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Gendered State Terrorism in Francoist Spain: Narratives of Repression and  
Agency in Cárcel de Ventas

verfasst von | submitted by

Caroline Sophia Jablow

angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
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# Abstract

The Cárcel de Ventas in Madrid was the most populated women's prison in Francoist Spain, detaining approximately 14,000 prisoners in its operation from 1931-1969.<sup>1</sup> This thesis investigates state terrorism in Francoist Spain from a gendered perspective and explores to what extent the repression of women proved integral to the Francoist narrative of state legitimacy through the micro-historical context of las Ventas. It utilizes a narrative analysis to determine which narratives Francoist leadership produced in discourses surrounding Cárcel de Ventas, and the counternarratives produced by women in their testimonies. More broadly, it discusses how gendered agendas are critical to campaigns of state terror and why their analysis is crucial for future scholarship.

Observing Francoist narratives, the state's use of terror was inherently gendered and marked a continuation of state violence against women in Spain, characterized by increasingly extreme measures including codification of gender roles and larger scale imprisonment as a moral "corrective" force to silence criticism of the regime. Francoist narratives of both women's roles in wider society and incarcerated women emphasized the protection of morality, codified family rights over women's rights, and stressed the eradication of leftist "others" and "threats" as measures paramount for the state, contributing to a wider dialogue of a nation in crisis without gendered punishment. In contrast, women presented counternarratives which characterized Francoist measures as violent, denounced the so-called Catholic "values" of the state, and represented the multilayered, intersectional experiences of women. Building on this analysis, I conclude that greater micro-level feminist research is required to understand the localized manifestations of state terror and its resistance globally.

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<sup>1</sup> "Cárcel de Ventas," Cárcel de Ventas, accessed January 4, 2024, <https://carceldeventas.org/>. All content listed from the webpage [carceldeventas.org](https://carceldeventas.org/) is translated from Spanish by me.

### Abstract - German/Deutsch

Das Cárcel de Ventas in Madrid war das bevölkerungsreichste Frauengefängnis im franquistischen Spanien, in dem von 1931 bis 1969 etwa 14.000 Gefangene inhaftiert waren. Diese Arbeit untersucht den Staatsterrorismus im franquistischen Spanien aus einer geschlechtsspezifischen Perspektive und erforscht, inwieweit sich die Unterdrückung von Frauen als integraler Bestandteil des franquistischen Narrativs staatlicher Legitimität erwies, und zwar anhand des mikrohistorischen Kontexts von las Ventas. Mithilfe einer narrativen Analyse wird untersucht, welche Narrative die franquistische Führung in den Diskursen um das Cárcel de Ventas produzierte und welche Gegennarrative die Frauen in ihren Aussagen vertraten. Darüber hinaus wird erörtert, inwiefern geschlechtsspezifische Agenden für Kampagnen des Staatsterrors von entscheidender Bedeutung sind und warum ihre Analyse für die künftige Forschung entscheidend ist.

Betrachtet man die franquistischen Narrative, so war der Einsatz des Terrors durch den Staat inhärent geschlechtsspezifisch und markierte eine Fortsetzung der staatlichen Gewalt gegen Frauen in Spanien, die durch immer extremere Maßnahmen gekennzeichnet war, einschließlich der Kodifizierung von Geschlechterrollen und groß angelegter Inhaftierungen als moralisches „Korrektiv“, um Kritik am Regime zum Schweigen zu bringen. Die franquistischen Darstellungen der Rolle der Frau in der Gesellschaft und der inhaftierten Frauen betonten den Schutz der Moral, stellten die Rechte der Familie über die Rechte der Frauen und betonten die Ausrottung der linken „Anderen“ und der „Bedrohung“ als vorrangige Maßnahmen des Staates und trugen zu einem breiteren Dialog über eine Nation in der Krise ohne geschlechtsspezifische Strafen bei. Im Gegensatz dazu präsentierten Frauen Gegenerzählungen, die die franquistischen Maßnahmen als gewalttätig charakterisierten, die so genannten katholischen „Werte“ des Staates anprangerten und die vielschichtigen, intersektionalen Erfahrungen von Frauen darstellten. Auf der Grundlage dieser Analyse komme ich zu dem Schluss, dass eine umfassendere feministische Forschung auf Mikroebene erforderlich ist, um die lokalisierten Erscheinungsformen des Staatsterrors und seinen globalen Widerstand zu verstehen.

## Disclaimer

Parts of this thesis were adapted from the seminar papers “Gendered State Terrorism – Testimonies of Women in *Cárcel de Ventas*” and “State Terrorism: Theoretical Introduction and the Case of Franco’s Spain,” completed as part of the course requirements for the modules 2023W 240148-1 VM1 / VM7 - Gender, Conflict, Security: Feminist Contributions to Peace and Conflict Studies and 2023W 030514-1 Transitional Justice, respectively.

# Introduction

This thesis seeks to convey the multilayered, diverse experiences of women inmates, a segment of the Spanish population that the Francoist leadership sought to categorize in their own one-dimensional narrative in the early years of the dictatorship. In this thesis, I investigate state terrorism in Francoist Spain from a gendered perspective and explore to what extent the repression of women proved integral to the Francoist narrative of state legitimacy through the context of las Ventas. I will utilize a narrative analysis to determine which narratives Francoist leadership and accomplices in state terror such as the Catholic Church produced in discourses surrounding the Cárcel de Ventas, as well as the counternarratives produced by women in their testimonies. Narrative analysis is a form of discourse analysis that has been applied in varying disciplines, ranging from humanities to linguistics since the mid-twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> In humanities, scholars have identified a “narrative turn” in research, a methodology growing in scholarship due to its capacity to deliver more qualitative, detailed analyses of social experiences<sup>3</sup> which reflects a principle focus of this thesis to provide more micro-historical, gendered insight into state terror campaigns.

As presented by political scientist Subotić, narrative analysis moves beyond an “uncritical collecting of stories,” to illuminate how stories are formed, for whom, and why.<sup>4</sup> In a similar manner, sociolinguistic scholar Slembrouck expands on the dimensions of narrative by discussing that narratives can serve as the foundation of how we organize our social realities and thus contends that it serves as a fruitful methodology for promoting social representation across disciplines.<sup>5</sup> Hence, these notions hold relevance to this thesis because it will analyze how historically marginalized actors in Francoist Spain organized their social realities despite competing narratives of their realities by the state and state sponsored actors. Expanding on this significance of how narrative analysis can offer more nuanced studies of historically ostracized actors, Spanish historian Corbalán and English scholar Scheffler argue that the

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<sup>2</sup> Anna de Fina and Barbara Johnstone, “Discourse Analysis and Narrative,” in *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, eds. Tannen, D., Hamilton, H. E., & Schiffrin, D., (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2015), 152.

<sup>3</sup> de Fina and Johnstone, 160.

<sup>4</sup> Jelena Subotić, “Stories States Tell: Identity, Narrative, and Human Rights in the Balkans,” *Slavic Review* 72, no. 2 (2013): 306, <https://doi.org/10.5612/slavicreview.72.2.0306>.

<sup>5</sup> 12. Stef Slembrouck “The Role of the Researcher in Interview Narratives,” in *The Handbook of Narrative Analysis*, ed. Anna de Fina and Alexandra Georgakopoulou (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2015), 239-240.



analysis of incarcerated women's narratives are important for studying gendered marginalization more generally because imprisonment "serves as a paradigm for the subordinated position of women in society."<sup>6</sup> Thus, I will apply this methodology to identify the roles of different actors in Francoist Spain, understanding the thematic character of their narratives and how these narratives were built, for which audience, and for what meaning through primary and secondary sources relating to the incarceration of women.

The introductory chapter of this thesis will examine the state of the literature on state terrorism and gender, embed it within the case of Spain, and outline the relevancy of merging the fields in this research on women's imprisonment under state terror. Succeeding this introductory chapter and corpus, the thesis will be structured as follows. Chapter one will outline and analyze state narratives through the following themes: Ideology and the Law, Political and Pedagogical Measures, and Media Propaganda. Chapter two will provide a historical overview of women's prisons throughout Spanish history to historicize and understand the connections between the state, religion, and women's prisons. Moreover, it will discuss how Franco's use of prisons both utilized the past ideas of the Spanish prison model and marked a new chapter of state terror. Chapter three will employ a narrative analysis to examine women prisoners' testimonies, expanding on the character of Francoist state violence, analyzing women's counternarratives to state narratives, and representing how women resisted state terror and the legacy of their voices. Here, I will organize the thirteen testimonies through the following thematic groupings and sub-groupings: Hardship: Pre-incarceration and Initial Experiences at Ventas, Punishment – Catholicism and Dehumanization, Executions, and Motherhood; Social Relations: Questioning Gendered Experiences of State Terror; and Political and Organized Resistance: Fooling the *Sección Feminina* and Education. Lastly, the conclusion will look more broadly into how gendered agendas are critical to campaigns of state terror, contextualizing the discoveries into the present day, and reflecting on the main outcomes of the previous chapters. It will offer concluding remarks, outline limitations of the thesis, and provide prospects for future research.

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<sup>6</sup> Ana Corbalán, "Feminine Voices of Resistance against Dictatorships: Prison Memories from Spain and Argentina," in *Dictatorships in the Hispanic World: Transatlantic and Transnational Perspectives*, ed. Patricia Swier and Julia Riordan-Goncalves (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013), 24.; Judith A Scheffler, *Wall Tappings: An International Anthology of Women's Prison Writings, 200 A.D. to the Present* (New York: Feminist Press at CUNY, 2002), 13.

Through examination of the narratives present in official dialogue and observation of the changing policies of Ventas throughout the Francoist dictatorship, gendered repression was fundamental to the survival narrative of the regime and proved to continue a legacy of gender-based violence against women by the Spanish state. Francoist narratives of women's roles in wider society and incarcerated women emphasized the protection of morality, codified family rights over women's rights, and stressed the eradication of leftist "threats" as measures paramount for the state, contributing to a broader dialogue of a nation in crisis without gendered punishment. In contrast, women presented counternarratives to those of the state through their testimonies, which characterized Francoist violence, denounced the so-called Catholic "values" of the state, and represented the multilayered, intersectional experiences of women in prison and beyond. Their narratives of resistance further demonstrate that Franco's rule of state terror merely marked a continuation of state violence against women in Spain, but on a greater scale, marked by increasingly extreme measures including codification of religious morality and larger scale imprisonment as a moral "corrective" force in an attempt to silence criticism of the regime. Provided the examination of las Ventas and the wider phenomenon of state terror, I conclude that a gendered agenda was crucial in Spanish state terrorism as women were expected to adhere to strict gendered and political roles or be threatened with violence, and that testimonies and their analysis are critical to counter these agendas.

## Corpus

To begin with, to analyze Francoist narratives, I will utilize several primary and secondary sources. Regarding primary sources, I discuss the implications of the 1938 *Fuero de Trabajo* (Labor Charter) and 1945 *Fuero de los Españoles* (State Constitution), which outlined the fundamental laws of the regime,<sup>7</sup> as well as the Falange party manifesto, documents that emphasize on the role of women, the family, and Catholicism in the Francoist Spain. I will also examine discourses of Francoist leadership such as Dr. Antonio Vallejo-Nájera, one of the leaders of the Spanish eugenics policy who heavily supported and produced research on the basis for incarceration of women and separation of children from their imprisoned mothers. In addition, I will examine shifting policies surrounding women's rights and girls' education, as well as state media narratives present in pedagogical and propaganda magazines. In terms of secondary sources, I will utilize several texts that focus on the expectations and experiences of

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<sup>7</sup> Eugenia Relaño Pastor, "Spanish Catholic Church in Franco Regime: A Marriage of Convenience," *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 20, no. 2 (2007): 279.

women under Franco to provide additional scholarly analysis on state narratives. In addition, supplementary context will be provided through reports from organizations such as the Council of Europe that detail the hardships faced under the Franco regime. This series of policies and rhetoric will provide insight into the gendered narratives of the state under Franco and provide historical context for deeper analysis of incarcerated women's testimonies.

For my historical background on Spanish women's prisons across centuries, I will utilize several secondary sources, principally for the Ventas prison, the Cárcel de Ventas digital archive. Cárceldeventas.org is a digital archive that maintains the memory of Spain's largest women's prison alive through four sections: history, which conveys a timeline of the prison from its founding in 1931 to its present conditions; voices, which offers the biographies and testimonies of eight former prisoners; building, which discusses the construction, architecture, and demolition of the building; and listings, which lists the executed women of Ventas and Claudio Coello prisons. These sources will provide greater insight into the relationship between the state, religion, gender, and imprisonment throughout time to lay the foundation for the escalation of imprisonment and state terror against women by the dictatorship.

For women's testimonies, I will utilize thirteen testimonies: eleven from Tomasa Cuevas' work *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas* and two selected interviews from the University of California San Diego's Spanish Civil War Memory Project (hereby UCSD SCWMP), an online archive with interviews with survivors of the Spanish civil war and state terror collected between the years 2007-2010. *Testimonios* was published in 2004, three decades after the transition to democracy following the Francoist dictatorship. Cuevas was a political prisoner during the dictatorship who was transferred throughout several women's prisons, including Ventas, who aimed through the testimonies to persevere in the struggle for freedom, fight patriarchal and historical injustices, and overall, preserve the memory of the women of Franco's prisons.<sup>8</sup> In her work, she gathered the testimonies of women housed in Franco's women's prisons across Spain, among which included many assigned to Ventas. In short, the sources provide examples of women's agency and diverse perspectives in the face of state violence. In my later analysis, I have linked experiences and dialogues expressed in testimonies through the thematic groupings and sub-groupings: Hardship: Pre-incarceration and Initial Experiences at Ventas, Punishment – Catholicism and Dehumanization, Executions,

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<sup>8</sup> Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 12.

and Motherhood; Social Relations: Questioning Gendered Experiences of State Terror; and Political and Organized Resistance.

## Literature Review – State Terrorism and Gender: A Spanish Perspective

State terrorism is largely defined as the utilization of “political violence by a government against its citizens.”<sup>9</sup> Its principal characteristics, as outlined by political anthropologist Sluka and Amnesty International include “arbitrary detention, unfair trial, torture, and political murder or extrajudicial execution,”<sup>10</sup> all of which existed in the imprisonment of women under Franco, to be further discussed throughout this thesis. The phenomenon is not new – it is acknowledged by criminologists Silke and Prunckun, as well as intelligence studies scholar Whitford to have roots in the Reign of Terror under Robespierre and the Jacobin government during the 1793 French Revolution, during which thousands of French civilians were executed in the name of eradicating domestic “threats.”<sup>11</sup> To understand this definition and how it can be applied to the case of incarcerated women under Franco’s Spain, international relations and politics researcher Blakeley classifies violence as state terrorism through the following criteria:

1. there must be a deliberate act of violence against individuals that the state has a duty to protect, or a threat of such an act if a climate of fear has already been established through preceding acts of state violence;
2. the act must be perpetrated by actors on behalf of or in conjunction with the state, including paramilitaries and private security agents;
3. the act or threat of violence is intended to induce extreme fear in some target observers who identify with that victim; and
4. the target audience is forced to consider changing their behavior in some way<sup>12</sup>

Blakeley’s criteria provide insight to the broad but calculated means, actors, and intents of state terror, allowing for an outline to first, understand how state terror in Francoist Spain operated

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<sup>9</sup> Henry Prunckun and Troy Whitford, “Introducing Terrorism and Counterterrorism,” in *Introducing Terrorism and Counterterrorism* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2022), 10, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781955055314-004>; Jeffrey Sluka, *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror*, ed. Jeffrey Sluka (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Sluka, 3.; “Amnesty International Annual Report 1993,” *Amnesty International*, accessed February 16, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/0001/1993/en/>.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Silke, *Routledge Handbook of Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, ed. Andrew Silke (London: Routledge, 2018), 66.; Prunckun and Whitford, “Introducing Terrorism and Counterterrorism,” 10.

<sup>12</sup> Ruth Blakeley, *State Terrorism and Neoliberalism: The North in the South* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 30.

and second, which particular gendered tools of terror were employed. This outline in the Spanish context will be discussed in the following section on gender and state terrorism.

So, why did Francoist leadership utilize state terror, and thereby, imprisonment, as a tool? The works of political communication scholar Stohl and international politics scholar Jackson, historian Murphy, and sociologist Poynting identify main determinants for actors, in this context, the state, to select terrorism as an instrument, focusing mainly on the communicatory power of terror such as its capability to advertise a message “without the need to physically touch each citizen.”<sup>13</sup> In the extreme cases such as torture and execution, the political prisoner serves as a warning to the rest of society to avoid stepping out of political, moral, and gendered lines. Stohl further illuminates on this principle, stating that the employment of terrorism by the state often holds the desired outcome to “create or enforce obedience...[to produce] compliance and fear...[and to maintain] order by eliminating and neutralizing resistance and...control the process of political change,” especially when it calculates that it “is more effective relative to other means of governance.”<sup>14</sup> Moreover, Stohl adds that terrorists select “their victims and targets with care to achieve maximum impact,” rather than avoiding “‘innocents’ or mass casualties,”<sup>15</sup> demonstrating that state terror, too, applies arbitrary and unjust tools against populations, yet rather through the official structures of the state and state-sponsored actors. This state desire for obedience, control, and political change can be understood in the new Franco regime within the context of the Spanish Civil War.

