas are the Valencian traditional houses where the farmers would work and live without electricity or running water and which are still found today. In the current times, Benimaclet is coming back to its origins by trying to preserve the image of l'horta. The uprising of trends like consuming local produces, has reintegrated the fields into the neighbour's everyday life through the creation of urban gardens.⁴

Although, it may seem that in Benimaclet commerce was thriving, due to its high productive agricultural profile and the importance of the fields, in reality, its populations lived in poverty due to low agricultural earnings. In 1937, 66% of the population relied merely on agricultural production for income, with earnings falling below the poverty line. To put this into

² Unless indicated, all quotes from Spanish and Valencian are translated by the author: "La identitat de Benimaclet es traçava al voltant de la seua estructura productiva marcada per les característiques del seu entorn: l'horta". Arantxa Alfaro Hernández and Isabel Gadea i Peirò, *Descosint la invisibilitat: Les jaqueteres de Benimaclet* (Alzira: Germania, 2012), 17.

³ "De les hortes del nostre barri eixien centenars de carros replets de productes alimentaris". Miguel Asensio Gómez, "La presó de Benimaclet. Per un barri sense por, lliure i democràtic," Benimaclet Entra, October 2017, 12.

⁴ "Huertos urbanos", Benimaclet Conta, accessed February, 2023, <http://benimacletconta.com/huertos-urbanos/>.

perspective, the average annual salary of Benimaclet was 179 reales while a family needed around 400/500 reales a year to survive.⁵



Figure 1. *left: Benimaclet isolated in between the fields, the neighbourhood was surrounded by fields from all sides. 1956. Vuelo Americano. Instituto Cartográfico de Valencia, GVA, accessed 13.03.2023.*

Many of the families survived thanks to self-consumption production and the extra money they earned by trading in the markets of Valencia city. All members of the family participated in the fields. This describes Benimaclet as a lower-class working-class neighbourhood. However, it is worth mentioning that in the collective imaginary, the productive responsibility and merit fell on the man. That is, it did not matter if children and women also participated in agricultural production, the profits from the house, the crops, and the business belonged to the man.

2.2. Societal improvement in the 20th century

This same historical period is marked by the Second Republic (1931-1939). In both the political and social spheres. Here significant improvements were implemented in Spanish society. The Constitution of 1931, ensured that sex, social class, wealth between others “shall not be ground for legal privilege”.⁶ This meant that on paper women had the same rights as

⁵ 25 pesetas was considered one real. If we tak into account the average yearly salary from Benimaclet of 179 reales, converted to nowadays Euros it would represent 27.000€.

Francisco Arenas Dolz, “El municipio de Benimaclet en los siglos XVIII y XIX,” in Benimaclet calvarios, hijos de Maclet - A la memoria según costumbres de nuestros mayores (València: Universitat Politècnica de València, 2012), 117-118.

⁶ “No podrán ser fundamento de privilegio jurídico”. Cortes Constituyentes de la República Española, Constitución de la República Española, (Madrid: Palacio de las Cortes Constituyentes, 9th December 1931).

men to obtain a job or financial strength, because “all Spaniards, without distinction of sex, are eligible for (working) positions”.⁷ At this point, their work should have been recognized and therefore paid. Along with the aim of eradicating illiteracy, women were encouraged to obtain an education and strive for more independence.⁸ As the magazine *La voz de la mujer* describes: “Above all the garments of beauty that adorn her, it will be education that best elevates her condition, making her superbly beautiful and elegant.”⁹ By then women were motivated to become more than just housewives.

2.3. Falling under the regime, the image or an ideal woman

After the military rising headed by Francisco Franco who established the fascist dictatorship in 1939/1940 the situation shifted for women. Despite the fact that Spanish women were granted the right to vote in 1933, during the Second Republic, under Franco’s regime, they were highly marginalized. With limited access to education and being relegated to a subjugated position, men assumed the dominant role. Women were expected to become the angel of the house, embodying three major roles: the wife, the mother and the breeder.¹⁰ Through fascist propaganda in women-oriented publications like *Consigna* [motto, keyword, consignment] or *Mujercitas* [little women], ideals around femininity were imposed by the sole legal ultra catholic political party *Falange Española* and its *Sección Femenina* [Feminine Section].¹¹ Since elementary school, women’s education would especially “focus on home life, handicrafts and

⁷ “Todos los españoles, sin distinción de sexo, son admisibles a los empleos.” Cortes Constituyentes de la República Española, Constitución de la República Española.

⁸ “la enseñanza primaria será gratuita y obligatoria.” Cortes Constituyentes de la República Española, Constitución de la República Española.

