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REPRESIÓN DE GÉNERO Y VIOLENCIA SEXUADA EN LA ESPAÑA FRANQUISTA: LOS TESTIMONIOS DE MERCEDES NÚÑEZ TARGA

GENDERED REPRESSION AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN FRANCOIST SPAIN: THE TESTIMONIES OF MERCEDES NÚÑEZ TARGA

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Resumen: La práctica sistemática de violencia de género contra las mujeres republicanas durante y después de la guerra civil española sigue siendo un tema marginal en los estudios sobre el periodo. Aunque el historiador Paul Preston describe la violencia contra las mujeres, que incluye la tortura sexual y la violación, como parte central de la represión nacionalista, este aspecto de la historia franquista ha sido relegado a una posición periférica en la historiografía. Esta marginalización se debe en parte al estigma asociado con experiencias de violación y abuso sexual, pero también al silenciamiento más generalizado de las experiencias de la mujer a manos de la historiografía contemporánea. El presente artículo propone abordar este tema partiendo de los testimonios de mujeres republicanas y de recientes trabajos históricos. En particular, el estudio parte de una revisión de los testimonios de la activista política catalano-gallega Mercedes Núñez Targa, *Cárcel de Ventas* (1967) y *Destinada al crematorio* (1980). El análisis se centra en sus descripciones en *Cárcel de Ventas* de las condiciones horribles que sufrieron las presas políticas republicanas en Ventas y en sus referencias a la violencia sexual que sufrieron.

Palabras clave: Núñez Targa. Violencia sexual. España franquista.

Abstract: The systematic perpetration of gendered violence against Republican women during and after the Spanish Civil War continues to be under-estimated and largely overlooked in historical and other accounts of the period. Despite the fact that Paul Preston has described the persecution of women, including sexual torture and rape, as a central part of the Nationalist repression, this aspect of the Francoist reign of terror continues to be peripheral to work on the period. This reflects in part the stigma of first-person reports of rape and sexual violence and a desire on the part of survivors to keep such traumatic experiences private. It is also, attributable, however, to a more generalised silencing of the experiences of women within a masculinist hegemonic historical record. This article seeks to highlight this gap in discussions of Francoist repression, drawing on both the testimonial evidence of survivors and on recent historical work. In particular, this article will draw on the testimonial writings of Catalan-Galician political activist Mercedes Núñez Targa, *Cárcel de*

Ventas (1967) and *Destinada al crematorio* (1980). It will focus particularly on her account in the former text of the horrific conditions that Republican prisoners endured in Ventas prison and the widespread practice of gendered violence inflicted on female prisoners.

Key-words: Núñez Targa. Sexual violence. Francoist Spain.

The extensive and systematic perpetration of gendered violence against Republican women during and after the Spanish Civil War continues to be underestimated and largely overlooked in historical and other accounts of the period. Despite the fact that Paul Preston (2012) has described the persecution of women, including sexual torture and rape, as a “central ... part of the repression carried out by the rebels” (Preston, 2012: xix), this aspect of the Francoist reign of terror continues to be at best peripheral to work on the period. This reflects in part the social prohibition and stigma of first-person reports of rape and sexual violence and a desire of the part of survivors to keep the affective and the sexual private. It is also, attributable, however, to a more generalised silencing of the experiences of women within a masculinist hegemonic historical record. This silence, like the violence itself, is gendered; as Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith have reminded us, “what a culture remembers and what it chooses to forget are intricately bound up with issues of power and hegemony, and thus with gender” (Smith, 2002: 6). This article seeks to highlight this gap in discussions of Francoist repression, drawing on both the testimonial evidence of survivors and on recent historical work. In particular, this discussion will make reference to the testimonial writings of Catalan-Galician political activist Mercedes Núñez Targa entitled *Cárcel de Ventas* (1967) and *Destinada al crematorio* (1980). Núñez Targa, who was imprisoned in Spain, France and Germany at the end of the Civil War, details in her accounts the horrific conditions of imprisonment and the widespread practice of gendered violence suffered by women in both Francoist and Nazi camps and prisons.