More specifically, in her work that dissects claims of genocide of the emerging Francoist state, criminologist Kazyrytski describes that during the Spanish Civil War and in its wake, state terror was marked by the “physical elimination” of political opponents and imprisonment determined by military tribunals that prosecuted not only combatants, but also civilians in mostly rushed and procedurally incorrect trials, which “became the main tool in the physical elimination of political opponents.”<sup>16</sup> Hence, a prioritization of control of those

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Stohl, “The State as Terrorist: Insights and Implications,” *Democracy and Security* 2, no. 1 (2006): 8, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48602564>.

<sup>14</sup> Stohl, 9.

<sup>15</sup> Stohl, 8.

<sup>16</sup> Leanid Kazyrytski, “Francoist Repression in Spain and the Crime of Genocide,” *Criminology & Criminal Justice* 22, no. 5 (November 1, 2022): 676–93, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17488958211017385>.

labeled as “politically adverse” by the regime occurred, with less desire to prosecute actual crimes, work in conjunction with the opposing side of the war, and/or establish a democratic and free society. With this two-sided, violent conflict in mind, it is important to note that it is uncertain if a Republican victory would not have taken similar violent post-war approaches to Nationalists.<sup>17</sup> Yet, Kazyrytski insists the fact that political consolidation efforts were already aided by internal divisions on the left for decades after the war, “substantial portions of the citizenry agreed with the aims of the regime,” and even those who despised the regime would have wanted to avoid further civil conflicts demonstrates that particular brutality was employed merely for the sake of political revenge or what she describes as “personal vendetta,”<sup>18</sup> and confirmation that political plurality was never intended by Franco’s dictatorship.

Terrorism studies scholars primarily contest whether state terrorism should be studied independent of terrorism, and then, specifically in relation to this thesis, the question of if the gendered lens should likewise be separated. In their retorts, many state terrorism scholars argue that state terror should be detached from the wider field of terrorism studies due to the “invisibility” of state crimes, the fact that more deaths can be attributed to state terror than war throughout the 20th century,<sup>19</sup> and that state terror continues to be one of the largest human security threats worldwide.<sup>20</sup> Put frankly by Stohl,

if terrorism means political intimidation by violence or its threat, and if we allow the definition to include violence by states and agents of states, then we find that the major form of terrorism in the world today is that practiced by states and their agents and allies, and that, quantitatively, anti-state terrorism pales into relative insignificance compared to it.<sup>21</sup>

The same reasoning of pervasive scholarly marginalization of those impacted by a violent phenomenon can be applied for utilizing a gendered approach, which as argued by gender studies scholars True and Tanyag can further outline how the violence in periods of conflict, in this case, state terrorism, “is rooted in pre-existing gendered inequalities that cut

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<sup>17</sup> William D. Phillips, Jr. and Carla Rahn Phillips, *A Concise History of Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 262.

<sup>18</sup> Kazyrytski, “Francoist Repression in Spain and the Crime of Genocide,” 677.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Jackson, Eamon Murphy, and Scott Poynting, *Contemporary State Terrorism: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 1-3.; Andrew Silke, *Routledge Handbook of Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, ed. Andrew Silke (London: Routledge, 2018), 66, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315744636>; Blakeley, 1-2.

<sup>20</sup> Jackson, Murphy, and Poynting, 1-3.

<sup>21</sup> Sluka, 1.

across and often reinforce hierarchies of class, race/ethnicity, nationality/citizenship, religion, and sexuality.”<sup>22</sup> This idea presented by True and Tanyag highlights the importance of intersectionality in feminist studies, a term coined by American civil rights advocate Crenshaw in her work “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” which identified through the black feminist experience how one’s “inequalities compound,” and how these relate to structural and systematic discrimination.<sup>23</sup> Hence, intersectionality will be an important factor in my analysis of women political prisoners, who possessed layered identities in addition to solely that of the gendered identity of being a woman or mother, and whose inequalities compounded not only based off preexisting structural gender-based violence, but also their unique identities across factors such as class, age, and motherhood, among other characteristics. Thus, this study explores how a gendered, intersectional approach can offer a more comprehensive understanding of state terrorism’s inherently gendered dimensions, and the phenomenon of violence against women and girls more broadly.

### Gender and State Terrorism – Franco’s Spain

Women’s involvement as both victims and agents of state terrorism has received growing scholarship in recent decades and is crucial to understanding the ever-present interplay of the state and violence against women.<sup>24</sup> This study seeks to take a microlevel approach to historical studies, to elevate often marginalized actors through small scale stories, in this case through imprisoned women during a campaign of state terror. Through focusing on incarcerated women’s experiences in this thesis, I stress that their experiences of state terror were distinctive from those of imprisoned men, though without the aim of rejecting the masculine experience but rather elevating often-marginalized feminine voices. Though much scholarship still isolates

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<sup>22</sup> Jacqui True and Maria Tanyag, “Violence against Women/Violence in the World: Toward a Feminist Conceptualization of Global Violence,” in *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Security*, ed. Caron E. Gentry, Laura J. Shepherd, and Laura Sjoberg (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 15.

<sup>23</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” In *Feminism and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198782063.003.0016>.

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, *Women and Terrorism: Female Activity in Domestic and International Terror Groups*, (London: Routledge, 2008).; Valerie M. Hudson and Kaylee B. Hodgson, “Sex and Terror: Is the Subordination of Women Associated with the Use of Terror?,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 34, no. 3 (2022): 605–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2020.1724968>.; Lori Poloni-Staudinger and Candice D. Ortals, *Terrorism and Violent Conflict: Women’s Agency, Leadership, and Responses* (Berlin: Springer Science & Business Media, 2014).

state terrorism from gender-based violence, this thesis aims to connect both as inseparable phenomena through the analysis of the Ventas women's narratives. In the case of Spain, the state followed the "maximum impact" theory as outlined by Stohl – it did not merely select victims or criminals through the simple dichotomy of innocent versus guilty, but rather through the magnitude that the designation of an individual as guilty could have. To demonstrate the cruciality of gender to the Francoist state's post-war reconstruction, historian Morcillo-Gómez argues that a reintroduction of a non-secular government tied to Roman Catholic values publicized and politicized the family, to which "women-as mothers-represented an essential element in the reconstruction of the fatherland,"<sup>25</sup> as will be observed in the numerous gendered state narratives produced in party, pedagogical, and media discourses. Thus, the incarceration - and in extreme cases execution - of several inmates at Ventas – those involved in leftist political organizations, wives and relatives of "reds," unmarried pregnant women, prostitutes - were selected by the state and inseparable from the state campaign of terrorism because they were chosen with the intention of broadcasting the greatest political message for the state – one of strict, politicized gender roles.

Regarding gendered state terrorism, in her work that examines women's testimonies of state terror in Argentina, specialist in women's, gender, and sexuality studies Sutton describes how elements of state terrorism such as torture and political imprisonment follows the cultural and structural reduction of women to their bodies. She describes:

The preeminence of the body (often in contradistinction to the mind) as the supposed definitional quality of women has often been used to suppress women's political voice as a group and as individuals... Women are treated as just bodies, or as just reproductive bodies, through laws that continue to criminalize abortion or impinge on contraception use.<sup>26</sup>

This element was undoubtedly present in the suppression of women's political voices through imprisonment under the early years of Francoism and the subsequent legal reforms regarding women's rights, to be discussed at length throughout this thesis. Moreover, Sutton's text confers the importance of how a gendered perspective allows greater insight into the characteristics, counternarratives, and memories of state terror as well as "emphasizes women's agency instead

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<sup>25</sup> Aurora Morcillo Gómez, "Shaping True Catholic Womanhood: Francoist Educational Discourse on Women," in *Constructing Spanish Womanhood: Female Identity in Modern Spain*, ed. Beth Radcliff and Victoria Loree Enders (New York: SUNY Press, 1999), 52.

<sup>26</sup> Barbara Sutton, *Surviving State Terror: Women's Testimonies of Repression and Resistance in Argentina* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 122.



of simply focusing on victimization...[taking] into account women survivors' political voices as vital to the process of collective memory transmission,"<sup>27</sup> all elements that will be touched on in the analysis of women prisoner's testimonies in Ventas.

Adhering to Blakeley's elements, gendered-based violence equaled state terrorism in Spain, as women and girls were persecuted in unique manners intended to induce extreme fear: most brutally, when met with imprisonment and execution. To illuminate, by the end of April 1939, Ventas, designated for five hundred inmates, held over 3,500 women and later imprisoned 14,000, with cells intended for one holding twelve or more women.<sup>28</sup> In their testimonies, countless survivors of Franco's prison system reported torture, rape, and murder by state actors such as police and prison leadership.<sup>29</sup> Violent acts such as these instilled a "climate of fear" into society, violently coercing citizens to comply with the state's expected social and political roles for fear of retribution.

Additionally, state-sponsored actors, principally the Catholic Church, were closely involved with state terror, as Roman Catholicism was made the official state religion and heavily tied to Francoist ideology, and leadership of the education, medical, and prison systems composed of clergy and organizations with ties to the Catholic Church.<sup>30</sup> At Ventas, the Church was heavily ingratiated in the policies and everyday functioning of the prison, for instance, running the San Isidro Nursery School, which separated children from their "red" mothers and allowed only two hours of visits a day.<sup>31</sup> The idea of separation was to prevent the indoctrination of communist and leftist political ideation in youth, to rather produce children who supported the objectives and Catholic moral values of the state.<sup>32</sup> Together with these conditions, countless inmates have condemned the Catholic Church for its "physical and

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<sup>27</sup> Sutton, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth Century Spain* (London: HarperCollins UK, 2012), 510.

<sup>29</sup> Council of Europe, Political Affairs Committee, *Report: Need for International Condemnation of the Franco Regime* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2005), 5-8 <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewHTML.asp?FileID=11217&lang=EN>.

<sup>30</sup> Nicholas Casey, "Taken Under Fascism, Spain's 'Stolen Babies' Are Learning the Truth," *The New York Times*, September 27, 2022, sec. Magazine, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/27/magazine/spain-stolen-babies.html>.

<sup>31</sup> "Traslado de la Maternal de San Isidro a Ventas," *Cárcel de Ventas*, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://carceldeventas.org/traslado-de-la-maternal-de-san-isidro-a-ventas/>.

<sup>32</sup> "Traslado de la Maternal de San Isidro a Ventas," *Cárcel de Ventas*.

psychological abuse” in women’s prisons.<sup>33</sup> Acknowledging Blakeley’s third criteria, as part of the “climate of fear,” intentional fear was induced in society and those related to state targets. For instance, several testimonies in this thesis acknowledge the so-described “martyrdom” of fellow inmates in detention centers, their maimed or dead bodies left in the open to send a message to others, and again, as Sutton describes, reduce women to their bodies. Further, in the early years of the dictatorship (1931-1943), eighty women were executed at Ventas and a nearby prison, 38 of which were under the age of 30.<sup>34</sup> These examples represent what Jackson, Murphy, and Poynting argue is the power of the state and need for the audience to conform – in short, the intended audience understands the message and who has delivered it.<sup>35</sup> Hence, the audience – whether fellow prisoners, those related to leftists, and/or wider society – met Blakeley’s fourth point – they considered altering their behavior in a manner to avoid being targets of Franco’s state terror campaign. In brief, as established by the present state of the art, state terrorism and its unique gendered considerations require separation from terrorism studies and need additional scholarship in Spain and beyond moving forward.

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<sup>33</sup> Council of Europe, *Report: Need for International Condemnation of the Franco Regime*, 2005.

<sup>34</sup> “Listado de presas de Ventas y Claudio Coello ejecutadas en Madrid capital (1939-1943),” Cárcel de Ventas, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://carceldeventas.org/listado-de-presas-de-ventas-y-claudio-coello-ejecutadas-en-madrid-capital-1939-1943/>.

<sup>35</sup> Jackson, Murphy, and Poynting, 8-9.

## Chapter 1: State Narratives

It has now been made clear that women were targets of state terror under the Franco regime. Yet, why were women and girls the foci of this extreme political violence and consequently imprisoned, or even executed? To comprehend the logic behind the Francoist state's failure to protect women and girls requires a further look into the Spanish national project and its inherently gendered aspects. The previously discussed argument by Morcillo-Gómez that gender ideology was once again critical to the Francoist state through linking the family with conceptions of a fatherland will be observed in this chapter through several aspects of society, from legal to social policies. To understand how the gendered agenda was critical to Franco's campaign of state terror, it is necessary to identify the narratives built and maintained in both the wider Spanish society as well as Ventas through legal, political, pedagogical, and propaganda measures, to be discussed in this chapter. The historicization of these longstanding conceptions of gender and the state will be discussed in the following chapter regarding Spanish women's prisons throughout centuries.

Narratives of the state regarding women will be explored through examination of fundamental laws of the Francoist regime, including the 1938 *Fuero de Trabajo* (Labor Charter) and the 1945 *Fuero de los Espanoles* (Spaniard's Charter/Constitution). Because of their status as fundamental laws, their understanding is crucial to comprehension of the targeting of women by Franco as political and moral enemies and thus posing a threat to the new state's legitimacy. In like manner, politically, I will inspect the Twenty-Six Point Program of the Falange, the political doctrine of the Falange Party authored by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the founder of the Falange Party. Regarding other leadership, I will analyze the work of Dr. Antonio Vallejo Nájera, a key leader in the eugenics movement in Spain whose writings had a direct impact on the imprisonment of women and their "othering." Moreover, I will examine gendered laws, with regard also to educational measures and political participation of women in Francoist society. These factors will help discuss changes to the legal status and rights of women during the dictatorship and understand the extent to which women and girls mattered to the national project of the Falangists. Additionally, I will utilize articles written in the magazines *Arriba Espana* and *Consigna* to observe the media propaganda targeted towards the public about politically involved leftist women and women in Ventas. Due to the overlapping objectives of legal, political, and educational narratives, I will organize the content thematically, with the note that there are overlaying ideas among each. The themes will be as

follows: ideology and the law, gendered political and pedagogical measures, and media propaganda.

### Ideology and The Law – National Catholicism and Codified Gender Roles

“Following the Spanish Civil War, the relation between the state and its citizenry rapidly changed, especially so the role of women, which underwent a vast decline from progress made during the Second Republic.<sup>36</sup> It is important to note that state violence against women existed before the dictatorship, yet, progress in institutional reforms was being made in the Spanish Second Republic (1931-1939) with, for example, the introduction of women into the workforce.”<sup>37</sup> Notwithstanding, conservative and patriarchal institutions and ways of thinking in relation to women, the family, and the workplace still existed throughout society both immediately before and into the Second Republic – for instance, divorce remained taboo in wider Spanish society and workplace equality remained absent.<sup>38</sup> In addition, before the Francoist state, Spanish medical science of the 1920s still sought to reinforce “women’s gender identity as mothers” and legitimize “women and their [subordinate] role in society.”<sup>39</sup> Hence, there was still much work to be done for the government before Franco in the advancement of political, economic, and social rights for women both structurally and culturally.

Despite the presence of such medical and social rhetoric in the fledgling Second Republic, the liberalization of policies regarding abortion, contraception, marriage, and labor rights marked an important advancement in the government prior to Franco.<sup>40</sup> “However, the rapid dissolution of women’s rights during the Franco years demonstrates the swift escalation of state violence and the targeting of women through patriarchal measures to restrict their

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<sup>36</sup> Anny Brooksbank Jones, *Women in Contemporary Spain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>37</sup> Student Name, “Gendered State Terrorism: Testimonies of Women in Cárcel de Ventas,” Completed as part of course requirements for *Universität Wien Course 2023W 240148-1 VM1 / VM7 - Gender, Conflict, Security. Feminist Contributions to Peace and Conflict Studies*, March 2024, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Lorraine Ryan, “A Case Apart: The Evolution of Spanish Feminism,” in *Feminisms Within and Without*, ed. Rebecca Pelan (Galway: National Women Studies Centre, 2006), 56–68.

<sup>39</sup> Mary Nash, “Uncontested Identities: Motherhood, Sex Reform, and the Modernization of Gender Identity in Early 20th Century Spain,” in *Constructing Spanish Womanhood: Female Identity in Modern Spain*, ed. Victoria Lorée Enders, Pamela Beth Radcliff (New York: SUNY Press, 1999), 35.

<sup>40</sup> Ryan, 56-68.

freedom and mobility.”<sup>41</sup> Doing so placed an increasing amount of authority back into the patriarchal structures that were just beginning to shift under the Second Republic. Social developments and the protection of women under the law were quickly reversed as the family became the principle moral unit of society under the Francoist regime to advance the ideology of National Catholicism and Spanish eugenics.

To begin with, the Francoist state built itself upon National Catholicism, the idea of linking the Spanish national project and race throughout time with the unity and morality afforded by Roman Catholicism. In this ideology, conceptions of a Spanish race were not linked to ethnicity or skin color but rather by belonging to a unified spiritual and political body – one with innately gendered dimensions. National Catholicism would restore Spain to its former glory: put briefly, the state political party, the Falange, believed that “the Middle Ages were the great period of man's spiritual and intellectual development because there was "unity" in all Christendom,” a unity that “was disrupted by the Renaissance with its paganizing influence, and by the Protestant Reformation, also pagan.”<sup>42</sup> From the perspective of the Falangists, the only manner by which the Spanish nation could once again be united, “great,” and thus, progress was through rejecting the so-called “pagan” progress of the past and returning to Roman Catholic values, with the family, as the moral base and producer of future generations, being the means by which to achieve this objective. The unwavering nature of this strive for Spanish unity can be understood through the writings of José Antonio Primo de Rivera, son of Miguel Primo de Rivera, ruler of the Spanish military dictatorship from 1923 to 1930, the regime before the Spanish Second Republic.<sup>43</sup> José Antonio was a politician and founder of the Falange Party whose works were utilized posthumously after his execution during the Spanish Civil War by the successive party, the Falange, in one sense, to represent martyrdom and sacrifice as core pillars of the Falangist character.