Beatriz Martínez Pose, “La representación de la mujer en los manuales escolares de la Segunda República y del primer Franquismo (1931-1945),” *Investigaciones feministas* 10, no.1 (Mai 2019): 146, <https://doi.org/10.5209/infe.62375>.

⁹ “Sobre todas las prendas de belleza que la adornen, será la educación la que mejor eleve su condición haciéndola soberanamente hermosa y elegante”. Alberto Camba, “La educación de la mujer,” *La voz de la mujer* 142(December 1927): 1.

¹⁰ María José Rebollo Espinosa and Marina Núñez Gil, “Tradicionales, rebeldes, precursoras: instrucción y educación de las mujeres españolas a través de la prensa femenina (1900-1970),” *Historia de la educación* 26 (Mai 2007): 199.

¹¹ *Falange Española de las JONS* (Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista). La Falange was the fascist party created by Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera at the beginning of the 20th century, before the Civil War, that would later on be annexed to Francos party, giving Franco full power over all right-thought parties and establish his authoritarian regime.

The Feminine Section was the women’s part of the Falange, responsible for the education of women during Franco’s regime, led by Pilar Primo de Rivera, the younger sister of Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera.

domestic occupations”.¹² Married women were encouraged to stay at home, a major difference from the previous time, “being freed from the workshop and factory”.¹³

Between 1945-1975 the birth rate suffered a substantial rise, resulting in what nowadays is known as the post war “baby- boom”.¹⁴ After the dictatorship, the number of births decreased rapidly, since women were under less pressure. Nonetheless, this image of an ideal woman did not fit into the reality of most of the Spanish women, as many families could not afford to have the wife at home tied to the domestic sphere.¹⁵ As mentioned above, during the beginning of the dictatorship, poverty was present in the majority of society, “the hungry and desperate stomachs would be soothed with fear and terror.”¹⁶ In Benimaclet as well as in many other parts of Spain, the post-war period was a tense economic and political time, with people barely surviving on a day-to-day basis. Although discouraged to work, in working-families, women had to be active in the productive sphere while trying to maintain hidden in the private sphere, as the regimes stated. Resulting in their work being underpaid, informal, not valued or recognized. This showcases “the intimate relationship of coexistence between capitalism and patriarchy” in the development of Spanish capitalism.¹⁷

2.4. Benimaclet fighting all together

Furthermore, the change into the rigid Franco’s dictatorship not only affected women and gender constructions, but also Benimaclet as a whole. Several significant projects were planned to improve the city of Valencia and boost its economy, such as the Gran Valencia Plan (1947), inspired by the CIAM.¹⁸ The objective was to design strongly politically controlled cities linked to an unitary national design.¹⁹ The Gran Valencia Plan aimed to

¹² New law that includes embroidery and sewing as mandatory subjects for female schools. Gobierno de la Nación. Boletín Oficial del Estado. Madrid: Gobierno de la Nación, 1941.

¹³ “La educación primaria femenina preparará especialmente para la vida del hogar, artesanías e industrias domésticas” quoting Pilar Primo de Rivera. Carmen Agulló Díaz, “Mujeres para Dios, para la Patria y para el hogar (la educación de la mujer en los años 40),” in VI Coloquio de la Historia de la Educación, (Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago, 1990), 19.

¹⁴ “(se) liberará a la mujer casada del taller y de la fábrica”. Consejo Nacional de Falange Española Tradicional y de las J.O.N.S. Fuero del trabajo, (Madrid: Jefatura del Estado, 1938).

¹⁵ “1945-1975,” Instituto Nacional de Estadística – Anuario Estadístico de España, accessed March 2023, https://www.ine.es/expo_anuarios/1945-1975.html.

¹⁶ Alfaro and Peirò, *Descosint la invisibilitat*, 77.

¹⁷ “Los estómagos hambrientos y desesperados serían tranquilizados con el miedo y el terror”. Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco, “Morir de hambre. Autarquía, escasez y enfermedad en la España del primer Franquismo,” *Pasado y Memoria. Revista de historia contemporánea*, May 2006, 248.

¹⁸ “la íntima relació de convivència entre el capitalisme i el patriarcat”. Alfaro and Peirò, *Descosint la invisibilitat*, 25.

¹⁹ Juan Ramón Selva Royo, “29+1. La ordenación urbanística metropolitana de Gran Valencia” (Thesis, Universidad de Navarra – Universidad de Piura, 2013), 2.