While precise statistical analysis of the prevalence of gendered violence under Francoism is impossible, testimonial and historical accounts indicate that many thousands of Republican women experienced what historian Maud Joly terms “las violencias sexuadas” or “la represión sexuada” during the war and dictatorship (2008: 89). These terms include the generalised practices of head shaving, the forced ingestion of cod liver oil, beatings and torture, as well as rape and other forms of sexual violence, many of which were targeted directly at parts of the body associated with femininity and motherhood. In a similar vein, the term “sexualized violence” is invoked by Brigitte Halbmayr in her work on violence

ce inflicted on Jewish women by the Nazis. For Halbmayr, sexualized violence “covers direct physical expressions of violence that are bodily attacks, an unauthorized crossing of body boundaries. They range from flagrant sexual advance to rape... This definition also allows for the inclusion of indirect, often emotional expressions of violence, such as imposed nakedness and accompanying feelings of shame, infringement on intimate space, deplorable hygienic conditions, leering stares, suggestive insults, and humiliating methods of physical examinations” (Halbmayr, 2010: 30).

All of these were suffered by Republican women under Francoism, who were to be punished for having transgressed traditional notions of Spanish womanhood by embracing the gender liberation that characterised Republican reforms. The role of women, as summarised by one of the regime’s military leaders, was to “educate the next generation, so that our children will suckle purity of the race” (as cited in Richards, 2013: 58). Left-wing women were, however, considered to constitute a significant threat to the desired purity of the so-called Hispanic race according to Antonio Vallejo Nájera, a Nazi sympathising psychiatrist who was the regime’s Director of Psychological Research. Using a race-based model of eugenics to argue that there were direct links between Marxist ideology and both mental deficiency and criminal tendencies, Vallejo Nájera (1937) argued that the purity of the race and the “regeneration” of the nation depended on the containment or elimination of left-wing ideologies and those who promoted such ideas. Women were a particular target due to their ability to transmit their “ideological deviance” to the next generation, with Vallejo Nájera advocating the implementation of a “disciplina social muy severa” (1938: 12) to contain this threat. His pseudo-scientific discourse was therefore deployed by the regime as justification for the repressive practices against women, including the separation of children from their Republican mothers¹. The treatment directed at Republican women was therefore gender specific and particularly harsh because, as Michael Richards has explained, for the regime “triumph meant more than forcing the military capitulation of Republican Spain: it signified the annihilation of the idea of the Republic and of those who ‘transmitted’ this ideal” (1998: 39).

As a result, women associated with the Republic, whether through their own convictions or actions or as a result of supposed crimes committed by males clo-

¹ See also Vallejo Nájera’s *Política racial del nuevo Estado* (1938) and *La locura y la guerra* (1939). Vallejo Nájera was appointed Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Madrid following the Civil War. Critiques of the regime’s pseudo-scientific discourse include Enrique González Duro’s *Los psiquiatras de Franco* (2008) and Francisco Sevillano’s *Rojos* (2007).

se to them, were subject to a wide range of repressive practices. In *The Spanish Holocaust* (2012), Preston documents the horrifying episodes of gendered violence that took place in towns and villages across Spain. One common punishment was head shaving, a practice intended to publicly humiliate Republican women, who would often be paraded through the streets with shaven heads or forced to clean public places like plazas and churches with their heads shaved and with signs around their necks with their “crimes” inscribed on them. As Gina Herrmann has noted, “the shaving of the head is a form of sexual violence that garnered its power from its display in the public sphere, quite usually and literally in the town plaza” (Herrmann, 2012: 132). A further practice intended to cause humiliation and shame was forcing women to ingest large doses of castor oil that caused them to defecate uncontrollably, supposedly as a means of purging and cleansing the impure body. Again, procession through the streets in this condition for public vilification was common practice.

Episodes of sexual violence and rape were also common. Wives and daughters of Republicans were routinely detained, raped and tortured. One of numerous examples that Preston (2012) cites is an episode of sexual torture carried out to extract a forced confession, in which a woman’s breasts were “horribly deformed as a result of being burned with lighters and matches until sections of flesh had burned away. Her nipples had been ripped off with staplers” (Preston, 2012: 485). Rape was also deployed as a means to extract either confessions or information about the activities or whereabouts of their male companions. It was also common for girls and young women to be “given” to groups of soldiers, with many accounts of gang rape referring specifically to Moroccan troops in these instances. Preston cites the account of John T. Whitaker of the *New York Herald Tribune* regarding this alleged practice: “These ‘regenerators’ of Spain rarely denied, too, that they deliberately gave white women to the Moors. On the contrary, they circulated over the whole front the warning that any woman found with Red troops would meet that fate” (Whitaker, as cited in Preston, 2012: 333).