To expand on Jose Antonio’s influence on the emerging state’s perceptions of citizenry and thus, gender, the Twenty-Six Point Program was the Falange’s manifesto that defined the principles and ideology of the party. Written by José Antonio in 1934, it further emphasized the

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<sup>41</sup> Student Name, “Gendered State Terrorism,” 7-8. Student’s name has been anonymized for grading purposes in this and following footnotes for this source.

<sup>42</sup> Bailey W. Diffie, “The Ideology of National Catholicism,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 23, no. 3 (1943): 459.

<sup>43</sup> Zira Box and Wendy Gosselin, “Spanish Imperial Destiny: The Concept of Empire during Early Francoism,” *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 8, no. 1 (2013): 95-96, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43610933>.

cruciality of gender roles to the functioning of the party by reinforcing the family as a key unit in every Spaniard's civic duty and stressing it as essential to state survival. To illuminate, the manifesto describes that the state serves as a "totalitarian instrument" to "defend the integrity of the fatherland," achieved through the structured "family, municipal, and syndical roles" designated to all Spaniards.<sup>44</sup> In other words, there was a strict expectation that women would serve as reproductive and moral units to maintain the prosperity of the so-called "values" outlined by Francoist leadership and the population. In another writing, Jose Antonio further maps out what the Falange party signifies for society by discussing the status of the Spaniard - who belongs and who does not belong to the Spanish nation? He clarifies:

The Falange is not a right-wing party, nor is it a left-wing party. It [the party] understands that these values of right and left are expired, to rest on lateral, incomplete conceptions of what is Spain. Spain is, for us, the "unity of destiny" that universally differentiates a group of peoples. The left, by giving everything to decisions of will, deny the unshakable permanence in that...The State finds no justification for closing the way, even against the will of others, to the separatist currents, which are the denial of Spain, and to communism, which is the denial in a whole Western, spiritual, Christian way, of understanding the world...no one can be considered exempt from participating...<sup>45</sup>

This passage demonstrates the definiteness of participation in Francoist society – either one belongs or does not. From the state's narrative construction, to be in opposition to the state was to forbid Spain its unity – posing a danger to the future of the Spanish nation state. The adversaries or "non-participants" of this society – namely leftists, communists, non-Catholics - none of them could evade their inevitable "common sacrifices" or punishment for threatening the inevitability of National Catholicism. The state constructed the narrative that the left was the group dividing the people, not the Falangists. Additionally, the party manifesto doubles down on the idea of strict conformity as a prerequisite for society, by equating leftists with separatists and stating that nobody could use their "freedom against the nation" and that "rigorous discipline" would be utilized against anyone who tried to "disunite the Spanish people" or attempt to rival their "destiny."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> José Antonio Primo de Rivera, *The Twenty-Six Point Program of the Falange*, 1934, accessed April 14, 2024, <https://archive.org/details/Twenty-sixPointProgramOfTheFalange>.

<sup>45</sup> "Consigna - José Antonio Primo de Rivera," *Consigna Numero 81* (Madrid, ES), October 1, 1947, 5, <https://ceclmdigital.uclm.es/viewer.vm?id=0002839907&page=1&search=&lang=en&view=prensa>. All articles from Consigna are translated from Spanish by me unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>46</sup> Primo de Rivera, *The Twenty-Six Point Program of the Falange*.

The most extreme manifestations of this endeavor for National Catholicism and “rigorous discipline” to “threats” were the Spanish policies of eugenics, branded by characterizations of political enemies as mentally and socially inferior and the state as superior to, in their eyes, “justify repression.”<sup>47</sup> “Namely, Dr. Antonio Vallejo Nájera was a key leader in the eugenics movement in Spain and advocated for stricter measures to be taken against those labeled politically adverse women that, according to the dictatorship, countered the state’s progress. His writings were utilized as the basis for the segregation of political opponents from society through imprisonment as well as the separation of children from their “red” parents in both women’s prisons and wider society.<sup>48</sup> For instance, in a study on those he called Marxist “militant” women, he concluded women were particularly disposed to the “mental illness” of Marxism because of their “psychic lability, the weakness of mental balance, the lower resistance to environmental influences, the insecurity of control over the personality.”<sup>49</sup> In his work *Eugenics of National Catholicism and Regeneration of the Race*, he identifies the key linkages between family as an institution and racial nationalism, maintaining that the expansion of the family as an institution was the key to the “regenerating” the Spanish race.<sup>50</sup> By the judgement of Nájera and the rhetoric of the state, for a woman to resist her moral and child-rearing expectations was to work against the creation of a stronger, just homeland, and the extent of this cruciality of this gendered role to the state is represented by the following policies under Franco and its pervasiveness in every aspect of society, from the education system to the constitution.

To observe further implications of National Catholicism, race, and the family on women’s rights, it is helpful to discuss legal developments under Franco. To begin with, another fundamental law of the Francoist regime, the 1938 *Fuero del Trabajo* (Labor Charter), aimed to “renew the Catholic tradition of social justice” to “strengthen the unity, freedom and

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<sup>47</sup> Esperanza Bosch Fiol, Victoria A Ferrer Pérez, and Capilla Navarro Guzmán, “La psicología de las mujeres republicanas según el Dr. Antonio Vallejo Nájera,” *Revista de Historia de la Psicología* 29 (2008).

<sup>48</sup> Antonio Vallejo Nájera, *Eugenics of National Catholicism and Regeneration of the Race* (Burgos: Editorial Española, 1937), “Regeneration of the Race.” Translated from Spanish by me.

<sup>49</sup> Ricard Vinyes, “Estructura Del Sistema de Capturas, Deportaciones y Pérdidas Infantiles Establecido Por La Dictadura Del General Francisco Franco. 1938-1949,” *Fundación Internacional Baltasar Garzón (FIBGAR)* (2015): 2. Translated from Spanish to English by me.; Student Name, “Gendered State Terrorism,” 8.

<sup>50</sup> Vallejo Nájera, *Eugenics of National Catholicism and Regeneration of the Race*.

greatness of Spain,” an objective that had innately gendered implications.<sup>51</sup> For one, closer examination of the charter reveals that those entitled to the rights of the nation were men rather than society at large and that women were expected to assume a different role to strengthen the spirit, productivity, and justice of Spain than those that had been outlined by the Second Republic, during which women’s employment as well as legal rights to abortion, divorce, and contraception increased. To illuminate, the charter prohibited women from working nightshifts, coerced them to be homemakers to “liberate” them from unsuitable working societal roles, and defined the family institution as the foundation of society, a “moral institution” with “inalienable rights” above the law.<sup>52</sup> Through institutionalizing the family, the state placed its rights over that of the woman by contending that the identity and spirit of the nation relied on strict gender roles over individualism or agency. By the state’s logic, only by adopting the principles and roles promoted by National Catholicism were women to be “freed” from the former lifestyles and roles that were “inappropriate” for them, such as working and living independently from their husbands or fathers.

To further illustrate this prioritization of family rights over women’s rights, the Francoist regime restricted access to abortion and contraception.<sup>53</sup> In addition, Francoist policy reversed progress made on advancing women’s rights in the Second Republic, including altering marriage and divorce procedures, and reinstated the civil code of 1889, which placed women under the guardianship of their fathers or husbands.<sup>54</sup> By 1945, women requiring mobility documents such as a passport or driver’s license, or who wanted to participate in extracurricular activities such as sporting clubs, had to complete social courses of the women’s arm of the Falange, *la Sección Feminina* (hereby SF), with themes ranging from Catholic values and domestic activities to textile production and volunteer work.<sup>55</sup> This conception that women needed to work for basic documents and social privileges extended into the political

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<sup>51</sup> Jefatura del Estado de España, *Fuero del Trabajo de 8 marzo de 1938*, Boletín Oficial del Estado núm. 505 de 10 de marzo de 1938, pp. 6178-6181, <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-1938-3093>. All sources from Jefatura del Estado de España are translated from Spanish to English by me.

<sup>52</sup> Jones, 75.

<sup>53</sup> Carme Molinero, “Mujer, Franquismo, Fascismo. La Clausura Forzada En Un ‘Mundo Pequeño,’” *Historia Social*, no. 30 (1998): 110. All quotes from this author are translated from Spanish by me.

<sup>54</sup> Molinero, 111.

<sup>55</sup> Jones, 75.



prisoner sphere, that women needed to work and reform educationally to even partially belong to society, a topic to be illuminated on further in the upcoming chapters. Moreover, the 1945 Spanish Constitution, the base of the Spanish government, further confirmed the state's emphasis on the patriarchal system and the family as a principal unit of society. To elaborate, it contained a pronatalist clause that provided remuneration to husbands for the number of children born by their wives, later revised to rescind the support for husbands with employed wives.<sup>56</sup> As observed by these policies, in essence, women's rights belonged to the family, husband, and the state rather than herself. Thus, in the state's eyes, women who challenged both fascism and these conceptions of women and girls' roles in society through their belonging to leftist political organizations such as the *Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas* (Unified Socialist Youth, Spanish Abbreviation *JSU*), posed the greatest threat to the state and its core pillars of National Catholicism and the family. To maintain the legitimacy of their official narratives and ensure a future in which women remained inferior members of society, the terrorizing Francoist state sought to contain these organizations that allowed women and girls greater mobility and agency outside of their roles as wives, mothers, and devout generational propagators of Catholic values.

To expand upon the containment of women's social and economic freedoms, a closer look into further policies touting the "liberation" of women and society under Franco reveals similar paradoxes to those prior. For instance, the 1945 Constitution claimed to "equally protect the rights of all Spaniards"<sup>57</sup> and laid out thirty-six articles which defined these rights, ranging from private property and labor rights to freedom of expression.<sup>58</sup> Yet, who belonged to the citizenry of "Spaniards," and which of these citizens actually possessed these rights as outlined by the state? Article one clearly states that it acknowledges "man as the bearer of eternal values and members of a national community,"<sup>59</sup> identifying who was meant to belong and be the beneficiaries of national values – the patriarchal system. In addition to this statement, the clear overhaul of women's rights under Franco again confirmed that the citizenry in possession of

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<sup>56</sup> Jones, 75-76.; Jefatura del Estado de España. *Fuero de los Españoles de 17 de julio de 1945*. Boletín Oficial del Estado núm. 199 de 18 de julio de 1945, pp. 358-360, <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-1945-7244>.

<sup>57</sup> *Fuero de los Españoles de 17 de julio de 1945*, article three.

<sup>58</sup> *Fuero de los Españoles de 17 de julio de 1945*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, article one.

rights were the men – for one, the men could decide if their wife could work, and the men would receive the profits if their wife produced children, and, as stated in article 4, anyone who disrespected this “family honor,” “will incur responsibility.”<sup>60</sup> Again, the rights as outlined in the constitution further institutionalize and strengthen the patriarchal system under Franco and the cruciality of the family, for instance, the enforcement that the “marriage will be one and indissoluble.”<sup>61</sup> All of the aforementioned restrictions on women’s agency and mobility demonstrate the state’s inclination to utilize similar principles in their escalation of state terror against women through imprisonment, overall representing the cruciality of control over women to the state’s national project.

Nonetheless, the constitution’s articles purport a Spain that is ideologically free, with freedom of assembly and a strong rule of law. For instance, article twelve argues that all Spaniards possess freedom of expression so long as they do not impede the “fundamental principles of the State.”<sup>62</sup> Yet, through the state’s persistent dialogue of the family’s rights over those of women and the othering of those whose ideas differed to official discourses, the narrative offers that divergence from strict, gendered roles essentially violated these central state principles. In brief, women were not perceived as members of the citizenry, and thus, the rights did not equally apply to them. Furthermore, the Constitution’s claims to protect against wrongful detainment,<sup>63</sup> guarantee a 72-hour release or judicial transfer rule for detainees,<sup>64</sup> and ensure a fair trial<sup>65</sup> conveniently emerged after a series of arbitrary post-war political detainments and executions from 1939-1945, including many of the women whose testimonies will be analyzed later on in this thesis. Observing the state’s venomization of those in political and social opposition to the future of Spain’s unity, the state has an exception to these apparent rights:

Article 35.- The validity of Articles twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen and eighteen [right to freedom of expression and assembly, personal correspondence and privacy, residency, and fair trial] may be temporarily suspended by the Government in

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, article four.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, article 22.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, article 12.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, articles 17-18.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, articles 18-19.

whole or in part by Decree-Law, which exhaustively determines the scope and duration of the measure.<sup>66</sup>

This exception further codified the 1939 *Ley de Responsabilidades Políticas* (Law of Political Responsibilities), a retroactive law that could prosecute for “crimes” before, during, and after the civil war, serving as the basis for imprisonment for supporters of the Second Republic and those who were active and “assisted rebellion.”<sup>67</sup> Although, as discussed, application of the laws was by no means egalitarian under Franco, both the article and law offered complete justification for the state regarding selectivity of this application of the law, with its ultimate manifestation being political imprisonment, to be discussed in the coming chapters. Viewing these rapidly changing policies in relation to women and the state, regulation of gendered roles, rights, employments, and more proved critical to the state’s control of society.

### Gendered Political and Pedagogical Measures – Education and the *Sección Femenina*

Both women and girls’ education and the Falange’s SF further illuminate systematic efforts to retain and force the state’s ideal Spanish woman, and further institutionalize the state’s “justification” for engaging in terror on its population, especially regarding women and girls. Firstly, education and youth planning serve as additional means to understand important and gendered objectives for state legitimacy, as a nation, in part. utilizes its pedagogical model in one manner to mold the next generation in state values and beliefs. In this manner the Franco regime proved no different - education’s principal foci were nationalism and Catholicism,<sup>68</sup> both pillars of Falangist beliefs that possessed strong gendered elements. Under Franco, the education system underwent prompt transformations that saw the reversal of advancements in equal education rights of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to adhere to its narratives of the role of the women and family in society more closely. In one manner, the Franco regime eliminated coeducation in elementary and high schools in 1936,<sup>69</sup> a practice perceived by the state to be a

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, article 35.

<sup>67</sup> Jefatura del Estado de España, *Ley de 9 de febrero de 1939 de Responsabilidades Políticas*, Boletín Oficial del Estado número 44 de 13 de febrero de 1939, <https://www.boe.es/datos/pdfs/BOE//1939/044/A00824-00847.pdf>.

<sup>68</sup> Julio Carabaña, “Comprehensive Educational Reforms in Spain: Past and Present,” *European Journal of Education* 23, no. 3 (1988): 213–28, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1502857>.

<sup>69</sup> Molinero, 111.

“moral and pedagogical filth,”<sup>70</sup> that purported the “clearly false” argument that the idea that women and girls were intellectually equal with men. Rather, a proper education in the eyes of the Franco regime was one segregated by gender. Girls were not persuaded to progress far academically, but home economics skills such as sewing and household management, language and music lessons, and the teaching of Catholic values were viewed as suitable academic content.<sup>71</sup>

Like girls’ education, women’s options to participate in society were limited and strictly gendered. The SF, the women’s branch of the Falange party, offered unique opportunities for women at the time, including community-facing leadership roles to educate young and working women for marriage, motherhood, and domesticity.<sup>72</sup> Spanish history scholar Richmond outlines the contradictory model of the SF, in one manner that their position as community leaders challenged the “message of female subordination and submission that they preached,” for instance, “domesticity and wifely virtues were to be taught by women who were usually unmarried, often working away from home and always under the direction of SF, not their families.”<sup>73</sup> Yet, for the state, because of the rhetoric they reinforced and the subordinate role they encouraged to youth and working class women, the SF remained acceptable, being a simultaneously transformative yet socially backsliding women’s organization<sup>74</sup> Thus, it can be observed that the limited means that women could have a more independent lifestyle under Franco had to be ones that served and progressed the gendered narrative of the state.

Additionally, observing excerpts from *Consigna*, a pedagogical journal of the National Delegation of the SF in circulation from 1940 to 1977,<sup>75</sup> further illustrates the enduring state narratives in educational materials. Its contents demonstrated the political project of the state in relation to youth and its gendered dimensions, and the weekly sections of the magazine,

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<sup>70</sup> Molinero, 111..

<sup>71</sup> Victoria Camps, “3. The Changing Role of Women in Spanish Society,” *RSA Journal* 142, no. 5452 (1994): 55–63.

<sup>72</sup> Kathleen Richmond, *Women and Spanish Fascism: The Women’s Section of the Falange, 1934-1959*, Routledge/Cañada Blanch Studies on Contemporary Spain ; 6 (London ; New York : Routledge, 2003), 101-110.

<sup>73</sup> Richmond, 101.

<sup>74</sup> Richmond, 110.