²⁰ Selva Arroyo, “29+1”, 4.

make Valencia one of the primary production centres by investing mainly in the development of the suburbs. However, the insufficient funds meant that the focus was solely on the industry, neglecting the needs of most of the inhabitants. Benimaclet was one of these suburban areas, yet “the streets remained unpaved, they were not even there”.²⁰ Paradoxically, there were major plans to invest in business, meanwhile the society was dying because of famine and several diseases.²¹

With no official institutions to support the people, they had to bond together to survive. By helping each other's neighbours or covering for others to not be discovered by the authorities.²² It was merely impossible for the working-class people to survive, buy food and trade following the norms of the regime. As a result, they had to be involved in illegal trading and business to gain some extra income. Benimaclet worked together as family during the dictatorship and afterward. At the end of the 20th century, fights to remove the trenet [small train in Valencian] a tram that would pass through the middle of the neighbourhood, showcased the power of the people. Mayor accidents were happening, even killing many passers-by. By demonstrating, creating a human chain, neighbours of Benimaclet managed to block the tram and make the city finally remove it in 1990 (Figure 2, left).²³ Today collective struggles continue, such as stopping the massive urbanization project to densify the northern border of Benimaclet, called el PAI. The project has been on hold since 1989 due to the protests (Figure 3, right).²⁴

²⁰ “entonces las calles estaban sin pavimentar, no estaban”. Mari Carmen Alpera (jaquetera from Benimaclet, born in 1941), in discussion with the author, January 2023.

²¹ Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco, *Hambre de siglos, Mundo rural y apoyos sociales del franquismo en Andalucía Oriental (1936-1951)* (Granada: Comares, 2007), 312-314.

²² “En la época esta que te digo de la postguerra, el estraperlo, la cepa blanca, eso era estraperlo, y estaba prohibido”. Mari Carmen Alpera, in discussion with the author, January 2023.

²³ “Luchas del trenet”, Benimaclet Conta, accessed February 2023, <http://benimacletconta.com/luchas-del-trenet/>

²⁴ Arturo Sanz, “Desde el PAI de Benimaclet,” interview by Paco Cremades, *A pie de calle*, Plaza Radio, December 2021, audio, 54:49, <https://plazapodcast.es/a-pie-de-calle-t1x99-desde-el-pai-de-benimaclet>



Figure 2. left: *People demonstrating on the streets stopping the trenet.* Unknown author, approximately 1990, Benimaclet, Benimaclet Conta archive, accessed March 2023.

<http://benimacletconta.com/luchas-del-trenet/>

Figure 3. right: *Pepole demonstration on the northern outskirts of Benimaclet against el PAI. “Water land and freedom, no PAI, nothing” can be read on the banner carried by the demonstrators.* Jesús Signes, 2022, published in Mar Guadalajara, “Benimaclet vuelve a cargar contra el PAI del Ayuntamiento,” *Las Provincias* (Valencia: *Las provincias*, February 2022),

<https://www.lasprovincias.es/valencia-ciudad/benimaclet-vuelve-cargar-pai-ayuntamiento-valencia-20220220181710-nt.html>

3. Les jaqueteres, sewing to survive

For instance, at the end, for many working-class women from Benimaclet during Franco’s time, being a woman meant not having rights, just “jackets, work, sleeping with the husband and having children”.²⁵ In theory, the only task directly attached to women is the specific reproduction function.²⁶ Nonetheless, patriarchal societies have also assigned them daily domestic work and the care work related to other human beings. Still, that work has just been recently recognized as employment or productive labour, therefore assigned a salary, and regulated. Not only during the time of les jaqueteres, nowadays, women also earn less and participate less in the paid workforce and are less represented.²⁷ Although conditions have improved by now, being a woman in the active workforce is an ongoing problem.

*My wife never worked, she only sewed, it was my wife who run the household and took care of the children, we had four.*²⁸

²⁵ “jaquetes, treballar, lilitarte en l’home i tindre fills”, Teresa Valero in Arantxa Alfaro, Antonio Antón, Isabel Gadea, Adrián García, Francisco Roca, *Estirant el fil* (Concurs audiovisual, Benimaclet Imaginació, 2012), shortfilm, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTDp9rsEAK0>.

²⁶ Lourdes Benería, “Reproducción, producción y división sexual del trabajo,” *Revista de Economía Crítica* 28 (2019): 52.

²⁷ European Institute for Gender Equality EIGE, *Gender Equality Index 2022: The Covid-19 pandemic and care* (Luxemburg: European Institute for Gender Equality EIGE, 2022) doi:10.2839/035888.

²⁸ Alfaro and Peiró, *Descosint la invisibilitat*, 117.