It is evident that this range of repressive practices perpetrated against women associated with the Republic, from verbal abuse and humiliation to sexual torture and rape, were deployed as weapons of war, used to cement the supremacy of the victors and to thwart resistance. The body of the Republican woman thereby became the field of a battle both physical and symbolic. However, despite the prevalence of such violence throughout Nationalist Spain, Joly notes that “la cuestión de las violencias sexuales de la guerra — analizadas como tales — constituye sólo muy raramente un objeto de historia en sí mismo” (Joly, 2008: 93).

It is within this context of a lack of both historical studies and reliable official documentation that the testimonial accounts of survivors and witnesses of gendered repression serve as critical sources of information. These works offer important insights into the gendered repression of the war and postwar years, and of women's experiences of imprisonment. Key texts in this field include the women's testimonies compiled by Tomasa Cuevas, herself a Communist activist who was arrested and tortured during the Franco years, together with the testimonial accounts of Sara Berenguer, Juana Doña, Eva Forest, Nieves Castro, Remedios Montero and Esperanza Martínez, among others; these works have attracted varying levels of public and scholarly attention. Very little critical attention has been paid to date to the writings of Mercedes Núñez Targa, whose first published testimonial account details her experience in Ventas prison for some two years in the early 1940s. While a small number of scholarly articles make reference to Núñez Targa's life and works, there has not been extensive analysis of her writing.²

Born in 1911 in Barcelona to a Catalan mother and Galician father, Núñez Targa began her working life at the age of 16 when, despite her parents' opposition, she took a job in a film laboratory, later working as a typist in the Consulate of Chile, where she would later become secretary to Consul Pablo Neruda. During the years of the Second Republic, Núñez Targa joined a number of progressive organisations, such as the Club Femení i d'Esports and the Ateneu Enciclopèdic Popular, which held seminars and lectures on literature and politics.

It was in 1936, following the death of her father who had discouraged her participation in political activities, that Núñez Targa joined first Socialist and then Communist youth organisations in Cataluña. In 1939, with the fall of Barcelona and Republican defeat in the Civil War imminent, the Communist Party leadership charged Núñez Targa with the task of re-establishing a clandestine unit of the Party in La Coruña (Galicia). She was soon under surveillance by the security services, leading to her arrest in late 1939 and her imprisonment in Betanzos women's prison, followed by the La Coruña provincial prison and finally in Ventas women's prison in Madrid, where she would spend over two years.

On her release from Ventas in 1942, Núñez Targa crossed the Pyrenees into France, where she joined the French resistance. She gained employment as a cook for the occupying Nazi forces in Carcassonne, whereby she was able to supply information to her comrades about the unit, also hiding guerrilla fighters in her

² Some reference to Núñez Targa is included in José Romera Castillo (2009), and Fernando Hernández Holgado (2015).

home and providing false documents to Resistance fighters. Arrested again in 1944, Núñez Targa was imprisoned in various camps and prisons, before being taken to the Nazi concentration camp of Ravensbrück, where she was put into a forced labour unit until she fell ill with tuberculosis. No longer able to work, she was set to be taken from the camp to the gas chamber, but was saved by the arrival of Allied troops in April 1945.

Following the liberation of the camp, Núñez Targa returned to France where she would remain until the end of the Franco dictatorship. She met her partner Medardo Iglesias Martí, with whom she had a son in 1949, and she continued her political activism during her years of exile, supporting Spanish exiles and clandestine militants and re-establishing the Galician branch of the Communist Party from exile. She was awarded numerous awards and honours from the French government for her work as part of the resistance movement. In 1975, following the death of Franco, Núñez Targa finally returned to Spain, spending the rest of her life in Galicia where she gave presentations and participated in radio interviews and televised debates on the importance of remembering Spaniards' experiences of repression. She died in Vigo in 1986.

Núñez Targa wrote two testimonial accounts of her experiences of imprisonment. The first, *Cárcel de Ventas*, published in Spanish in France in 1967, recounts her experiences in Ventas women's prison and was one of the first published accounts of the atrocities committed by the Franco regime in women's prisons. Her second work, *Destinada al crematorio*, recounting her experiences in the Nazi concentration camps, was originally published in 1980 in Catalán, and was only published in Spanish in 2011. These two testimonies have more recently been published together in one volume entitled *El valor de la memoria. De la cárcel de Ventas al campo de Ravensbrück* (2016), edited by Núñez Targa's son, Pablo Iglesias Núñez, who wanted his mother's story to be told in contemporary Spain³. Together with his partner and co-editor Ana Bonet Solé, Iglesias Núñez has also participated in seminars and events throughout Spain to promote *El valor de la memoria* and raise awareness of the stories of his mother and her compatriots as a means of ensuring their accounts do not fall into oblivion.