<sup>75</sup> “Consigna: revista pedagógica de la sección femenina de FET y de las JONS (1940-1977),” *Catálogo Colectivo de la Red de Bibliotecas de los Archivos Estatales*, accessed February 3, 2024, <https://www.mcu.es/ccbae/es/consulta/registro.do?id=3602>.

including religion, national syndicalism, and history, with regular reproductions of the writings of Jose Antonio, demonstrate key priorities of the state narrative. One repeated article was one that discussed the importance of youth involvement in the Falange party, after the *Ley de 6 de diciembre de 1940* (Law of December 6, 1940) made participation in the party youth organizations mandatory, for girls, the youth version of the SF, known as las *Juventudes Femininas* (hereby JF).<sup>76</sup> One of these articles in *Consigna* clearly demonstrates the intent of the JF for the state apparatus, stating that the “mission of the Girls' Youth, therefore, is ‘to achieve a national spirit, strong and united, and to install in the soul of future generations the joy and pride of the Fatherland.’”<sup>77</sup> The same article explicitly outlines what the control of girls’ education means for the state, taking a quotation from leader of the SF and sister of Jose Antonio, Pilar Primo de Rivera:

What we have to do is to teach the Youth so that not a single one of them escapes our influence and so that all of them know how to react in any circumstance, according to our Falangist understanding of life and History...because the future of the Falange depends on how these girls come to us.<sup>78</sup>

Once more, the state demonstrates the importance of control of girls and knowledge transfer from the state directly to them without outside influence for its future survival. Further elements of gendered control are seen in an article that provides advice to instructors on how to handle their girl students’ questions about the future and choosing a profession in adult life. The statement reads:

This concern for tomorrow has two aspects: one, the family, and the other, the school. As the fundamental and decisive one is the family, we are going to deal precisely with this one... Girls should be offered opportunities to try to achieve their aspirations through work that is pleasant and compatible with their nature and the obligations of their lives as women.<sup>79</sup>

Hence, the prioritization of the family over women’s social and economic advancement was as clear in pedagogical materials as in fundamental legal documents. Girls, if permitted by their husbands or fathers, would have to make sure that the career they chose was “pleasant and

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<sup>76</sup> Jefatura del Estado de España, *Ley de 6 de diciembre de 1940*, Boletín Oficial del Estado núm. 342 de 7 de diciembre de 1940, p. 8392, <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-1940-12138>.

<sup>77</sup> “Lección XIII,” *Consigna*. N.º 78 (Madrid, ES), July 1, 1947, 64, [https://ceclmdigital.uclm.es/viewer.vm?id=0002843136&page=64&search=ninas&lang=es&view=prensa\\_](https://ceclmdigital.uclm.es/viewer.vm?id=0002843136&page=64&search=ninas&lang=es&view=prensa_)

<sup>78</sup> “Ibid, 64-65.”

<sup>79</sup> Francisca Bohigas, “La elección de profesión,” *Consigna*. N.º 97 (Madrid, ES), February 1, 1949, 38-40, [https://ceclmdigital.uclm.es/viewer.vm?id=0002844934&page=1&search=&lang=en&view=prensa\\_](https://ceclmdigital.uclm.es/viewer.vm?id=0002844934&page=1&search=&lang=en&view=prensa_)

compatible with their nature,” the translation being: a profession that would not interfere with their most important role to the state – being a mother and wife. Put succinctly by Spanish historian Valencia-García, the work of the SF, JF, and the wider educational model demonstrated that:

If education was meant to teach religion and nationalism primarily, and if women were the purveyors of that education, we can start to understand how teaching fascistic ideals became the task of women – those women, to some extent, becoming complicit to their own oppression.<sup>80</sup>

All these measures combined to compose a way for the state to “legitimize a system of domination over the female gender,”<sup>81</sup> and one that could thus, by extension, justify imprisoning women who rejected fascism and the idea that their social role was limited to the rearing of a family or reproducing Francoist rhetoric in their community with the SF. In one stark example, re-educative courses were offered to women’s prisoners as an initiative of the SF – if women completed hard labor or attended domestic, political, and religious courses, they could have their sentences reduced.<sup>82</sup> Here, the thread of a “corrective and moralizing force” is observed from both sides of the societal spectrum - from girls’ education and SF political participation all the way to imprisonment. This message is further reinforced through the narratives constructed throughout additional state newspapers, to be observed in the following section.

### Media Propaganda: Women and Prisoners

In addition to party ideology, legal codes, education, and the SF, the media composed another layer of state narrative of the need for subordination of women, especially focusing on women that they believed “threatened” the state. From the state’s point of view, the media proved an additional means outside the legal and educational sphere to reach a wider audience in their effort to counter the political spread of those labeled Marxist and leftist women. In the law section of this chapter, it has been observed that a patriarchal backlash took hold in political leadership that saw to swiftly eradicate the advancements of women, another segment of the

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<sup>80</sup> Louie Dean Valencia-García, *Antiauthoritarian Youth Culture in Francoist Spain: Clashing with Fascism* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 56-57.

<sup>81</sup> María del Carmen Gil del Pino, Sonia García Segura, and María José Martínez Carmona, “Apuntes sobre la educación de la mujer durante el franquismo: ‘Profesión: su sexo’ (1936-1975),” *La Aljaba: Segunda Época, Revista de Estudios de la Mujer* 26, no. 1 (2022): 1–14. Translated from Spanish by self.

<sup>82</sup> Richmond, 15-16.

population that could possess political aspirations and mobilize outside of party lines. To the state, if women detracted from the strict roles given to them – being mothers, homemakers, and/or dedicating themselves to spreading state values with the SF – they required a corrective force, and the state’s mass media narratives would serve to amplify this communication.

One channel by which the Francoist state publicized this message of the threat of the “enemy” woman was through one of its principle daily propaganda newspapers, *El Arriba Espana*, or *Arriba*. *Arriba* began in 1935 and continued through the Civil War and beyond as the Falange’s first daily periodical utilized to spread Nationalist ideology.<sup>83</sup> In *Arriba*, Falangists again claimed their movement as “neither left nor right” but rather “purely Spanish,”<sup>84</sup> but examining the rhetoric present in the media, not all citizens were represented by the Falange – state dialogue argued women, leftists, and prisoners were not Spanish, they were threats to the national morality and state survival. In particular, the “othering” of women that countered the national project was rampant in *Arriba*. Rapidly and repeatedly, the media permitted the state to lay out the characters of this state survival story through a spiritual dichotomy: the Francoist leadership was “good” and the Marxist women were “evil.” From the perspective of the state, falangists, despite their policies of eugenics, “us versus them” rhetoric, and political witch hunts of those threatening this national project, were “not fascists.”<sup>85</sup> For the state, political prisoners represented “communism as a system,” which to them was the

negation of all the principles that sustain our Catholic civilization, the destruction of an economic order achieved by the contribution and sacrifice of generations during centuries, the negation of the homeland in its sense of historical dimension and the greatest swindle in the social order.<sup>86</sup>

In addition, “red” women were described as women “without the great treasure of an interior life, without the refuge of religion,” who were “ugly” and envious because the end of the

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<sup>83</sup> “Arriba: órgano de Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las J.O.N.S. de Madrid,” *Biblioteca Digital Memoria de Madrid*, accessed February 3, 2024, [https://www.memoriademadrid.es/buscador.php?accion=VerFicha&id=379788&pagina=&tipodoc=docs\\_hijos&dia\\_inicio=11&mes\\_inicio=12&anio\\_inicio=&dia\\_final=&mes\\_final=&anio\\_final=](https://www.memoriademadrid.es/buscador.php?accion=VerFicha&id=379788&pagina=&tipodoc=docs_hijos&dia_inicio=11&mes_inicio=12&anio_inicio=&dia_final=&mes_final=&anio_final=).

<sup>84</sup> Alvaro Cruzat, “El frente antifalangista,” *Arriba* (Madrid, ES), December 12, 1935, [https://www.memoriademadrid.es/buscador.php?accion=VerFicha&id=386877&num\\_id=&num\\_total=1](https://www.memoriademadrid.es/buscador.php?accion=VerFicha&id=386877&num_id=&num_total=1). All referenced *Arriba* articles are translated from Spanish by me.

<sup>85</sup> “La Sección Femenina - Conferencia en Falange Femenina,” *Arriba* (Madrid, ES), March 4, 1939, [https://prensahistorica.mcu.es/es/catalogo\\_imagenes/grupo.do?path=1000210624](https://prensahistorica.mcu.es/es/catalogo_imagenes/grupo.do?path=1000210624).

<sup>86</sup> “Trascendental discurso del Caudillo en el Consejo Nacional,” *Arriba* (Madrid, ES), July 18, 1945, [https://www.memoriademadrid.es/buscador.php?accion=VerFicha&id=398649&num\\_id=1&num\\_total=3](https://www.memoriademadrid.es/buscador.php?accion=VerFicha&id=398649&num_id=1&num_total=3).

Second Republic “extinguished” their femininity and thus they sought revenge, wanting to “bury [Spain’s] unity forever.”<sup>87</sup> As observed by this rhetoric, an immediacy to act is utilized as a constructive device behind the system of imprisonment under Franco that further attempts to “justify” the method of state terror utilized to imprison women as fast as possible, without fail grounds or a fair trial.

Other articles in *Arriba* possess several attempts to justify the employment of the prison system as a “corrective and moralizing” force. Through numerous articles, the state tries to demonstrate the capacity of women’s prisons to restore moral values and promote participation in “proper” roles for women. To illustrate, one article in *Arriba* describes the involvement of women in processions for the first festivals of Corpus Christi under “liberated Spain,”<sup>88</sup> a celebration of the Catholic Church, exemplifying the complete agency the state placed in religion for instilling values, and the inseparability of the two institutions in both the prison system and wider society. The article describes how the involvement of women prisoners demonstrates the “confidence they must have in the rectitude of Franco’s justice,”<sup>89</sup> and connects again to the idea that women prisoners were segments of the population that needed to be saved through religion. Another article discusses a visit of the SF to Ventas to visit the first three children born inside the prison. It claims that these women, the so-called “delinquency,” will be morally restored and “will return [to society] because Franco ‘wins and convinces,’ and convincing is the definitive victory that enlightens his generous soul.”<sup>90</sup> In this phrase, the binary characterization of “good versus evil” and “us versus them” is further emphasized – the “delinquency” must be corrected and helped, but this can only be achieved through the supposed goodness, generosity, and moral integrity of the state.

In another instance, the utilization of youth as a symbol of the “greatness” of the Catholic Church is demonstrated through propaganda of the baptism of babies and the works of the feminine section of the religious political organization *Acción Católica* (Catholic Action)

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<sup>87</sup> José Vicente Puente, “El rencor de las mujeres feas,” *Arriba* (Madrid, ES), May 16, 1939, [https://www.memoriademadrid.es/buscador.php?accion=VerFicha&id=386921&num\\_id=&num\\_total=1996](https://www.memoriademadrid.es/buscador.php?accion=VerFicha&id=386921&num_id=&num_total=1996).

<sup>88</sup> “Primer corpus de la España liberada - solemne fiesta religiosa en la Cárcel de Mujeres,” *Arriba* (Madrid, ES), June 9, 1939, [https://www.memoriademadrid.es/buscador.php?accion=VerFicha&id=386942&num\\_id=1&num\\_total=1996](https://www.memoriademadrid.es/buscador.php?accion=VerFicha&id=386942&num_id=1&num_total=1996).

<sup>89</sup> “Primer corpus...” *Arriba*.

<sup>90</sup> “Una visita a la prisión de Ventas,” *Arriba* (Madrid, ES), May 16, 1939, [https://www.memoriademadrid.es/buscador.php?accion=VerFicha&id=386921&num\\_id=&num\\_total=1996](https://www.memoriademadrid.es/buscador.php?accion=VerFicha&id=386921&num_id=&num_total=1996).



inside Ventas and the San Isidro Nursing Mother's Prison. For greater clarity, the Cárcel de Ventas archive describes that the San Isidro Nursing Mother's Prison was "without a doubt the most publicized women's prison by the official media," a place that, with articles of religious holidays and baptisms of children, displayed the prison as a "model establishment, a showcase of the goodness of the regime in its defense of the values of motherhood and childhood."<sup>91</sup> In brief, the narratives found in *Arriba* demonstrate the importance to the state to rationalize their venomization and segregation of "politically adverse" women in a palatable way to society that emphasized Catholic "good" works, a moral struggle between "good and evil," and youth inside prisons as a symbol of moral purity.

### State Narratives – Conclusion

In conclusion, through ideology and the law, political and pedagogical measures, as well as propaganda, the Francoist state demonstrated why the gendered agenda proved crucial to its brand of state terror – the narrative of state survival depended, to a large extent, on the adherence of women to strong gender roles. Across each of these themes, Stohl's discussion of desired outcomes for state terrorism can be observed – the Francoist state sought through multifaceted measures to "create or enforce obedience...[to produce] compliance and fear...[and to maintain] order by eliminating and neutralizing resistance and...control the process of political change," and determined that targeting women could have the "maximum impact"<sup>92</sup> to achieve these objectives. Through ideology and the law, the state began its "us versus them" characterization of society and mapped out who and who did not belong to the Spanish spiritual and political race. Either an individual was compliant or not, and the Francoist state labeled "non-participants" in society – namely leftists and non-adherents to state-guided Catholicism – as "threats," of which those labeled as politically left women proved the ultimate culmination of these "threats" for Spain. Observing the multi-pronged mission by the state to protect itself and attempt to "legitimize" state terror, in the next chapter, the historization of women's prisons in Spain will demonstrate how gendered state violence was not a new phenomenon, but rather developed over centuries and thus became a natural progression for the terrorizing Francoist state to employ. Furthermore, the official policies and discourses of the Cárcel de Ventas would too, prove integral to the Francoist narrative of state legitimacy –

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<sup>91</sup> "Traslado de la Maternal de San Isidro a Ventas," Cárcel de Ventas.

<sup>92</sup> Stohl, 8-9.

if those “enemies” and “threats” were not segregated from society, monitored, and separated from their children – going off the narrative of the state, there may be no future Spain.

## Chapter 2: Historical Overview – Spanish Women’s Prisons and Ventas

In the last chapter, the structural and systematic gendered narratives of Francoist state were discussed through the thematic lenses of ideology and the law, politics and education, and media propaganda. This chapter will dive deeper into the history of women’s prisons in Spain more broadly and then Ventas to demonstrate how these legal, sociopolitical, and propagandic measures translated to the development and policies of the Ventas prison under Franco. Through examining the history of Franco’s Ventas, the importance of the prison’s existence and the prisoners’ significance to Franco’s brand of state terror and state legitimacy will come into greater focus. In like manner, through exploration of the development of the prison, the importance of women prisoner’s testimonies in the face of Franco’s state terror campaign and as Sutton discusses, their cruciality to the preservation of collective memory under state violence<sup>93</sup> can be better understood. At present, the women of Ventas, their descendants, scholars, and community members continue to keep the history of the prison alive through testimonies, events, exhibitions, and the archive utilized throughout this chapter, [carceldeventas.org](http://carceldeventas.org). By first historicizing Spanish women’s prisons and then reconstructing what is known regarding Ventas, greater assistance will be provided for analysis into the “true role” of Ventas for the state and the consequent counternarratives produced by women.

### “Crisis of Morality:” mid-17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish Women’s Prisons

In Spain, the concept of women’s prisons did not merely begin under Franco – gender-specific prisons and correctional programs developed for centuries beforehand. More aptly, Spanish historian Holgado, a specialist in Spanish women’s prisons with focus on Cárcel de Ventas, describes the women’s programs throughout time as a “correcting and moralizing” force to punish women for “misconducts” through programs centered around religion and manual labor.<sup>94</sup> These ideas of correction as linked to a national project connect to Blakeley’s criteria that with state terror, the intended population is coerced to alter their behaviors in some way,<sup>95</sup> a thread evident through Spain’s early instruments for women’s correction and reaching its ultimate intensity under Franco. As early as the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, women debtors were

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<sup>93</sup> Sutton, 6.

<sup>94</sup> “Las antiguas ‘galeras’, o cárceles de mujeres,” Cárcel de Ventas, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://carceldeventas.org/las-antiguas-galeras-o-carceles-de-mujeres/>.

<sup>95</sup> Blakeley, 30.

among the first imprisoned in an official penitentiary house, and towards the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the emphasis on women's prisons as a source of unpaid labor increased.<sup>96</sup> Forms of imprisonment were not limited to correctional facilities - common spaces for women's incarceration or labor-focused punishment included convents, hospitals, and sewing workshops that continued into the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>97</sup> demonstrating the ever-present, intertwined nature of women's correction with both work and religious doctrine. To illuminate one example of such facilities, Magdalene houses run by Catholic groups such as the Daughters of the Good Shepherd professed a narrative that they needed to "save" young girls from "falling into 'the bad life,'" thus utilizing religious principles as a justification for incarcerating women for otherwise unconventional "moral crimes."<sup>98</sup>

To further illustrate the longstanding moral linkages of women with prison projects, gender studies specialist Serrano explores the historiography of Spanish penitentiary reform in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. To delineate, Serrano states that most incarcerated women were targeted for these "moral, rather than criminal offences" including but not limited to "wandering in the streets without known purpose, begging, street prostitution, adultery, illegal cohabitation, and shameful behavior," all subjective and arbitrary convictions that disproportionately targeted the poor, immigrants, and non-religious.<sup>99</sup> Many young women housed in these institutions were poor, orphaned, or turned to prostitution due to limited economic means.<sup>100</sup> Hence, their imprisonment was often the result of a combination of the failure of state institutions and social services paired with conservative, Catholic values. The resulting narrative was a "crisis of public morality" – rather than a focus on institutional failures, the failures of young women and the "moral backsliding" of women and girls were highlighted as the root problem. Provided these examples, a religious and moral element

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<sup>96</sup> Elena Serrano, "Sex and Prisons: Women and Spanish Penitentiary Reform, 1787-1808," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 42, no. 4 (2019): 504-505.