3.1. No education, no job, no recognition, just women

In Benimaclet, girls as young as nine years old, were compelled to abandon their studies and assume work if their family were in dire need.²⁹ They would substitute the pencil and notebook for the needle and thread. This responsibility fell exclusively on the girls, meanwhile boys were oriented towards trading, selling goods, or working in the fields. Spanish renowned poet Federico García Lorca already expressed it in his book *La casa de Bernarda Alba* [Bernarda Alba's house], written in 1945: "Thread and needle for the females, whip and mule for the males".³⁰ Yet, besides sewing jackets and working in the domestic realm, women also worked in the fields, and were responsible for getting water from the well for the house and nourishing the animals such as the chickens, horses and pigs.³¹ The patriarchal society was not expecting them to be employed. Therefore, their contributions were often unseen and unpaid, making it complicated to gain a salary and economic independence. In most families, "it was the man who economically maintained" them.³² For men, the wage had a double meaning, it was a compensation for his work and gave them the power of being the one bringing value to the family. The use of the word value is related to society's idea of money, "since the father's wage included the subsistence of the family, this wage was the only one that mattered."³³ In Benimaclet, the productive work of les jaqueteres during this period, "was vital for the survival of the families from working classes," still it was not recognized.³⁴

Factories sought maximum profit in the nascent Spanish capitalistic society. As a result, they would "employ" women in the submerged economy.³⁵ There are no official records of les jaqueteres' work, since "women (were) working in black money."³⁶ There were no labour inspections, as in the eyes of the law, women were not assimilated to workers. Some of them have worked for over "20 years as jaquetera, and never paid social security contributions",

²⁹ Alfaro and Peirò, *Descosint la invisibilitat*, 84.

³⁰ "Hilo y aguja para las hembras. látigo y mula para el varón". Federico García Lorca, *La Casa De Bernarda Alba* (Barcelona: Didacta+, 2022), 59.

³¹ Lola Serra (jaquetera from Benimaclet, born in 1942), in discussion with the author, January 2023.

³² "en el imaginario colectivo, era el varón el que decía proporcionar el mantenimiento económico del grupo". Alfaro and Peirò, *Descosint la invisibilitat*, 57.

³³ Joan Scott, "La mujer trabajadora del Siglo XIX", in *Historias de las Mujeres* (Madrid: Taurus, 1993), 418.

³⁴ "el sou que provenia de la seua tasca productiva era essencial per la supervivència de les famílies de les classes popular", Alfaro and Peirò, *Descosint la invisibilitat*, 12.

³⁵ Employ in this case is written in brackets, as they did not had legal working contract, les jaqueteres were not hired. Nonetheless, they got commissions and afterwards a small monetarian compensation from this textile factories.

³⁶ "aquest poble tenia molta dona trevallant en diners negres". Amparo Arce in Alfaro, Antón, Gadea, García and Roca, *Estirant el fil*.

because legally they were never paid.³⁷ Consequently, they did not have rights as workers and there was no institution or laws that could protect them. At a further stage in history, these type of workshops inside the houses got regulated and women had to be legally hired.³⁸ Therefore, the employers stopped giving them commissions, their work became “too expensive”. The production moved to factories on the outskirts of the city, some women went there to work, but most of them stopped sewing. As a result, the phenomena of *les jaqueteres* existed only during a very precise time, where their wage as seamstresses was cheaper than the one for men in the factories.

3.2. Working and sewing, women tied to the domestic sphere

When the little girls started working, they were apprentices, only accomplishing small tasks. Sewing most of the parts by hand, they could learn from older women in their houses and improve their status, everything inside the domestic realm. Some houses had the benefit of having a sewing machine, which accelerated the production. Nonetheless, the workload exceeded the eight-hour working day during the week. From the authoritarian regime's side, laws had been passed to control workers' rights and prevent abuse in the workplace. They committed to restrain the working hours in order to protect the worker.³⁹ However, some of the women would stay “sewing all night long, because the day later one had to hand in the jackets if one wanted to get paid.”⁴⁰ As in the eyes of the law, these women were not part of the active workforce, they were not protected by these laws. *Les jaqueteres*, worked endlessly without being able to claim their rights.

Every Saturday, they would go to the factory by foot or tram, carrying all the heavy jackets in a cloth, to deliver them to their employers. Sometimes, they were not even allowed to take the tram as their jackets would assume too much space, and they had to go by foot.⁴¹ One of these factories from the company Feycu was located in Xirivella, a small city on the south of Valencia. If we look at the distance on a map nowadays, it will take more than 1:30h to get

³⁷ “jo he treballat 20 anys de jaquetera, jo no he pagat mai la seguretat social per que a mi no em pagaben, era tot en negro”, Matilde Artalejo in Alfaro, Antón, Gadea, García and Roca, *Estirant el fil*.