At the time of writing her testimonies, Núñez Targa likewise pointed to the importance of telling the stories of imprisonment and violence to ensure that these formed part of the historical record, by doing so fulfilling a promise she made to

³ Full biographical details of the various editions and translations of Núñez Targa's works are included in the list of references.

a cellmate in Ventas who asked her, if she made it out of prison, to speak of their ordeal: “Explica a los de la calle lo que has visto aquí” (2016: 34). Núñez Targa also undertook to give an accurate and truthful account of her experiences and those of her fellow prisoners, stating in the Introduction to *Cárcel de Ventas* her goal to “restituir con la mayor fidelidad posible aquella hora demencial de la posguerra vivida por las reclusas de Ventas” (2016: 34). She gave a similar undertaking in *Destinada al crematorio*, insisting on the truth of her account and noting that writing a testimonial account is not a creative endeavour: “No se trata de hacer obra literaria, sino de decir la verdad. Y eso sí que lo hare” (2016: 125). While affirmations of verisimilitude are not unusual in testimonial works, such claims overlook the inevitable process of selection, omission and reconstruction that is inherent to any process of remembering the past from the perspective of the present.

The 2016 edition of Núñez Targa’s two texts also includes some twenty pages of photographs and official documents, including her “Orden de Búsqueda y Captura”, her prison records and a card identifying her as a former member of the Resistance (2016: 90, 300 and 304). As well as constituting a means of enshrining these documents in the historical record, their inclusion serves as an additional means of authenticating Núñez Targa’s testimonies and adds a very real dimension to her accounts of her experiences in Ventas and the Nazi concentration camps for the reader. My discussion in this article focuses on Núñez Targa’s earlier work, *Cárcel de Ventas*, which leaves a testimonial legacy of the repression directed at Republican women within that site of imprisonment.

Ventas Prison was built in 1931 and designed by the Republican Director General of Prisons, Victoria Kent, to be a model prison for women which would facilitate prisoners’ rehabilitation and eventual reintegration into society. However, under the Nationalists, Ventas became what has been described as “un almacén de mujeres” (Cuevas, 1985: 17), where up to 14,000 women were crowded into a prison that was built to house only 500 (Hernández Holgado, 2003: 303), meaning that twelve or more women shared cells designed for one person. The excessive number of prisoners, together with a lack of food, water and medical care, led to many instances of disease and death. Abuse, humiliation, physical punishment and sexual torture against inmates were also common practice in the prison.

Many aspects of the conditions and experiences of the inmates at Ventas Prison were not unique within the vast penitentiary network established by the Franco regime. Preston (2012), Hernández Holgado (2003) and others have indicated that overcrowding, disease, malnutrition and a lack of basic hygiene were common in many prisons and detention centres. Preston also notes that “torture and mal-

treatment provoked many suicides, some of them faked to conceal beatings that had gone too far” (2012: 477). A similar argument is made by Richards who, while noting the high level of deaths from diseases such as typhus, influenza and tuberculosis, also contends that “violent deaths were often recorded euphemistically”, noting specifically the unusually high incidence of heart attacks among imprisoned young adults (Richards, 2013: 78).

However, in addition to enduring the dehumanising conditions common to sites of imprisonment throughout Nationalist Spain, the repression experienced by women in prisons had additional gender specific dimensions, as Núñez Targa’s account reveals. The previously discussed objective of thwarting the transgenerational transmission of left-wing ideology by targeting women, and the female body in particular, had a very direct impact on the treatment of women in prison. A key dimension to this was a specific targeting of motherhood, for while the maternal role was exalted in Nationalist ideology, the Republican mother was vilified as a dangerous threat to the nation’s moral and social harmony. As Abad explains, “el subrayado respeto que para las mujeres afines al régimen suponía dicha capacidad femenina contrastaba con el denigrante tratamiento que la dictadura hacía sobre la maternidad de las mujeres republicanas” (Abad, 2009: 76). This was the basis for the particularly cruel treatment directed at pregnant women and mothers in Ventas and other women’s prisons.