<sup>97</sup> Fernando Hernandez Holgado, "The Militant Prison: Ventas and Les Corts," *Studia Historica Contemporánea* 29 (2011): 199.; Serrano 505.

<sup>98</sup> Aurora Morcillo-Gómez, *The Seduction of Modern Spain: The Female Body and the Francoist Body Politic* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2010) 108-109.

<sup>99</sup> Serrano, 505.

<sup>100</sup> Serrano, 505.

existed in women's prisons from their origins, a thread that continued and further radicalized under Franco's reign of state terror.

However, alongside these early prison institutions, movements from civil society also sought to reform women's prisons. As early as the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, an organization known as the *Señoras* (the women) was the first civil society group with the objective to reform prison conditions in Spain, with implemented reforms including the installation of prison hospitals, education services, and special protections for pregnant women and mothers.<sup>101</sup> However, a religious and labor focus still existed in their organization, for instance, the *Señoras* provided religious education for prisoners and established textile workshops in several prisons.<sup>102</sup> Serrano notes that testimonies of prisoners at the time are nonexistent, and thus, the true nature and reception of the *Señoras*' reforms are difficult to determine.<sup>103</sup> This example illuminates why testimonies are crucial for both identifying discrepancies between official and unofficial narratives as well as understanding the gendered experience of prison life, to be demonstrated in the following analysis chapter.

### Towards a New Approach to Women's Incarceration: Victoria Kent and the Spanish Second Republic

What is certain, however, is that the first large-scale effort towards a non-denominational approach towards prison reform began during the Spanish Second Republic (1931-1939). For the first time, the ideas of reformation and gendered consideration were institutionalized by the state rather than the work of civil society and academic discourses. To illustrate, the Republican government appointed lawyer Victoria Kent the Director General of Prisons in 1931, with one of her principal objectives being to "modernize" Spanish incarceration.<sup>104</sup> Under her leadership, several humanitarian reforms were implemented across Spanish women's prisons, including the removal of shackles and chains as well as improved coordination of supplies and transfers between prisons.<sup>105</sup> As an extension of this modernizing

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<sup>101</sup> Serrano, 501-502.

<sup>102</sup> Serrano, 511.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> "Victoria Kent, Directora General de prisiones," Cárcel de Ventas, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://carceldeventas.org/victoria-kent-directora-general-de-prisiones/>.

<sup>105</sup> Fernando Hernández Holgado, *Mujeres encarceladas: la prisión de Ventas, de la República al franquismo, 1931-1941* (Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2003): 44-46.

goal, one of her primary projects was to design a “model prison” for women that specifically addressed gendered conditions and current problems with the prison system that disproportionately impacted women, what was to become Ventas.<sup>106</sup> Ventas, the new “model prison” was thus to be an example for the contemporary physical and ethical standard of women’s prisons across Spain.

In addition to administrative reforms, Kent introduced progressive ideological considerations for improving gendered experiences in and beyond prisons. She believed in education as a correctional tool as well as in the principles of “non-denominationalism and scientism,” which led to measures such as removing mandatory attendance of religious events for prisoners and dissolving the Chaplain leadership of the Prison Corps.<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, the new administration directed an overhaul of the dominant Catholic Church leadership in women’s prisons and in 1932, the first Female Auxiliary Section of the Prison Corps was named, composed of thirty-four women selected to become educated to run women’s prisons.<sup>108</sup> Through these reforms, secularism reached every level of the prison, from the individual to the leader, and gendered concerns of prisons were to become less equated with the “crisis of morality” and rather with the unique needs of women in prisons.

Then, “in 1933, Cárcel de Ventas officially opened, shifting away from the religious and moral reeducation ideology present in female incarceration towards Kent’s vision of a more non-denominational approach that emphasized equal punishment for men and women as well as educational approaches towards the reintegration of women into society.”<sup>109</sup> The design of the prison held in mind concerns of both gender and general dignity including independent rooms, bathrooms, a library, school, a hospital, as well as features designed so that children could stay with their incarcerated mothers until age six.<sup>110</sup> Although at the time of its inauguration in 1933, Kent was no longer Director, her vision and reforms proved undoubtedly fundamental in the construction of Ventas and a new, forward-thinking prison system that

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<sup>106</sup> “Victoria Kent,” Cárcel de Ventas.

<sup>107</sup> “Victoria Kent,” Cárcel de Ventas.

<sup>108</sup> “Las nuevas funcionarias,” Cárcel de Ventas, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://carceldeventas.org/la-nuevas-funcionarias/>.

<sup>109</sup> Student Name, “Gendered State Terrorism,” 9.; “Victoria Kent,” Cárcel de Ventas.

<sup>110</sup> Holgado, *Mujeres encarceladas*, 67-71.

considered specialized gendered needs and sought to advance secular women's leadership across the Spanish prison system.

### Prisons During Spanish Civil War and Early Years of Francoism

Yet, in a brief time, the progressive policies of Ventas were about to see a complete overhaul during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and into the Francoist dictatorship (1939-1975), where policies became more radicalized and violent. As reported by the Council of Europe, official and likely underestimated Spanish records report that "in the first half of the decade, [the prison population] reached 300,000 out of a population of 25.9 million. For comparison, the entire national prison population in pre-civil war Spain in January 1936 amounted to 34,526,"<sup>111</sup> demonstrating the sheer proportional escalation of pre-war and post-war prison populations in Spain and thus, the radical use of imprisonment as a tool of state terror. More specifically, in the years prior to the dictatorship, for instance, from 1930 to 1934, the yearly average of prisoners totaled 478 for women and 8,925 for men, to which by early 1940, rose to 23,332 women and 247,487 men<sup>112</sup> under Franco's political witch hunt. Rapidly, Ventas became the most populated women's prison of this prison nexus in Francoist Spain, detaining approximately 14,000 prisoners throughout its operation from 1931-1969.<sup>113</sup>

However, the violent legacy of Ventas did not begin with women, but rather the utilization of the prison to execute approximately 2,400 male prisoners under the guise of "transfers" throughout the civil war.<sup>114</sup> By March 1937, women repopulated the prison, and the complete overhaul of Ventas by the Franco regime began in March 1939.<sup>115</sup> Countless women and girls determined to be "politically adverse" – participants in republican or leftist organizations – were arrested, but also women who worked for humanitarian causes during the war, such as those assisting in infirmaries, soup kitchens, or women who had republican relatives.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Council of Europe, *Report: Need for International Condemnation of the Franco Regime*, 2005.

<sup>112</sup> Holgado, "The Militant Prison: Ventas and Les Corts," 203

<sup>113</sup> "Cárcel de Ventas," Cárcel de Ventas.

<sup>114</sup> "La guerra: 'sacas' y traslados," Cárcel de Ventas, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://carceldeventas.org/la-guerra-sacas-y-traslados/>.

<sup>115</sup> "El 'almacén' de reclusas," Cárcel de Ventas, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://carceldeventas.org/el-almacen-de-reclusas/>.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

Holgado further describes the arbitrary detention of common or non-political prisoners during the early years of Francoism. By discussing that many were arrested not because they were “politically trained” but rather because they required a union card during the war,<sup>117</sup> he further reiterates the political witch hunt that rather sought to simply imprison those adjacent to republican fighters as a message of political terror. Moreover, he describes that “a crime that theoretically should have been conceptualized as ‘economic,’ such as the possession of red money, became political because it was interpreted as a manifestation of disaffection with the new regime.”<sup>118</sup> On the other hand, many young women were politically active - they had positioned themselves against the Francoists during and after the war – and were pursued for doing so,<sup>119</sup> though punished arbitrarily despite differing levels of involvement, a factor to be discussed in the upcoming analysis. In due time, the prison reached up to three times its capacity, with 1,734 inmates housed in Ventas by December 1940<sup>120</sup> and between 1939 and 1941, fifty-eight Ventas women died from illness, with fourteen of these women under the age of thirty.<sup>121</sup> Hence, the conditions were congested and unsanitary, far from the morally righteous and charitable narratives offered by the Church of “saving” girls and young women, and several women and children treatable diseases, as will be seen in the upcoming testimonies.

These early examples of execution and death from illness in Ventas demonstrate the disregard for the health and wellbeing of prisoners and the failures of the state to protect women and girls. State narratives posited that the prevention of the spread of their political views to society was more important to the regime than the prevention of spread of illness and death among those they deemed state enemies. Further, the image of the Catholic Church as a charitable force of good was contradicted with the deadly and inhumane conditions present inside the church. Here, the inconsistencies of state narratives from rhetoric of “good versus evil” and “us versus them” regarding political prisoners is seen through its tangible dehumanization and lack of regard for human life, proven in its most extreme form through executions of prisoners. To elaborate, in the early years of the dictatorship (1939-1943), 80

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<sup>117</sup> Holgado, “The Militant Prison,” 216.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 218.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 215-216.

<sup>120</sup> Holgado, *Mujeres encarceladas*, 113.

<sup>121</sup> Holgado, “The Militant Prison,” 208.



Ventas women were executed, including seven minors.<sup>122</sup> “Observing these conditions, with the arrival of the dictatorship, the vision of Francoist leadership towards Ventas returned to this “corrective” and “moralizing” force, and the systematic overhaul and rescaling of women’s prisons demonstrate the cruciality of the use of imprisonment as a means for Franco’s campaign of state terror.”<sup>123</sup> Reviewing these circumstances, the emphasis on separation of political prisoners from society despite a lack of widescale institutional capacity demonstrates the cruciality of the use of imprisonment as a means for Franco’s campaign of state terror. In addition, use of violent means to counter the political beliefs of women and girls exhibits the belief of Francoist leadership of the cruciality of dehumanization, execution, and political violence to maintain the state, and from the state’s perspective, to “justify” these hardships and deaths.

In the Francoist policies of Ventas, the narrative of correction as tied to religion and morality returned to its pre-Second Republic vision. Just as National Catholicism linked a return to “greatness” through nationalism and Catholicism, the prison system also faced a revisionary trajectory of returning inmates to the moral punishment and religious retribution of prisons past. To elaborate, in May 1940, religious leadership once again took control in Ventas, with the reintroduction of *Las Hijas del Buen Pastor* (Daughters of the Good Shepherd), a female Catholic order composed of several nuns, into the prison structure.<sup>124</sup> As described by the Cárcel de Ventas digital archive, this development, combined with textile workshops and classes run by both *Las Hijas* and the SF, returned to the “correcting and moralizing” forces of prisons past.<sup>125</sup> Holgado further details that during the civil war, the Church had taken the side of the Francoists and thus, their utilization of the prisons became more heavily politicized and the targeting of the “Anti-Spain enemy of religion,” or the “red” women.<sup>126</sup> Again, the true interconnected nature of the Catholic Church and the state in performing acts of state terror is blatant.

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<sup>122</sup> “El ‘almacén’ de reclusas,” Cárcel de Ventas.

<sup>123</sup> Student Name, “Gendered State Terrorism,” 9-10.

<sup>124</sup> “Las Hijas del Buen Pastor, en Ventas,” Cárcel de Ventas, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://carceldeventas.org/las-hijas-del-buen-pastor-en-ventas/>.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Holgado, “The Militant Prison: Ventas and Les Corts.”

In addition, several of the new leadership joined the prison by means of the *Ley de 25 de agosto de 1939* (Law of August 25, 1939) which stipulated that “victims of red barbarism” were entitled to government positions.<sup>127</sup> Staff, among which included nuns, reinstated old methods of Spanish prison labor through sewing workshops as well as religious curriculum and means of discipline.<sup>128</sup> The return of the prisons to a religious orientation and patronage towards those victimized by the “reds” again demonstrates that the prisons’ policies were a core representation of the regime’s vision and structure of its state terror. Until 1944, *Las Hijas* ran Ventas before it was turned back over to the Prison Corps.<sup>129</sup> Nevertheless, the emphasis on a religious and moral direction in the prison’s early days under Franco demonstrate the importance of religion and religious punishment to Franco’s brand of state terror. Observing these circumstances, with the arrival of the dictatorship, the vision of Francoist leadership towards Ventas returned to this “corrective” and “moralizing” force because punitive religious methods were once again employed.

Yet, throughout the dictatorship, the correctional focus and prison population shifted significantly. As soon as the mid-1940s, the population of political prisoners in Ventas began to decline because of government pardons and sentence reduction to reduce overcrowding.<sup>130</sup> By mid-1946, the number of political women prisoners in Spain reduced to approximately 5,000, and the number of common prisoners, those convicted for crimes such as petty theft, outnumbered those of women convicted of political post-war crimes, with 4,039 common prisoners compared to 1,219 political prisoners.<sup>131</sup> Despite these changes, several core elements of Franco’s national project of morality continued - with these convictions still existed a moral imperative and religious undercurrent to social control of women who posed a threat to the national project of Spain and the ideals of Catholicism. In addition to these inseparable connections of political prisoners with religious and moral ideals, common prisoners remained linked to a national moral imperative – while several non-political prisoners included those accused of petty theft, many were also held for crimes “against public morality,” akin to prison

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<sup>127</sup> “Las Hijas del Buen Pastor, en Ventas,” Cárcel de Ventas.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> “Las presas comunes: una inmensa mayoría en Ventas,” Cárcel de Ventas, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://carceldeventas.org/las-presas-comunes-una-inmensa-mayoria-en-ventas/>.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

objectives of centuries past. These “crimes” included but were not limited to vagrancy, prostitution (made illegal in 1956), the corruption of minors, pimping and abortion,” among other so-designated “crimes.”<sup>132</sup> Therefore, despite shifts in religious staff and political prisoner populations, a clear political and religious intent remained in the imprisonment of women later into the Francoist regime. Furthermore, labor in the form of textile production and paper handling continued, demonstrating the persistence of work as a “corrective” model.<sup>133</sup>

Moreover, another wave of political prisoners arose in the 1960s with the arrests of young women protesting for the amnesty of political prisoners, as well as women organizers of clandestine worker’s unions and communist student activists.<sup>134</sup> This second wave demonstrates the state’s persistent narrative of the so-called “threats” politically mobilized women posed to national unity even in the later decades of the regime, and the state’s intent to use any means necessary to contain them. By the summer of 1969, the Franco regime evicted the prison by order of the *Ley 61/1969 de 30 julio* (Law 61/1969 of July 30),<sup>135</sup> meaning the prisoners needed to be transferred to other facilities for the remainder of their sentences. During this time, the remaining inmates of Ventas were divided among several different facilities, including the Alcalá de Henares central prison, the psychiatric sanatorium of Madrid, and the Carabanche prison hospital, with the intent to construct newer prison facilities.<sup>136</sup> However, these plans never materialized, and the remaining women were transferred to a former male prison hospital that converted into a women’s prison.<sup>137</sup> Despite the regime’s failure, the intent to expand prison facilities demonstrates the likelihood of a continuation once again of political imprisonment into later decades. Yet, the Ventas building was demolished in 1973,<sup>138</sup> and the regime fell in 1975 with the death of Francisco Franco.

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> “Una nueva generación de presas políticas en Ventas,” Cárcel de Ventas, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://carceldeventas.org/una-nueva-generacion-de-presas-politicas-en-ventas/>.

<sup>135</sup> Jefatura del Estado de España, *Ley 61/1969 de 30 julio*, Boletín Oficial del Estado núm. 156 de 1 de julio de 1969, 10336, [https://www.boe.es/diario\\_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-1969-41739](https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-1969-41739).

<sup>136</sup> “Desalojo y cierre de la prisión,” Cárcel de Ventas, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://carceldeventas.org/desalojo-y-cierre-de-la-prision/>.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

It is important to note the limitations to understanding the penitentiary systems under Franco more broadly, and more specifically the policies of Ventas. For one, Spanish historian Gómez Bravo describes that there remains limited accessibility to primary source documents and thus a complete understanding of the “true role” of the prison system under Franco.<sup>139</sup> However, because of this absence of documentation, he notes that testimonies have thus been “identified with the early forms of repression”<sup>140</sup> mainly because of oral documentation. Ventas proves no different - in the wake of the building’s demolition and the Franco regime, the Ventas archive, containing over thirty years of documentation, was displaced.<sup>141</sup> At present, the remaining, few, and poorly preserved documents can be accessed at the *Archivo General del Ministerio del Interior* (General Archive of the Ministry of the Interior), but despite the erection of a small plaque acknowledging the victims of Ventas, not much of the surrounding area indicates the darker history of the space as a site of Franco’s campaign of state terror against women deemed political enemies of the state.<sup>142</sup> Hence, analysis of prisoners’ testimonies is crucial to both understanding how state terror operated under Franco and the character of women’s responses to state terror campaigns.