³⁸ There is not a specific date for the regulation of the workforce, as this information comes from the interview of Mari Carmen, she did not know exactly when it happen, it can be guessed that it was at the final stages of the dictatorship, beginning of the transition, meaning at the end of the 70's.

³⁹ “The State commits to take constant and effective action in the defence of the worker, his life and his work. It shall restrict the length of the working day so that it is not excessive, and shall provide work with all kinds of guarantees of a protective and humanitarian nature”. - “El estado se compromete a ejercer una acción constante y eficaz en defensa del trabajador, su vida y su trabajo. Limitará convenientemente la duración de la jornada para que no sea excesiva, y otorgará el trabajo toda suerte de garantías de orden defensivo y humanitario”. Gobierno de la Nación, *Fuero del trabajo* 1938, (Madrid: Agencia Estatal Boletín del Estado, 1938).

⁴⁰ “m'he quedat moltes nits, tota la nit sensera cosint. Perque al altre dia teniem que tornarles, perque sino no cobravem”, Matilde Artalejo in Alfaro, Antón, Gadea, García and Roca, *Estirant el fil*.

⁴¹ Vicenta Valero in Alfaro, Antón, Gadea, García and Roca, *Estirant el fil*.

there by foot.⁴² Once in the factory, the male employers will check if the work was worth a penny and pay them depending on the quality. After taking in the goods, they would give out the new patterns and already cut out pieces of cloth and leather for the next week. All les jaqueteres in Benimaclet went through the same schedule, sewing throughout the week and delivering during the weekends. They would work in many different ateliers, each one of them hidden in the interiors of their own house or a family member.

*Well, there were two sisters, the leader and my sister. Then we were two, three, I think four, apprentices. We would finish and take them to the centre, to return them, we would say. And the one [workshop] next door would have more people, I do not know.*⁴³

One of the companies that employed some jaqueteres was Feycu, nowadays converted into a just fabric shop. Feycu's designs were patented, and the brand was advertised in important Spanish magazines. The factory in Xirivella was architecturally acclaimed by architects and historians, fighting to avoid its demolition in 2003.⁴⁴ Carmen Jordá, Professor of architectural composition at the Polytechnic University of Valencia, member of Docomomo (international organisation for the conservation and recording of the modern movement), states that the monumentality and volumetric give the building a very distinctive "basilica like" style.⁴⁵ With its "austerity, functionality, use of concrete", the building follows the rupturists ideas from the 20th century.⁴⁶ In the 1950's and 1960's, Feycu was a well-known powerful firm. Nonetheless the company did not find it a priority to invest in their main human capital, meaning the female seamstresses. Les jaqueteres would receive orders on a weekly basis, which entailed such a high workload, which were almost impossible to finish at time. As a result of this "they would dedicate their entire day exclusively to work, a day, in which there was no leisure time."⁴⁷ However, if one week they would become less commissions, being left without any jacket meant no extra money for the household. Coming back to this idea of family and community taking care of one another. Les jaqueteres, would than help each other

⁴² Google maps has been use for this approximate calculation, taking the centre of Benimaclet and Xirivella as reference points. Calculation by the author. Accessed on March 2023.

⁴³ "Pues eran dos hermanas, la jefa y una hermana. Luego eramos dos, tres, creo que cuatro aprendices. Que terminábamos y lo llevabamos al centro, a devolverlas que decíamos. Y el [taller] de al lado tendría más gente", Lola Serra, in discussion with the author, January 2023.

⁴⁴ M.J.C., "Comienzan la limpieza del solar de Feycu en Xirivella pese a que no hay un proyecto definido", Las Provincias, February 22, 2008, <https://www.lasprovincias.es/valencia/20080222/horta/comienzan-limpieza-solar-feycu-20080222.html>.

⁴⁵ "Fábrica textil Feycu", Docomomo Ibérico, accessed March 2023, <https://docomomoiberico.com/edificios/fabrica-textil-feycu/>.

⁴⁶ Ferran Bono, "Fabrica patrimonio", El Pais, July 4, 2005, https://elpais.com/diario/2005/07/04/cvalenciana/1120504696_850215.html.