The methods deployed by the regime to impede the transmission of ideology via the Republican mother were violent and cruel. There are many episodes recounted in testimonies by survivors and witnesses of women being subjected to beatings in the lower abdomen in order to cause miscarriage in those who were pregnant and to permanently damage the reproductive system in those who were not. Abad cites examples detailed in the 1946 publication of the Spanish Antifascist Women’s Association, which tell of prisoners being beaten in the abdomen with steel cables, causing internal and external injuries that took a year or more to heal, and of pregnant women being savagely kicked in the stomach (cited in Abad, 2009: 68). In *El valor de la memoria*, Núñez Targa recounts her witnessing of episodes of sexual violence against pregnant women in Ventas:

Se han ensañado, sobre todo, con las mujeres embarazadas. A muchas de ellas las han hecho abortar a palos. ‘Lo echarás por la boca’ —le gritaban a una mujer joven, en avanzado estado de gestación, mientras le propinaban numerosas patadas en el vientre. La mujer, Carmen P., abortó y desde entonces sufre de horribles dolores abdominales (Núñez Targa, 2016: 61-62).

Motherhood was also targeted through the separation of mothers from their children —children over the age of three were not allowed to be in the prison with their mothers, thus women had to rely on the assistance of family members outside prison or, if their relatives had also been imprisoned or killed, the children were either left to fend for themselves or taken into state care. Thousands of children were sequestered from their Republican mothers to be given to Falangist families or taken to religious orphanages, taught to denounce their parents as criminals whose sins they had to expiate.

While babies and young children were able to accompany their mothers in prison, they too suffered conditions of filth and deprivation. Núñez Targa recalls in her account the cells in Ventas designated for mothers, recalling the “olor tan sofocante a orines, a agrio, a excrementos, que produce náuseas” (2016: 59). These appalling conditions resulted in severe illnesses among the babies and children and many deaths, adding to their mothers’ suffering. Accounts tell of up to twenty children per day dying of meningitis in Ventas (Preston, 2012: 513). The descriptions that Núñez Targa provides in her testimony of the condition of the children in the prison and the fear and trauma that characterise their environment are among the most harrowing aspects of her narrative. She describes the imprisoned children as “pálidos, delgaditos, ... llenos de pupas”, noting that these young children “viven día y noche encerrados, hambrientos, temblando ante las funcionarias, presenciando ‘sacas’, oyendo los fusilamientos al amanecer y todo esto se refleja en su mirada” (Núñez Targa, 2016: 59).

The lack of nutritious food available to prisoners also affected their children, with nursing mothers often unable to provide their babies with sufficient milk due to their own malnutrition. The opportunity to feed their children was also used as leverage by the guards over the prisoners, as a means of enforcing certain behaviour or extracting confessions or information. Núñez Targa recounts, for example, an instance of what she calls “repugnante chantaje” in Ventas against a prisoner named Julia who needs to breastfeed her two-month-old daughter. The guards demand that she first confess and affirm her belief in God, which Julia, a “comunista convencida”, refuses to do. As a result, not only is Julia not permitted to feed her baby, but the child is taken from her and she never sees her again (Núñez Targa, 2016: 86).

The lack of basic hygiene in the prison can also be considered a form of gendered repression, as it makes particularly acute the suffering and humiliation of women during menstruation, as Núñez Targa notes. Without sanitary products and

unable to wash themselves, prisoners are forced to ask the unsympathetic guards for help, with their requests either ignored or met with derision. Núñez Targa relates the experience of one of her cellmates in Ventas in such a situation: “Intenté pedir medios higiénicos a la funcionaria y me atajó con un ‘Deje ya de dar la lata’ y el consabido portazo. Tenía frío. Me sentía sucia, repugnante, humillada” (Núñez Targa, 2016: 112).

This sense of shame over their lack of bodily cleanliness affects all of the prisoners due to the decision made by the authorities to cut off water supply in the prison. Thus despite the fact that Ventas prison had functioning plumbing, with wash basins, showers and baths available, Núñez Targa explains that “han cerrado el agua y han dejado tan sólo esta fuente. Para seis mil mujeres” (2016: 45). This move was arguably designed not only to create a sense of humiliation and desperation among the prisoners, but also to cause conflict among them as they were forced to battle each other for access to water. Núñez Targa’s testimony, however, reveals that rather than creating conflict, the lack of water increased the sense of solidarity among the prisoners, as they shared the scarce water and soap: “Mira, nosotras tenemos un cubo y nos lavamos las dos en la misma agua. Si quieres, nos lavamos las tres... En un mismo cubo, pues, nos lavamos las tres» (2016: 45).