### Spanish Women’s Prisons: Conclusion

In brief, moral and religious parameters have long been linked to women’s incarceration in Spain. Throughout these centuries, various actors, including civil society, the Catholic Church, and the state, have played a part in shaping correctional institutions, their focus, and their reforms. Although early civil society groups linked their humanitarian and administrative reforms for women still to religion, the Spanish Second Republic proved a turning point by which women’s prisons became more institutionalized by the state and disbanded from religious affiliation as a source of correction. Yet, as Franco came to power, the state once again continued this religious legacy and tied it to the survival of the state to further “justify” the incarceration of political prisoners. Observing the history of Spanish women’s prisons, it is not a stretch to conclude that leftist political thought under Franco could be translated into a crime of “morality,” as any adverse behavior of women outside of culturally and politically identified roles had been labeled over time. The state’s narratives across sectors of society such as

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<sup>139</sup> Gómez Bravo Gutmaro, “The Origins of the Francoist Penitentiary System, 1936-48,” *International Journal of Iberian Studies* 23, no. 1 (October 1, 2010): 5–21.

<sup>140</sup> Gómez Bravo, 6.

<sup>141</sup> “Desalojo y cierre de la prisión,” Cárcel de Ventas.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

religion, education, and the media further reinforced these dehumanizing, demonizing, and “us versus them” perspectives on female incarceration, a narrative that was contested and reshaped with counternarratives from women prisoners.

In my upcoming analysis, I will mainly focus on the political prisoners of the 1940s, as this period saw the most rapid escalation of the political prisoner population. For one, the prisons’ swift expansion at the early stages of the Francoist dictatorship demonstrated the importance in the separation of “enemy” women from society to ensure the integration of the new Francoist state. Hence, investigating women’s testimonies during this period will provide more in depth and gendered insights into the memories of state terror.

## Chapter 3: Women's Narratives

The last chapter provided a historical overview of Ventas prison to situate the history of Ventas as part of a wider, longstanding system of women's prisons throughout Spanish history. It was observed that the policy shifts under Ventas belonged to an enduring narrative of spiritual morality and gender tied to correction through religion and labor. Yet, the scale at which these prisons escalated and policies radicalized in the early years of the Francoist state demonstrated an orchestrated utilization of the prisons as a means to conduct state terror. Through a narrative analysis of prisoners' testimonies, this chapter seeks to disrupt the state narratives of imprisoned women under Franco's state terror that demonized women as threats to Spanish security, mentally ill, and morally corrupt. It demonstrates the complex, intersectional experiences of imprisoned women across factors such as age, class, and motherhood, and showcases the counternarratives they generated through their testimonies. In my analysis, I showcase that there existed a plurality of experiences in Ventas despite women being held at similar time periods and in the same physical space. Therefore, I want to emphasize that although I do highlight collective viewpoints and experiences discussed by women in their testimonies, I also aim to represent the diversity of these perspectives in my analysis.

The material utilized in this chapter will be divided between thirteen testimonies: eleven testimonies from Tomasa Cuevas' work *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas* and two selected interviews of the UCSD SCWMP, an online archive with interviews collected between the years 2007-2010. As per the website, the mission of the archive is to "create an audiovisual record with the testimonies of those who suffered and resisted the systematic violence implemented by the Francoist regime."<sup>143</sup>

### Prisoner Testimonies Background

To begin with, there are several limitations to providing complete information on all the prisoners whose testimonies I will analyze. Not an uncommon issue in global micro-histories, the women of Ventas demonstrate limitations in analyzing often marginalized communities throughout history – it is important to write more about them, but at times, there is limited information available. Information is not always clear regarding how long women were inside Ventas, how many prisoners there were, how old they were, what their birth and

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<sup>143</sup> "About the Project," Spanish Civil War Memory Project, University of California San Diego, accessed June 29, 2024, <https://library.ucsd.edu/speccoll/scwmemory/>.

death dates are, and there is a lack of supporting documentation. Furthermore, though many women recount their experiences with torture and proximity to death, the difficulties and sensitivities that emerge with sharing traumatic memories limit a completely open understanding of how state violence impacted every woman. All of these factors, combined with the multiple transfers common for women in Franco's prisons and the anonymity wished for by some prisoners in their testimonies, signify that I will only be able to provide limited information for several prisoners. Despite the detailed and fruitful resource of Cuevas' *Testimonios*, one additional reason for this limitation is that the testimonies collected by Cuevas mostly do not follow a set of questions and answers, but rather women recounting their experiences as they prefer. On the other hand, with the testimonies collected by researchers Scott Boehm, Daniel Rojo, and Miriam Duarte (UCSD SCWMP), the interviewees follow a set of semi-structured interview questions, and thus more biographical information is known regarding the two testifying women. Hence, although these sources are both incredibly resourceful for scholarship, my position as an observer rather than interviewer limits my ability to obtain more biographical information and ask additional questions more centered around my research focus. Another disclaimer is that the lack of government documents from the prison archives makes it difficult to corroborate information such as the number of inmates across different years as well as number of childhood deaths inside Ventas. Hence, my objective in this analysis is not to deduce hard facts or numbers, but rather more significantly understand the meanings attached to women's descriptions of life inside Ventas and the counternarratives they produce through these accounts.

With this information in mind, I will organize the content thematically, with the following themes and sub-themes: Hardship: Pre-Incarceration and Initial Experiences at Ventas, Punishment – Catholicism and Dehumanization, Death, and Motherhood; Social Relations: Questioning Gendered Implications of State Terror; and Political and Organized Resistance: Fooling the *Sección Feminina* and Education. These thematic containers will help, despite these gaps in knowledge, to connect the experiences of women, but also display their individual differences and layered experiences inside Ventas. Although I briefly introduce each testifier in the text, I include a biographical appendix at the end of the chapter to expand upon the prisoners' whose testimonies I look at in closer detail.

## Hardship

### Pre-Incarceration and Initial Experiences at Ventas

To begin, examining the treatment women and girls received before arriving at Ventas reaffirms that the early years of imprisonment under Franco served as a political messaging tool and act of state terror, rather than a means to truly reform or eradicate a “threat” to the state. Once again, like centuries past, the Spanish prison system became associated with addressing a gendered “crisis of morality” with a Catholic approach, moving away from General Director of Prisons Victoria Kent’s emphasis of correction rooted in secularism, humanity, and addressing the unique needs of women in prisons. For one, the state narrative of the “red” woman as the danger to societal morality and unity was apparent in the deliberate targeting of young women for their political affiliations after the war, especially those that participated in the JSU, the youth organization of the Spanish Socialist and Communist parties. It is important to acknowledge that throughout the text, several women proudly identify themselves as communist or JSU “militants,” an identity with the connotation of violence to achieve political objectives. However, throughout their testimonies, several housed at Ventas assure that their true messages and objectives were greatly manipulated by the state to fit the narrative of them posing the utmost risk to the emerging Spain.

To further clarify the nature of the JSU’s activities, Spanish language scholar Larson describes the works of Spanish author Casterás and journalist Fonseca regarding *las Trece Rosas* (The Thirteen Roses), a group of girls and young women executed in Ventas. She communicates that among the JSU’s objectives were to combat fascism and promote the communist cause, and that many joined the organization with the objective of improving women’s societal status, as well as the possibilities to gain opportunities for education, employment, and cultural exchange, all opportunities that had long been limited both before and during the Franco regime.<sup>144</sup> These principles of women’s political empowerment and improvement of socioeconomic opportunities stood in direct contrast to those of the Francoist national project that, as discussed in previous chapters, sought to return to more conservative gender roles that further restricted women’s socioeconomic mobility and political participation. Hence, it can be understood also the post-war treatment of women and girls connected to these

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<sup>144</sup> Kajsa Larson, “Remembering the Thirteen Roses: Blurring Fact and Fiction,” *Nomenclature Aproximaciones a Los Estudios Hispánicos* 2 (2012): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.13023/NAEH.2012.08>; Carlos Fonseca, *Las trece rosas rojas: La historia más conmovedora de la Guerra Civil* (Madrid: Ediciones Temas de Hoy, 2004); Ramón Casterás, *JSU 1936-1939* (Madrid: Jóvenes en Libertad, Centro de Documentación y Estudios:1987).



ideals was overstated to serve as a message to be obedient to the Francoist regime and reinforce women's roles as mothers, homemakers, and moral symbols of society. Examining the following testimonies of these "enemies" of the state reveals more of these alternative narratives that questioned those of authority figures in relation to the true nature of young women's political mobilizations. For instance, then 21-year-old Carmen Machado, arrested for her involvement with the JSU, expresses that during her interrogation by police:

We were horrified by everything they asked us; none of us knew what it was about, because we were even unaware that in those days an enormous number of boys and many girls had been arrested in Madrid, all of them from the JSU, who were accused of trying to assassinate the caudillo [Franco] on the day of the parade, when in reality the only thing was that they were beginning to establish contacts on a personal level, to get together and see if they could reconstitute the JSU. We did not know all that until later.<sup>145</sup>

In her testimony, Machado hints at the large-scale mobilization of state terror against politically active youth such as herself, who were accused of "militancy," utilizing words such as "horrified" and "enormous" to characterize the grotesque nature of state violence. Rather than the state's claims that young women composed a violent threat to the Francoist dictatorship, Spanish historian Preston stresses the point of Machado that most were unaware of the plots they were accused of and insists many JSU members, specifically the Thirteen Roses, were rather "accused, without justification, of participating in a non-existent plot to kill Franco,"<sup>146</sup> like Machado's own experience. Moreover, discussing arbitrary sentencing in relation to political activities, the anonymous prisoner's testimony in the "*La cárcel*" chapter of a woman detained in Ventas from 1939 to 1940 details:

As for the post-war detainees, the first files were called continuing acts and they had a difference: they all knew that they were involved in clandestine activities...but there were some cases in which they had simply acted as swindlers, without a very clear knowledge of the content of the letters that they passed on, given sentences of twenty years and even death sentences.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Carmen Machado, "Capítulo 10: La menor," interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 128. Translated to English by self. All following quotes taken from *Testimonios* are translated from Spanish to English by me.

<sup>146</sup> "¿Quiénes eran las Trece Rosas?," *Las Provincias*, October 4, 2019, <https://www.lasprovincias.es/politica/trece-rosas-20191004220213-nt.html?ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.lasprovincias.es%2Fpolitica%2Ftrece-rosas-20191004220213-nt.html>.

<sup>147</sup> Anonymous, "Capítulo 1: La cárcel," interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 274.

As formerly discussed, the ruling Falange party manifesto stressed that gender and political conformity was a prerequisite for belonging to Spanish society, stating that “rigorous discipline” would be utilized against anyone who tried to “disunite the Spanish people” or “incite them against the destiny of the fatherland.”<sup>148</sup> Yet, through their narratives, women reject the notion that through rejecting the narrow gender roles or political objectives of the state that they were disuniting the Spanish people, and rather look to the division caused by Franco’s post-war state terror campaign. For one, as assumed from the anonymous prisoner’s statement, a large range of political activities could be cause for state arrests, from the organization of resistance networks to serving as messengers, to which the state disproportionately applied sentencing. To further illuminate the arbitrary application of this state “discipline,” Maria Salvo Cionin, known as “*La catalana*,” (the Catalan) arrested for her involvement with the JSU, describes:

it must be taken into account that the general composition of the prison was very diverse. There was a majority with a very high degree of politicization, but there was also a large mass as a result of the circumstances of the war.<sup>149</sup>

She doubles down on the unjust treatment of young women in a subjective post-war justice system, re-counting,

The luck afterwards depended on chance. If the complainant insisted, if the reports collected in the neighborhood (always among the right-wing people) confirmed not the fact, but the ideas, not only of the person denounced, but of the family in general, it was certain that it would be before a court-martial, made up of military personnel with no legal knowledge...Evidence of the arbitrariness and excessiveness of the sentences is provided by the fact that at the start of the case reviews, all of the persons reviewed had their sentences reduced. Of course, for those already executed, there was no room for a new review.<sup>150</sup>

In this testimony, the nature of Franco’s post-war justice system is defined in alternative details to those of the state – rather than mitigating “threats” to Spanish society and being a force of moral “good,” the testifier refers to the institutions as run by individuals with “no legal knowledge,” with sentences based on “chance,” and with executions handed out capriciously. Hence, in brief, although some women describe themselves as communist or leftist militants and others rather as members of a political organization, the common denominator is that they

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<sup>148</sup> Primo de Rivera, *The Twenty-Six Point Program of the Falange*.

<sup>149</sup> Maria Salvo Cionin ‘La Catalana,’ “Capítulo 9: La catalana,” interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 419.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 274.

were targeted for their political affiliation and subsequently subjected to state terror through unfair and inconsistent sentencing, without sufficient review of their individual cases. No matter what the activity, the human rights of all these women and girls were violated by this state terror campaign, both before they entered Ventas and thereafter.

In their testimonies, women further illuminate the violations of human rights in their experiences before arriving to Ventas, including being subjected to abrupt arrests in the middle of the night, interrogated for hours, and mentally and/or physically tortured. With these counternarratives, women again identify their role in relation to their arrest by the state as serving as political warning signs to the wider society in the emerging dictatorship rather than composing a deadly threat to Franco. To illuminate, arrested for her activities with the JSU, Adelaida Abarca describes her experience as a sixteen-year-old being interrogated by not police, but rather an armed group of Falangists for hours. Rather than receive a fair trial, she reports her interrogators as “very threatening with insults, with foul language, and they kept asking questions.”<sup>151</sup> She emphasizes that “they accused me of a whole series of things and constantly questioned me in a way, without even leaving me room to breathe.”<sup>152</sup> Observing this example, the notion of “innocent until proven guilty” was nonexistent – numerous collaborators with the JSU were “othered” by being labeled enemies of the state without question, and thus met with terror and excessive force. She emphasizes their intent to target all associated with the JSU, noting that:

above all they wanted to know the names of the leaders and where they were, which I had to know by force, because I was in the Provincial Committee, and we knew everyone, we had to know where they were hiding, where they had the propaganda, where we made it, where we had the weapons.<sup>153</sup>

Here, the “othering” of Abarca is apparent with the mark by the state of her not belonging to the new Spain by means of both political affiliation and gender, and thus not being entitled to the rights of a Spaniard of freedom of expression and assembly, personal correspondence and privacy, and a fair trial. Women insist in their testimonies that the state did not truly seek to eradicate an “enemy” - without individual review, women and girls with any connection to the JSU were labelled “other” and subjected to detention. In this testimony, not unlike others, all

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<sup>151</sup> Adelaida Abarca, “Capítulo 16: La fuga,” interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 517.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 517-518.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 517-518.

of Blakeley's criteria for state terror are met: the sudden arrest and interrogation were "a deliberate act of violence" as part of a wider "climate of fear," an "act perpetrated by [state or state-supported] actors" of the Falange and Secret Police, "the act or threat of violence is intended to induce extreme fear in some target observers who identify with that victim," meaning members of the JSU or Republican-associated individuals, and that this "target audience is forced to consider changing their behavior in some way,"<sup>154</sup> to cease involvement with leftist or non-Falangist political organizations.

As outlined, the experiences of Abarca, Machado, and the anonymous testifier were not unique - many young women subjected to these citizen-style arrests questioned the legitimacy and excessiveness of their punishments, producing a collective narrative of resistance. To illustrate, another prisoner, Cloti Alonso, recounts a conversation had with a police officer during her fifteen days in detention pre-Ventas, insisting:

I am fully convinced that I am here, but I must not be, since the policy that they are saying is that only those who have blood on their hands will be arrested or prosecuted. I had them as clean as I had my conscience...I had not committed any murder. If a crime is to defend a legally constituted regime, all right, that was what I had committed.<sup>155</sup>

Here, again, the legality and legitimacy of the emerging Francoist state are called into question, and Alonso dismantles the new state constitution's insistence to "equally protect the rights of all Spaniards" by enquiring of her arrest for an activity that was not criminal – supporting the legal republican regime that was interrupted by Franco's coup d'état. Her story reproduces the longstanding utilization of women's prisons in Spain for perceived moral, rather than criminal offences. The inherent violence of the state's targeting of civilians is apparent through the claims that anyone with "blood on their hands" would be apprehended – a narrative Alonso refutes through insisting on her "clear conscience" and support of a "legally constituted regime," that of the republicans. She reiterates these paradoxes in Francoist laws versus ideology in her testimony, noting the confusion between laws that promised personal freedoms, versus ideology, which applied selectivity regarding whom truly these rights belong to.

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<sup>154</sup> Ruth Blakeley, *State Terrorism and Neoliberalism: The North in the South* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 30.

<sup>155</sup> Cloti Alonso, "Capítulo 5: Las de Madrid," interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 713.

In Abarca's case, state violence is also chronicled in detail through describing the daily life inside a detention center:

There was a lot of repression, people were very scared because every day you could hear the screams, you knew who was being killed, there were suicides. It was one of the most hellish police stations... [during interrogations,] several times, there was always someone in front of us who had been left in a pitiful situation, of the martyrdom they had given him, as an example, so that we could see that if we did not behave well, as they said, that the same would happen to us.<sup>156</sup>

Once more, women share their experiences with the messaging tools of state terror, in this case, the so-called martyrs - those killed or maimed to serve as an example to the rest of those in detention – intended by the state to instill fear and force control. In another example of pre-Ventas state violence, then sixteen-year-old Carmen Borrell Pérez, arrested for her activities with the JSU, represents anecdotes of other women's experiences with authority figures before arriving at Ventas,

I knew one who had a child of months old, she took him and when she came back from the government, she came without the child, she had been thrown against the wall and they had killed them [the child] because they did not tell them where her partner was.<sup>157</sup>

Abarca and Borrell Pérez' excerpts identify the use of state violence, including torture, interrogation, and murder as indiscriminate towards gender and the youth – both identities that served as symbols of the Francoist national project. Through their accounts, they produce a counternarrative that questions the state's foundation of morality in Roman Catholicism as well as the status of the family as an institution with "inalienable rights." They insisted that the so-called "martyrs" were not sacrificing themselves for any moral conviction or cause of their own, but rather dying without their consent on behalf a state that purported to represent the moral high ground. Machado adds:

our families went to all the places where they knew there were detentions until they managed to find us. I have heard my mother say that when she found out where we were and learned about the characteristics of that detention center, she was so horrified that she walked around night and day to see if and how they would take us out. Because that place had a reputation for young girls who went in and came out raped. And we were girls who were between eighteen and twenty-one years old.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Abarca, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 519.