⁴⁷ "una imatge d'un dia a dia dedicat quasi exclusivament al treball, en el qual el temps d'oci brillava per la seua absència". Alfaro and Peiró, Descosint la invisibilitat, 113.

out, working from one atelier to the other, depending on where the heavier workload was.⁴⁸ This highlight again the sense of community, cooperation and sorority. But how did their work remain hidden and untold if it was happening all over town?

4. Production in the reproductive spaces

4.1. The houses from the outside

Houses in Spanish villages and small urban neighbourhoods were constructed as townhouses, relatively small in size, with a front façade facing the street. This facade served as a boundary between the public and private domains. Typically, one entire family would reside in one of these homes, from the children to the grandparents. Occasionally, multiple families would share the same dwelling, subletting parts of it, to have an extra bit of income. Despite the limited number of rooms available, everyone had to fit inside, in Benimaclet they “would make beds with chairs and mattresses at night to sleep.”⁴⁹ The houses were adapted to their individual immediate needs with very little resources, meaning if they had to host extra people, they would find a way to do so.

Regarding les jaqueteres, the homes served as workshops. The typology remained the same, a village townhouse, but they had to host a new function: the sewing workshop. In some bedrooms sewing tables were added, some living rooms were turned into ironing stations and in every wardrobe, clothes, textiles, patches, and jackets were stored.

These ateliers were to find in every ground floor.⁵⁰ As one walked down the street, one could hear “plugging in the radio with the stories [...] they were sewing and singing.”⁵¹ Although, one could hear them, they remained hidden behind these facades. Therefore, these thresholds, doors, and windows, usually open towards the street, would not connect but separated the public from the private sphere. Although something very typical for small Spanish villages and neighbourhoods is to leave all the doors open because there is a big sense of community, curtains were present, enclosing the interior spaces (Figure 4). Although the door might have been open, still nobody could have had glimpse inside. Women used to work inside, behind the scenes, and their work remained hidden and unrecognized. “The fact that there were no

⁴⁸ Mari Carmen Alpera, in discussion with the author, January 2023.

⁴⁹ “Sabes que hacían con colchones y sillas, camas por la noche para dormir.” Mari Carmen Alpera, in discussion with the author, January 2023.

⁵⁰ Vicenta Valero in Alfaro, Antón, Gadea, García and Roca, *Estirant el fil*.

⁵¹ “las oías como tenían las radios enchufadas con las novelitas [...] y ellas cosiendo y cantando” Mari Carmen in discussion with the author, January 2023.

spaces enabled for specific development of this profession was due to an absolute lack of infrastructure that hindered the performance of this work.”⁵²



Figure 4. *Woman glooming from the shadow and the private sphere and looking into the public market square.* Unknown author, 1960, Paco Guardado personal archive

4.2. Walking through the house until the sewing atelier

How did those interior spaces where they actually worked and spent all their days look like? Upon entering the house, one would occasionally find two rocking chairs for the grandparents. They would be safeguarding the home, as well as guarding the women sewing within. It is noteworthy that during this time, it was considered beneficial for younger girls to remain in the house, untouched, surrounded by elders, as it protected them from the “dangers” on the streets.⁵³

Most houses in the early 1950’s consisted of only one ground floor, as they were cheaper to build, with later developments reaching up to three or four stories. A lengthy corridor stretched from the entrance to the rear of the house, with rooms on either one or both sides. Since it received light solely from the entrance and the backyard, the corridor was rather dim. The rooms on the sides had similar issues, with some lacking windows facing the outside, having only some towards the other rooms. The original floor plan was simple, with distinct functions such as bedrooms, a kitchen and sometimes a small living room, but no ateliers

⁵² “El fet que no foren espais habilitats per al desenvolupament d’aquest ofici es traudeix en una absoluta carència d’infraestructures que obstaculitzava la realització d’aquest treball”. Alfaro and Peiró, *Descosint la invisibilitat*, 103.

⁵³ With dangers they refer to either be raped or attacked by men or just not being seen as proper virgin ladies. Amparo Arce in Alfaro, Antón, Gadea, García and Roca, *Estirant el fil*.

(Figure 5). Upon reaching the courtyard, one might have found plants or a small vegetable garden, as well as animals such as chicken or rabbits for the family's self-sufficiency. In Mari Carmen's case, one of the interviewed women, the kitchen was situated at the rear of the courtyard, entirely isolated from the rest of the house. In these small back rooms, they would cook with coal, utilize the toilet, or iron clothing. The smell of the kitchen and bathroom were not pleasant and therefore separated from the living areas, and yet the women spent most of their time in them. "The floor was like rough concrete", without a proper floor finishing, as these spaces were not designed for living purposes.⁵⁴ The location of these rooms and unfinished design showcases the lack of interest and money invested in feminised spaces.