References to sexual violence in Ventas are also present in Núñez Targa’s testimony, as she depicts the terrible attacks on women’s bodies designed to cause maximum pain and humiliation and to provide entertainment for the guards. A particularly horrific example is the treatment of a prisoner to whom Núñez Targa refers as Nieves C.:

A esta mujer le hicieron numerosas incisiones en la vulva, con ayuda de una navajita, y le rociaron las heridas con vinagre y sal. Desnuda y a vergajazos, entre risotadas y obscenidades, la obligaron a correr, divirtiéndose al ver cómo andaba con las piernas muy abiertas. —Pareces una rana— le chillaban (Núñez Targa, 2016: 61).

References to rape are, however, less direct in Núñez Targa’s account, with incidences of rape implied but not explicitly referred to. As an example, in her description of an episode of torture in Ventas, Núñez Targa writes: “Pues para hacerte cantar te sacan de la cárcel y te dan una soberana paliza, o te dan corrientes eléctricas, o hacen contigo lo que les da la real gana...” (2016: 43). This use of ellipsis at the end of such a sentence occurs quite often in such references, suggesting that something is left unsaid. A similar omission may be deduced from Núñez Targa’s reference to “un tiempo en que cualquier falangista venía, sin papel del juez ni cáscaras, se llevaba una mujer y la fusilaba por su cuenta” (2016,: 47) which, given

other accounts of such events, suggests women being sequestered to be raped before being killed.

This approach to implying incidences of sexual violence, particularly rape, is not unique to Núñez Targa's work, with many Republican women's accounts of their experiences of repression and imprisonment eschewing specific accounts of sexual assault. This despite the fact that historians such as Preston maintain that rape was a frequent occurrence, a crime perpetrated against literally thousands of women. Some testimonies of survivors and witnesses confirm this, with Juana Doña, for example, affirming that in Ventas and other prisons rape was a punishment inflicted on women of all ages, from adolescents to the elderly: "Las violaciones eran el pan nuestro de cada día, el abuso de poder de los hombres sobre las mujeres . . . [era] un acto de poder y humillación (Núñez Targa, 1978: 158). Likewise, the memoirs of former political prisoner Soledad Real include quite graphic descriptions of sexual torture and rape endured by prisoners.

The works of Doña and Real are, however, exceptions in the broader landscape of testimonial accounts of former Republican prisoners. As Herrmann has noted in her analysis of the testimonies of Communist resistance members Esperanza Martínez and Remedios Montero, "sex and sexual violence stand as the resounding silences of the complete corpus of Communist women's testimonies" of this period of history (Herrmann, 2012: 132). There is a particular scarcity of first-person accounts; when rape is alluded to, it tends to be in references to and memories about the rape of other women, rather than the self, reflecting a desire to keep such memories private, as well as a possible ongoing sense of shame and fear of stigmatisation. We should therefore be aware of the potential gaps or silences, of what is left unsaid, in these works, following Luisa Passerini's call for us to be attentive to embodied silences in narratives and to silences "connected with remembering" (2007: 32).

The testimonial legacy left by Núñez Targa reveals the extent of the repression and violence endured by Republican women in Francoist sites of imprisonment. Considered to represent "una identidad de género desviada, . . . antinatural e impure" (Abad, 2009: 74) and thereby a threat to the so-called Hispanic race, the punishments inflicted on these women were purportedly designed to re-educate them, to cleanse them of the disease of subversive ideologies, and to prevent the transgenerational transmission of such ideas. The writings of Núñez Targa, as well as other testimonial accounts of survivors and witnesses and the meticulous research by historians such as Preston, reveal the extent to which the violence within and beyond the prison walls was gendered: head shaving, the forced inges-

tion of castor oil, forced labour in public spaces, sexual torture and rape, were all punishments that sought to humiliate Republican women through degrading violence.

Despite the extensive and systematic practice of such crimes, the topic of the gendered repression suffered by Republican women under Francoism has long been cast into historical and cultural oblivion. Writing in 2013, Herrmann called on scholars and human rights organisations to address this issue, arguing that the silence surrounding “the histories of rapes, sexual abuse, and sexual harassment lived by Spanish Republican women ought to be of paramount concern to memorial and human rights organizations and to those of us... who study the Spanish Civil War and *el Franquismo*” (Herrmann, 2013: 133). Since that time, Herrmann’s own work, together with the studies by Abad, Preston and Joly, among others, have opened the way to redress the lack of both public awareness and scholarly discussion of sexual violence under Francoism. It is also significant that a number of women’s prison testimonies have, like those of Núñez Targa, been republished in new editions over recent years, making the accounts of gendered repression more visible and illuminating the horrific role that Ventas and other prisons played as sites of Francoist repression against women.

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