<sup>157</sup> Carmen Borrell Pérez, interview by Scott Boehm and Daniel Rojo, *Spanish Civil War Memory Project*, University of California San Diego, February 17, 2009, 21:07-22:00.

<sup>158</sup> Machado, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 128-129.

This is an excerpt that delivers one of the more harrowing gendered violences of the detention centers: rape as an expression of state violence. Undoubtedly, rape is an act of violence not restricted only to women, however, these assaults happen more commonly to women, and represent wider, more systematic and structural forms of violence. To elaborate, it emphasizes the discrepancies and inconsistencies of state narratives – women were supposed to follow Catholic principles and become wives and mothers – yet the state violated these conceptualizations of women as moral and pure symbols through acts of sexual violence as an extension of their systematic “othering” of political opponents. To illustrate, prisoner Antonia García, known as “Toñi,” expands on this state violence by recounting her experiences of torture in the hands of police custody, emphasizing her age:

I had not even turned eighteen years old yet...they put electric currents in my ears and I went crazy and I have had, during the eleven years I have been in prison, pains in my head that were crazy; however, I did not say anything, I did not speak, I did not open my mouth. That is why I made them so angry, because they questioned me endlessly and wanted me to tell them things: what I had done, and where I was, and who was so-and-so, but I didn't even bother to think about that I had to say to say something.<sup>159</sup>

Similar to many other of the young women inside Ventas, Toñi was arrested for her involvement with the JSU, but she did not let the state’s labelling of her as a “red” define her or her identity. Like Abarca’s case, Toñi demonstrated her resistance by refusing to agree with the state narrative of her activities being criminal. Furthermore, although addressing her experiences of torture and its repercussions, she asserts her identity as not merely a victim of state violence or torture, but rather an individual with agency to resist the state’s idea that her political activity constituted a crime.

As observed by these stories, the incongruity of the Francoist laws and burgeoning national project are a constant narrative produced by women. Despite the state’s insistence that they were criminals, testifiers utilize their recollections of violence to rather argue that the state acted criminally through conducting acts of state terror. Through their counternarratives, women utilize words such as “threatening,” “accusing,” “hellish,” and “excessive” to discuss the terrorizing nature of the state and state-sponsored actors. Through discussions of proximity to torture, rape, and death, these themes are illuminated in greater detail, and the true application of violence rather than merely separation from society or correctional reform is

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<sup>159</sup> Antonia García, ‘Toñi,’ “Capítulo 4: Prisión de madres,” interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 326.

witnessed. In the following sections, the extension of this initial violence into experiences at Ventas will be expanded upon.

Once arrived at the prison, the descriptions of women and girls taken to Ventas provide a clear narrative of suffering and inhumanity at the hands of the outwardly Catholic Francoist state. Their details of overcrowding and horrible conditions stand in direct contrast to the image projected by the Church and state of possessing the moral high ground and “correcting” the “barbaric” leftist women. Rather than a humane facility to correct “morally fallen” or “mentally ill” women, women argue that the grounds proved the state to be the truly immoral and barbaric force. To elaborate, Ventas was labelled by those imprisoned as “a mass of meat,”<sup>160</sup> “an avalanche of women,”<sup>161</sup> and “a warehouse of women,”<sup>162</sup> the illustrative depictions demonstrating Ventas as an overflowing facility with minimal space. Abarca spotlights the infestations of pests such as rats, detailing:

We had to scare them away at night, making noise, moving, so that they would not pass over us: many times the rats jumped over my face. I could not sleep; I was obsessed. At every moment I saw them coming out from under the little door where the boiler was, and I had to move a slipper or something to scare them away. Other times we would put water in the bathtubs and the next morning we would find it with mice.<sup>163</sup>

In addition to these inhumane, fear-inducing conditions as described by Abarca, Borrell Pérez emphasizes the hunger, detailing “we were hungry...the food there, well, nothing more [than] lentils with bugs, a loaf of bread...and nothing more.”<sup>164</sup> The contradictions of the official Francoist narrative that Catholicism and its principles were critical factors in the reform of leftist women are apparent in the arguably uncatholic treatment of women inside Ventas.

What becomes clear throughout these testimonies that discuss experiences before and directly after entering Ventas is the utilization of imprisonment by the state as a tool of terror for its communicatory ability, rather than its material practicality or purpose to eliminate an actual threat. As previously discussed in the works of Stohl and Jackson, Murphy, and Poynting, instead of physically “touching every citizen,” the state could exploit those

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<sup>160</sup> Toñi, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 327.

<sup>161</sup> Abarca, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 522.

<sup>162</sup> Anonymous, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 275.

<sup>163</sup> Abarca, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 521.

<sup>164</sup> Carmen Borrell Pérez, interview by Scott Boehm and Daniel Rojo, 15:19-15:47.

designated as “red” women to, as Stohl put, to “create or enforce obedience [to produce] compliance and fear... [and to maintain] order,” in wider society, to try to alter the behaviors of others who may resist the state. These testimonies demonstrate what being utilized as a political tool symbolized through detailing the brutality of human rights violations in Franco’s early days against those deemed political enemies. However, as demonstrated by women’s narratives, the state did not avoid innocent individuals in their massive uptick in incarceration, but rather imprisoned individuals indiscriminately. The longstanding perception of those defined as “immoral women” needing correction throughout Spanish imprisonment only made this overhaul of women’s imprisonment a natural progression for the Francoist state. These initial experiences provided insight into the ensuing treatment of prisoners, to be explored in the following section through punishment and the means of resistance produced by women despite their hardships.

### Punishment – Catholicism and Dehumanization

In addition to the poor conditions of overcrowding and hunger, women specify that punishment in Ventas proved a further way for the state to execute terror. In the following testimonies, women explain that these maltreatments in Ventas ranged from conditional forms of Catholicism and mental manipulation to executions, at the most extreme. These experiences disputed the utilization of the prison to truly reform through the “winning and convincing”<sup>165</sup> force of Francoist and Catholic thought but rather, return to the “correcting” and “moralizing” force of prisons past. Yet, how the state accomplished this was demoralizing and dehumanizing on a scale unreached before, and a force that became more politicized and intertwined with the gendered state national project, a narrative woven by several women’s testimonies.

Questioned about the everyday realities of prison life, Borrell Pérez described plainly, “well, they punished you for nothing.”<sup>166</sup> In a similar regard, some women epitomize the conditions of the prison as the punishment itself and question its moral implications for the state. For instance, Alonso highlights the brutal irony of the Catholic Church’s means to reform women through moral channels, detailing:

the majority of nights, we spent time with a can at the head of the bed, filled with water, removing the insects that were there, bedbugs, cockroaches, rats, living in a subhuman

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<sup>165</sup> “Una visita a la prisión de Ventas,” *Arriba* (Madrid, ES), May 16, 1939, [https://www.memoriademadrid.es/buscador.php?accion=VerFicha&id=386921&num\\_id=&num\\_total=1996](https://www.memoriademadrid.es/buscador.php?accion=VerFicha&id=386921&num_id=&num_total=1996).

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 18:38.



way, how is it possible to live like that in a country that calls itself Catholic and Christian?<sup>167</sup>

In another display of the ever-present role of Catholicism in the early years of Franco's Ventas, Borrell Pérez discloses that:

I made my communion in jail because they offered me if I made my communion a communication with my father, my mother, my brothers and sisters...face to face to be with them for a while, and so I made my communion in jail.<sup>168</sup>

As assumed by these descriptions, women repeatedly question in their testimonies the state's claims that Catholicism was a force of "good" inside Ventas. Rather, testimonies argue that a conditional form of Catholicism existed by which women needed to "earn" their redemption through surviving a "subhuman" way of living or participate in Catholic sacraments to receive basic "privileges," such as receiving visitors. Thus, women insist religion was not a "refuge" or a "path to Franco's rectitude"<sup>169</sup> as held by state media narratives, but rather, more simply, yet another method to punish and "other" them. In another display of subjective applications of Catholicism inside Ventas, "*La catalana*" narrates the everyday treatment by nuns, telling:

The prison was run by nuns with their peculiar way of treating people, with their favoritism, with a coldness and lack of humanity in the face of so much tragedy that surrounded them. On the one hand they treated us like little girls gone astray and on the other as possessed by all the demons.<sup>170</sup>

The imagery in the testimony demonstrates the prolongation of a gendered religious correctional model in Spain with the depiction of being treated as "little girls gone astray." Moreover, her recollection represents the infantilization of women in not only correctional facilities, but also wider society, as women held the expectation to uphold a moral purity that was reintroduced under Franco and maintain Catholic values of marriage and motherhood from girlhood onwards. Each of these testimonies emphasize the application of Catholicism by state leadership with contradictory principles: the women were to find rectitude and restoration by following the teachings of the Catholic Church, but the same leadership enforcing these

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<sup>167</sup> Alonso, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 714.

<sup>168</sup> Carmen Borrell Pérez, interview by Scott Boehm and Daniel Rojo, 12:20 -12:50. Communion is the Catholic sacrament of accepting the "body" (eucharist/bread) and "blood" (wine) of Jesus Christ. In essence, it symbolizes the acceptance of Christ and the commemoration of His sacrifice of dying on the cross.

<sup>169</sup> "Primer corpus de la España liberada - solemne fiesta religiosa en la Cárcel de Mujeres," *Arriba* (Madrid, ES), June 9, 1939, [https://www.memoriademadrid.es/buscador.php?accion=VerFicha&id=386942&num\\_id=1&num\\_total=1996](https://www.memoriademadrid.es/buscador.php?accion=VerFicha&id=386942&num_id=1&num_total=1996).

<sup>170</sup> "La Catalana," interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 416.

Catholic principles were treating them with a “favoritism,” “coldness,” and “lack of humanity” unacceptable by the Catholic faith, even in a manner that made women feel as though they were perceived to be “possessed by demons,” labeling them as synonymous with pure evil. Hence, the voices of Ventas prisoners proved a way to criticize and counter the core facets of the early Francoist state’s ties to Catholicism and its consequent abuse through religion in the prison system.

Another explicit demonstration of this “lack of humanity” was being put *incommunicado* – in solitary confinement, without communication with fellow prisoners or their outside relatives. Abarca details,

The punishment ranged from taking away your communication, package and mail, to putting you in a punishment cell totally *incommunicado*, not only with the outside, but also with your own companions. And also with close surveillance to avoid all contact.<sup>171</sup>

Yet, women, through their social relations, resisted these harsh punishments through collective organization. She describes that:

most of the time it [*incommunicado*] was useless even in really serious cases, because the punished always received news from their families and the best of each package, so that solitary confinement was a cure of rest and fattening thanks to the sacrifice of the companions, because in some cases they were caught passing food or news and came to swell the number of solitary confinements.<sup>172</sup>

In her description, Abarca offers that solitary confinement, like other methods of punishment in Ventas, was arbitrary. She demonstrates that, in spite of the repressive instruments of the state, women utilized their agencies to provide support to fellow punished prisoners and thus render the punishment “useless.”

As emphasized by the prior examples, whereas state narratives enemized and “othered” leftist women, the conditions in Ventas solidified this intention of the national project to dehumanize political opponents in a manner contradictory to true Catholic values. Further, gendered ideas of the national project that aimed to reduce women to their roles as mothers and submissive followers of moral codes extended into Franco’s prison model through treatment of women as “subhuman,” “little girls gone astray,” and “possessed by demons.” Yet, through their testimonies, women produced counternarratives that insisted on questioning Catholicism

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<sup>171</sup> Abarca, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 383-384.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, 384.

in prisons, punishments, and the nature of the state and Catholic leadership inside Ventas in general. Hence, women rejected the “othering” of the state by depicting the human cost of such treatment and the humanity they shared with fellow companions inside Ventas in their acts of resistance.

## Executions

In their accounts of *las Trece Rosas* and the aftermath of the executions, women produced counternarratives to those of the state that emphasized that these young girls were state enemies, evil, uncatholic, and posing the utmost threat to the state, and thus “required” execution. Rather, like the descriptions of the arbitrary nature of sentencing, the prisoners identify those executed as young girls, killed for their political ideals rather than any criminal offence. In her memory of the execution of the Thirteen Roses, then fifteen-year-old Josefina Reinoso, imprisoned for her involvement with the Girls’ Union, details:

I was detained in Ventas. Very little time, as you can see, but one of the most painful experiences and one that has left its mark on me was the shooting of the thirteen girls who were part of a file of sixty-five...One of the things that also impressed me very much is that I heard a comment - it is not official, of course, because it is only a comment I heard - that one of the prerogatives of the prison directors is to hold the detainees, especially when there are several minors...for seventy-two hours to give a greater margin of time in case of pardon or any contingency that could attenuate and even free them from this terrible sentence such as the death penalty, which is something so definitive and so frightening...But in the end, it was not like that. At thirty-six hours the execution pickets went to look for them. They consented to leave and killed the thirteen girls, plus the other up to sixty-five who were part of the file. It was really terrible.<sup>173</sup>

In her account of the executions, Reinoso discusses the lack of integrity in making what she called such as “definitive” and “frightening” act – that methods of fairness in judicial review were nonexistent in the terrorizing state of the early Francoist dictatorship. Further, she emphasizes the cruelty of such a final means of punishment for minors, whose sentences to long years of imprisonment or death, as previously discussed, were distributed by chance. The youth of the Thirteen Roses is further remembered through the prison song “When the Stars Die” by fellow prisoner Rafaela Fernández Rafita, as referenced by Toñi, with lines including:

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<sup>173</sup>Josefina Reinoso, “Capítulo 5: Las de Madrid,” interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 755-756.

White maidens...thirteen stars have died, thirteen vestals of the temple of freedom, virgins...That run slightly amidst lichens and fertilize the fields and the orchard with eternal essences, green of spring, of purity, of grace and beauty!<sup>174</sup>

Here, a repeated emphasis on the youth lost through execution is observed with the description of them as “white maidens,” “vestals,” “virgins,” and “pure.” Through these words and phrases with connotations of the gendered Biblical “good” – “grace,” “virgins,” “pure,” the women contest the narratives of the state that these girls were “evil.” In an ironic twist, they spin the state narrative that these women were “fallen from grace” by acknowledging the inherent grace and innocence of youth, that their fall rather came too soon by their execution, utilizing Catholic gender roles as a tool to communicate a mockery and condemnation of state authority.

However, not only do women acknowledge the inhumanity of the state and prison leadership in performing executions, but also their own difficulties to cope with the realities of facing life and death on a regular basis. Touching on how death and executions created her own distance from humanity, Toñi recalls:

One of the things that impressed me the most while I was in prison was to think that when the list came and they took away the ones they were going to kill, that I could sleep. The thought that I could sleep still haunts me. It torments me, how is it possible that human beings are like that? It must be a natural law, that you must live, but it's one thing that has always tormented me: how could we sleep afterwards?<sup>175</sup>

In this excerpt, the lack of humanity is rather reversed by Toñi herself, as she reflects on the, in her words, “tormenting” compartmentalization made by her and fellow prisoners in response to the regularity of executions in Ventas. Here, through her reflections, she shifts the accountability from the state to the women themselves in their relations to violence. In a similar sense, multiple women seek to downplay their own hardships, demonstrate their guilt over deaths or punishments, but simultaneously represent the tragedies of others so that they do not undermine their adversities. The ways in which women highlight the positive qualities of their fellow prisoners and elevate other prisoners’ voices will be further examined in the following section on motherhood inside Ventas.

## Motherhood

As previously discussed by gender studies scholars True and Tanyag, gender-based violence in times of conflict is at its foundation ingrained in ongoing gendered disparities that

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<sup>174</sup> Toñi, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 323.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 328.

intersect and “often reinforce hierarchies of class, race/ethnicity, nationality/citizenship, religion, and sexuality.”<sup>176</sup> In the case of Franco’s state terrorism, the circumstance was no different. Before the dictatorship, women were already marginalized in wider society – as reviewed in the previous chapter, women were targeted for their so called “immoral behavior” and expected to be dutiful to the state through wifedom and motherhood. Just as the Spanish Second Republic was beginning to advance women’s rights, under Franco’s rule, women again faced increased inequalities as a result of religious nationalism and patriarchal society – the institutionalization of the family, restricted reproductive rights, and less educational opportunities, to name a few - that only compounded for women facing political imprisonment. One example of the state’s increased gender-based violence under Franco is demonstrated through the “many women who were mothers in Ventas,<sup>177</sup> another layer that undoubtedly marked their incarcerated experiences and demonstrated the heightened inequality placed on women by the state in prisons.