4.3. The rare case of Lola Serra – Visualizing the hidden spaces

In a very specific and even rare case, the one of Lola Serra, the courtyard also hosted the sewing workshop. This is not the norm, as usually houses did not have a designated room for les jaqueteres. Although it may seem unpleasant to work next to the smelling kitchen and animals, the women working there were fortunate, as they had their own proper space. It was located at the rarest side, hidden, probably without heating or a proper floor. Nonetheless, they had a workspace. With just a few tables and two sewing machines, they would produce day and night. When the sun went down, they used some fluorescent light tubes to be able to continue working.⁵⁵

This typology of houses, where women are separated from the public life can be assimilated to the ancient Greek gynaeceum, the women's rooms at the back of houses around 500 BCE.⁵⁶ These rooms tended to be dark and unclean, which highlights the unhuman conditions they had to withstand in their own houses. Back during the Greek but also the Romans, these sewing spaces for women existed, they have always been part of the productive force of the household. They produced textiles and participated in the household economy. In both historic periods, as well as with the phenomenon of les jaqueteres, there is a point in the narrative when men take over, due to political and societal changes. In the Roman world, it was since cities started to get urbanized, and production became merely a male activity.⁵⁷ With les jaqueteres, legislations and cultural changes forced women to be legally hired, and for that there were already men, it was no longer interesting employing women.

⁵⁴ "el piso del suelo del corral era de cemento sin pulir." Lola Serra in discussion with the author, January 2023.

⁵⁵ Lola Serra in discussion with the author, January 2023.

⁵⁶ "Gynaeceum", Collins Dictionary, accessed March 2023, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/gynaeceum>

⁵⁷ Anna C. Kelly, "Searching for professional women in the mid to late roman textile industry," *Past & Present* 258 (February 2023): 3-43, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtac007>.

*Hidden Sewing Spaces.
Visualizing the housing and sewing workshops of les jaqueteres of Benimaclet (1940-1975)*

To further underscore the issue of women being confined to the domestic work, it is interesting to examine the case of Lola Serra's sister. She lived with her husband in the house adjacent to the workshop (Figure 6), which was owned by her in-laws. All women from both sides of the family, including Lola, would then work there. The two houses were interconnected through a small door in the courtyard, implying that they could move to and from “work” without ever having to set foot on the public street. On the one side, there was the sewing atelier, and on the sister's side, they had chickens and rabbits. Women were working where the animals were located. Lola frequently stayed overnight at her sister's house, since her actual house was in the midst of fields. For a young woman it was dangerous and badly seen to walk home unaccompanied at night.⁵⁸

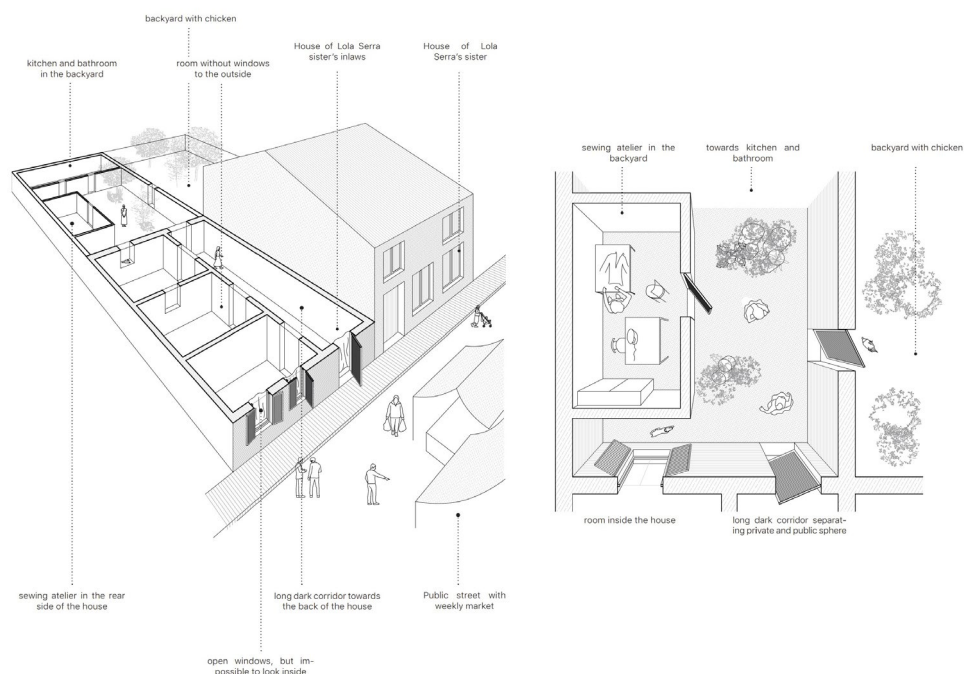


Figure 5. left: *Reconstruction of the public street and the private sphere in the background, one can not see what is going on inside the house, behind the facade.*

“Behind the closed facade”, by the author, 2023.

Figure 6. right: *Reconstruction of the backyard with a sewing atelier, plants and unfinished floor.*

“Looking inside”, by the author, 2023.

Depending on the workload, Lola and her sister could go several days without venturing onto the public streets. This was not only the case of Lola and her sister, many jaqueteres were

⁵⁸ Mari Carmen in discussion with the author, January 2023.

enclosed in the domestic sphere. Inside the homes, they would sew “and from that room to the other one to sleep, without seeing the street.”⁵⁹ Amparo Arce, another *jaquetera*, in an interview considered herself privileged, due to that fact that her house had a courtyard. This allowed her to get some fresh air and enjoy the sun while sewing.

Les *jaqueteres* would not escape these spaces during the week.⁶⁰ Due to social constructions the spaces these women belonged to be the domestic interiors. Further from that, “women were not welcomed in lot of spaces.”⁶¹ Architecture and urban design played a role in oppression, contributing to hide their work in the backyard, creating differentiated private and public spheres to segregate on the gendered division of work. Those women had often to adapt to the houses instead of the other way around. They would work without rest, as an obligation “to help the family survive”, worked endlessly hidden away in the interiors without recognition.⁶²

5. Conclusion

Overall, the untold story of les *jaqueteres* of Benimaclet highlights the patriarchal society in which women must live post 1939. Expected to invisibly work for free in the household and the field and informally underpaid in the productive sphere when needed. There are no further explanations than cultural and societal pressure to why women are the ones taking up so much workload. This highlights the societal oppression of women, as they were not supposed to work, and not acknowledging their efforts served as a means of devaluating their contributions. Even more so, falling to disrespect their work and how they helped many families to economically survive during the post-war period.

Although the village has been prone to speak up and fight for what it stands many times in his history, women were silently working in the interiors, without raising their voices. Social constructs and the authoritarian fascist dictatorship pushed these women towards the reproductive sphere. Even though their work was known in the neighbourhood, as almost all of them were part of the group, gender constructions did not allow their story to be told. Their work was not recognised or rewarded for any of their housework, care work, or sewing. Neither was it acknowledge from a legal point of view as they worked in the submerged economy for big textile firms like Feycu, or from the societal part, as women were not expected to work and participate in the productive sphere. The spaces they were allowed to

⁵⁹ “D’eixa habitació per la nit t’en anaves a dormir a l’altra habitació, sense vore el carrer”, Amparo Arce in Alfaro, Antón, Gadea, García and Roca, *Estirant el fil*.

⁶⁰ “Pero de ahí, así no salíamos en toda la semana”, Alfaro and Peirò, *Descosint la invisibilitat*, 106.

⁶¹ “la dona no tenia puesto en molts puestos”, Teresa Valero in in Alfaro, Antón, Gadea, García and Roca, *Estirant el fil*.

⁶² “no hay más remedio si se quiere sacar la familia adelante”. Enric Sanchis, *El Tabajo a Domicilio en el Pais Valenciano*, (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, Instituto de la Mujer, 1984), 35.

be in, were the darkest and most isolated ones in the house. Kitchen, bathroom, or the sewing atelier were to find at the rear side of the house, completely detached for the public sphere at the front facade. These were the rooms dedicated to the maintenance of the household, meaning, workspaces, nonetheless, as said before, it was never recognized as work. The architecture influenced by the social constructions played a role in hiding the women away and keeping the story of les jaqueteres untold.

Benimaclet and its urban layout is not an isolated case, there are more untold stories like the one of les jaqueteres. Sadly, many of those stories will be never told. For the informal work of the Spanish working-class women from their generation, there are no official records or archives. As these women grow old, their memories and stories slowly become erased. Luckily, this will not be the case of les jaqueteres anymore.

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FIGURE LIST

Figure 1: Instituto Cartográfico de Valencia, GVA. Vuelo Americano. 1956.
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Figure 4: Unknown author. 1960. Paco Guardado personal archive.

Figure 5: “Behind the closed facade”. By the author. 2023.

Figure 6: “Looking inside”. By the author. 2023.