Throughout their experiences, the difficulties and tragedies of mothers included but were not limited to being separated from their child or their child losing their life due to malnutrition and illness in the prisons,”<sup>178</sup> happenings to be discussed and analyzed in this section. To begin with, in her testimony, Toñi contributes to how the additional identity of being a mother added a further gendered hardship to life in women’s prisons under Franco. Here, like several other testimonies, she not only delivers her own perspective, but also elevates the voice of another prisoner, Carmen, to discuss the implications of motherhood in incarceration. She reveals:

Carmen's case...is the case of women who have had children. Some of them had nowhere to leave them, because at that time we were all persecuted or had no money, most of the families had prisoners and could not help. So, if you took the children with you, they would let you keep them until they were three years old, then they would take them to an asylum and you would never see them again. Almost no mother who has taken children to the hospice has been able to pick them up, the children were treated very badly and, in general, before they were three years old, they had already died...I tell you this because I want you to see it. Whatever she tells you, she will never tell you

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<sup>176</sup> Jacqui True and Maria Tanyag, “Violence against Women/Violence in the World: Toward a Feminist Conceptualization of Global Violence,” 2018, 15.

<sup>177</sup> At first, the San Isidro Nursing Mothers Prison ran separately from Ventas, before becoming a subsidiary in January 1941. It later moved entirely to Ventas in 1945. As a result of unclear details such as timelines for various prisoner’s testimonies, the descriptions of motherhood will be utilized under the umbrella of the Ventas prison. “Traslado de la Maternal de San Isidro a Ventas - Cárcel de Ventas.”

<sup>178</sup> Student Name, “Gendered State Terrorism,” 16-17.

what she has done and what she has gone through...I have told you about Carmen because it is also to tell you about the poor women who were in Madres.<sup>179</sup>

Toñi's depiction of Carmen's situation also provides greater insight into the compounding inequalities that socioeconomic status and state violence placed on mothers in Ventas. Facing the loss of relatives during wartime, limited financial resources, and Franco's campaign of state terror that targeted multiple family members, several women had no option but to bring their children into the life-threatening conditions of incarceration. This practice painted a very different version of events from those of the Francoist state, which identified the bringing children into prisons and consequently separating them from their mothers as being a "humane" process to prevent the spread of leftist political leanings to future generations. Furthermore, in this case, the pattern of women sharing other prisoners' stories is repeated, but with a more clearly specified purpose – to tell the truth. With the counternarratives they produce, prisoners acknowledge that multiple truths exist to not only the ways they are perceived by state narratives, but also the individual experiences across the prisoners themselves. These factors provide more insight into why different women housed in Ventas find importance in providing details of not only their experiences, but also others, to encapsulate more of the truth as they witness it, and to contest individuals' minimizations of their own adversities during imprisonment, such as Toñi states, "she will never tell you...what she has gone through."

In further depictions of motherhood in Ventas, the lack of regard for the lives of children and their mothers is understood to a greater extent. As described by Sutton, a terrorizing state utilizes "motherhood and sexuality as oppression resources,"<sup>180</sup> a layer of state violence in wider society that compounds in oppressive force inside the repressive space of the prison. As Sutton states, a terrorizing state finds "in motherhood a bountiful arsenal to enhance the suffering of their victim,"<sup>181</sup> and in the case of Ventas, motherhood enhanced emotional and physical suffering through this practice of separation of mothers from children, childhood death, as well as insufficient medical care for the pregnant and nursing mothers as well as their children. These were not simply "red" women "without the great treasure of an interior life, without the refuge of religion,"<sup>182</sup> as depicted by state media narratives, but women who in fact

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<sup>179</sup> Toñi, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 321-322.

<sup>180</sup> Sutton, 6.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>182</sup> José Vicente Puente, "El rencor de las mujeres feas," *Arriba* (Madrid, ES), May 16, 1939, [https://www.memoriademadrid.es/buscador.php?accion=VerFicha&id=386921&num\\_id=&num\\_total=1996](https://www.memoriademadrid.es/buscador.php?accion=VerFicha&id=386921&num_id=&num_total=1996).

embodied the role of mother as desired by the Francoist state. These counternarratives of motherhood demonstrate the inconsistencies of the state national project, as families became the principle moral unit of society under the Francoist regime to advance the ideology of National Catholicism and conceptions of a Spanish race yet were decimated by measures of state terror such as imprisonment. It is clear through the descriptions of medical conditions inside the prison that state narratives advocating for the separation of children to protect them from their so-called “red” and “barbaric” leftist mothers did not protect them from an actual threat: state violence.

Despite the state media’s display of the baptism of newborns inside Ventas and advertisement of facilities for mothers as a positive force, the reality of their treatment as described by women prisoners proved darker and less focused on child moral or physical well-being. For instance, the anonymous testimony in the “*La cárcel*” chapter maintains:

Pregnant women had no assistance other than that of a fellow midwife, whose work was not facilitated in the least. When the juvenile department was created, the mothers were separated and then those condemned to death; living conditions did not improve: only the surveillance was better organized...Medical assistance was absent to the point that only in '43 was a gynecologist appointed in Ventas. Until then the doctors were, who knows for what irony, practicing dentists.<sup>183</sup>

Here, the prioritization of state objectives over humanity is perceived through the greater importance placed on surveillance over that of protecting the lives of mothers and those deemed morally and politically “salvageable” children by the state. By discussing this, the anonymous testifier adds to a counternarrative of several women to that of the state by insisting that the children were rather also treated as “other” and disposable, just as the women were. In an additional recollection of the suffering inflicted on mothers and children by the state, the anonymous testimony entitled “*La comadrona*” or “the midwife” of a woman arrested for “socialist beliefs” who then worked inside the Ventas hospital provides more insight into what the realities of medical care and childhood death were inside Ventas:

As a midwife, I worked in the infirmary...The children were a great number, because when the father was imprisoned and the mother was detained, they brought them with them. Between measles, whooping cough, smallpox, typhoid, the children began to die, and the women had to be taken to the infirmary...The children during my stay there almost all died. There was one day at the end of July, beginning of August, when there were five children's corpses, but the official did not come, because there was a lot of work in the prison. When they came to take them away, one of the children had worms

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<sup>183</sup> Anonymous, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 275-277.

in their eye sockets...The mother in her desperation wanted to see him, I refused, I wanted her to remember her son as at the moment he died in her arms; I could not tell her the reasons why, it was painful for me. She threw herself to hit us, but we didn't let her see him.<sup>184</sup>

In this testimony, “*La comadrona*,” from her unique perspective working in delivery in the maternal ward, emphasizes the recollections of Toñi that several women had no option but to endanger their children by taking them to prisons due to Franco’s state terror campaign’s targeting of all deemed political opponents. Contrary to the state’s insistence that imprisoned children would be separated, taught Catholic values, and raised to support the Francoist regime despite their mothers’ political beliefs, from the counternarratives produced by women, many children did not survive past childhood inside prisons.

Abarca further touches on how these state narratives did not translate into humanitarian policies in Ventas, and rather resulted in this large amount of childhood deaths, recounting:

These children in prison had horrible living circumstances. They started epidemics of childhood diseases, and they were dying little by little without any care, six to seven died every day. They were taken to a room and placed on marble tables. The mothers had to keep watch because it was a place where rats would appear. It was frightening to see those disgusting and hungry animals coming to eat those scrawny little creatures; those corpses were already a skeleton; they came to nothing. It was a drama that could not be endured. Thus, little by little, most of the children disappeared, and because they had no family on the street who could take care of them, they died in prison.<sup>185</sup>

In Abarca’s statement, she emphasizes the additional layer of dehumanization that came with the reduction of children to “skeletons” and her detail that they “came to nothing.” Moreover, she elaborates on how dire the situation was even for the rats of the prison, who were “disgusting” and “hungry,” utilizing them as a symbol of their own suffering and hunger at the hands of the state. Further elaborating on the disregard for death and lack of care for imprisoned mothers, Cuevas retells a story heard by another prisoner who she called “*La abuela saturday*,” a fellow inmate who was sentenced to twenty years imprisonment, that Cuevas described as a woman “respected by many.”<sup>186</sup> She tells that “*La abuela*” recounted a situation where a

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<sup>184</sup> Anonymous, ‘La comadrona,’ “Capítulo 5: Las de Madrid,” interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 757.

<sup>185</sup> Abarca, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 520-521.

<sup>186</sup> Anonymous, ‘La abuela Saturday,’ “Capítulo 1: La cárcel ” interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 283-284.



prisoner's son was dying of pneumonia, and she needed to be accompanied by an official to see him in Porlier, a men's prison in the post-war period:

The official, arch-justifiably called *La Veneno* (The Poison), could be sure that she would insult and humiliate the women in every minute that they "enjoyed" her company. The time of departure came...the official had not appeared; at four o'clock they called from Porlier to tell them to hurry, that the boy was dying, crying out for his mother. At five o'clock, disheveled and drunk, both habitual things for her, Veneno appeared. At that moment they called again from Porlier to say that the son had just died. The mother refused to see him dead, telling us later that she could not bear to see her son's corpse in that company. There was no sanction or anything similar for the official.<sup>187</sup>

Here, especially, it is witnessed that despite the state's insistence that the family was the core institution that bound the Spanish state together, exclusivity applied to whom composed a proper family, and thus deserved the inalienable rights outlined by Spanish fundamental laws. The status of the imprisoned family as "other" is understood in one matter through the absence of punishment for the "*La Veneno*." Despite these tragedies and their limited agencies inside Ventas, women found means to resist this gendered state violence by any means possible. In one instance, Abarca reports how she organized a communication network between those in and outside of Ventas to help mothers connect with relatives:

I was chosen to deliver the children of the mothers who were in jail to the families, who took them out to take them to be weighed...On these occasions of delivery of the children I collected notes from the relatives of many of those who were in prison, and I delivered them in a very discreet way; to deliver the child, under the little coat or under the hood I would put my hand and put the notes, because the officials would undress the child to see if they could get something out of them. But I carried them in my hand and when I delivered the child to the family, I would pass all the notes they had given me. And when the family came back, I would do the same thing bringing me the messages, which I would hand out to the interested people.<sup>188</sup>

In this excerpt, Abarca highlights just one of the means by which women utilized what limited agency they possessed within prison walls to help the wider group of women and respond to hardships such as punishment, death, and motherhood. In addition, the situation emphasizes what lengths many prisoners had to go through under a terrorizing state to have basic services inside prisons, such as communications with relatives.

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<sup>187</sup> Anonymous, "La abuela Satoria," interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 283-284.

<sup>188</sup> Abarca, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 520.

Overall, the collective experiences of mothers demonstrate a counternarrative to the state's insistence that facilities inside Ventas were "defending the values of motherhood and childhood," and rather reinforce that children also proved targets of state terror. Throughout their recollections of hardships, women characterize the nature of Francoist violence as one of indiscriminate nature; they identify the main perpetrators of this violence, including right wing actors, secret police, and Catholic leadership in the prison; the norms of early prison life, such as hunger, overcrowding, unequipped for medical, maternal, and childhood care; and the ways in which they resisted these conditions, ranging from silence, to denial of charges and the elevation of others' truths. Just as emphasized by Sutton, "perspectives beyond motherhood" and a "broader range of testimonies" are important to a more plural understanding of gendered experiences of state terror, or a "collective memory that recognizes with greater complexity women's experiences."<sup>189</sup> Notwithstanding, the role of women as mothers is an important gendered layer of life inside imprisonment, yet not the only unique gendered challenge or means to demonstrate resistance, to be further illuminated in the following sections regarding social relations, political organization, and education.

## Social Relations

As already witnessed, social relations, especially "friendships, provided a means for connection in shared experiences - both uplifting and devastating - across imprisonment. Many found this solidarity at the core of their resistance, with friendship proving an important marker to not merely getting through each day but also finding more subtle means of resistance through attitude – for instance, moments of laughter, joy, and hope – narratives that are weaved throughout the testimonies of women housed in Ventas."<sup>190</sup> Machado describes,

With those friends we formed a community where we shared what little we had. Around that time another girl also from the JSU entered the prison, who was very well known to one of these girls because she was from the same neighborhood. As she had nothing at all, her family was either not in Madrid or they were all detained, I don't remember, we took her in with us.<sup>191</sup>

In this testimony, the importance of social relations as a means for providing some measure of equality in prison conditions is evident. Despite what little they had, women resisted the state

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<sup>189</sup> Sutton, 18.

<sup>190</sup> Student Name, "Gendered State Terrorism," 12.

<sup>191</sup> Machado, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 127.

by offering resources and recognizing the inequities that existed – differences in class, resources, family life - in an already unequal space: the prison. Once more, in this and several other recounts by those who testified, there is a common thread in these testimonies to highlight not only their stories, but those of others that perhaps did not have the chance to testify. Here, women exhibit their true comradeship and importance to produce both collective and individual memories to resist the uniform state narratives that they were purely enemies. This expression of gratitude for camaraderie is further articulated by prisoner Manoli, arrested numerous times throughout the dictatorship, who ruminates the passing of time and the collective, shared experiences of imprisonment:

The departure from Ventas was very emotional, because we had been there for years and there remained great comrades and dear friends with whom we had spent bitterness and also the small satisfactions we received there. They were years of life in common, both in the cells and in the basement of death row, where we had lived for months; there were culture classes that ended, courses, work, in short, a whole set of things that the management, with the bad intention that characterized it, tried to break. But it could not break neither the friendship, nor the affection, nor the morale, nor the high spirit.<sup>192</sup>

Describing the shared experiences of imprisoned women, from day-to-day happenings to the extremes of being faced with death and the potential of execution, Manoli represents the subtleties of resistance that social relations provided. Collectively, through their attitudes and companionships, women resisted the conditions of state repression. Moreover, they created counternarratives to the dehumanizing rhetoric of the state by demonstrating the human side of life inside prisons, characterized by what Manoli describes as the “friendship,” “affection,” “morale,” and “high spirit.” In a similar manner, “*La catalana*” discusses the importance of friendships to handling hardships inside Ventas, acknowledging:

I made friendships, expanded relationships that until then had been reduced to the good companions who shared with me that state of affairs; their behavior with respect to me was so lofty that I will always be indebted to them, and I want to point out that María Antonia Madueño, Isabel Imber and Consuelo Alonso were the pillar on which I leaned not to collapse in that situation; Toñi helped me a lot to regain confidence in myself, it was a time that I will never forget.<sup>193</sup>

Like Manoli, Alonso identifies the other women as critical to her survival, utilizing words such as “pillar,” to describe their support to increase her ability to have dealt with prison

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<sup>192</sup> Manoli, “Capítulo 7: Parte de una vida,” interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 389

<sup>193</sup> Alonso, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 421.

conditions. By the network of support that fellow women provided, offering help to “regain confidence,” women rejected the state narratives that sought to terrorize in not purely a physical manner, but also by psychological means such as reducing them to less than human. Once more, the importance of acknowledging and recognizing others in everyone’s testimony is a recognized pattern. Social relations thus provided a sense of stability and security in a turbulent environment of several prison transfers, and inside Ventas, a prison did not always provide necessary resources, access to a network that strived to attain these needs or at a minimum, provide support by means of friendship. “Overall, through these passages, the multiplicity of women’s experiences in Franco’s prisons is understood through moments of happiness, hardship, and departures. In one manner, friendship narratives of women again acknowledged the intersecting inequalities of their fellow prisoners concerning age, distance from relatives, and presence on death row, among other conditions. Moreover, stories of friendship in Ventas present how in imprisonment, personal connections possess important and diverse roles in resisting state terror campaigns through attitude and companionship.”<sup>194</sup>

### Questioning Gendered Implications of State Terror

As emphasized before, the perspectives of all women did not always prove collective or homogeneous in Ventas. For instance, some women refute the idea that there existed any differential treatment or additional hardship for women’s prisons experiences than men’s. In one of these examples of reassertion that there was gendered equality of punishment between men and women, the anonymous prisoner of “*La cárcel*” begins her testimony by underlining:

Prison is no different for women than for men...the circumstances that arose at the end of the civil war-with massive imprisonment for the slightest suspicion, for the most uncontrolled denunciation, with a prolonged, sometimes very prolonged stay, without the least possibility of defense and in moments of logical disorganization in the decimated forces that defended the Republic-led to the situation we have lived through...In the first place, in Spain no discrimination was made when a woman was arrested and ran the same risks as the men of her family who were already arrested, had been exiled or had been shot.<sup>195</sup>

“Here, the anonymous testifier denies any gender-based discrimination in Franco’s targeting and incarceration of women, rather emphasizing the equal political and arbitrary targeting of both men and women. In this sense, she downplays her own hardships and the gendered

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<sup>194</sup> Student Name, “Gendered State Terrorism,” 14.

<sup>195</sup> Anonymous, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 273.

hardships in order to reject the notion that state leadership promoted, that these women needed saving or were weaker than men in some regard. Yet, the same prisoner's testimony becomes more nuanced when she discusses the unparalleled factors taken away from women and pressures through imprisonment, stating:"<sup>196</sup>

Another painful aspect that was accentuated over the years was to see youth pass, barely lived in many cases. To grow older and know instinctively that a woman disappears when she is no longer desirable. I saw a woman cry with uncontainable bitterness when, having been in prison for ten years and being quite close to freedom, she realized that menopause had deprived her of her desire and hope of having children. There is little point in thinking about how a woman can fulfill herself as a human being; for such an approach to have any real content, the choice of her life must be possible, she must be able to choose her role and not have it relentlessly imposed on her. Moreover, the overcrowding, the lack of living conditions, the impossibility of a single minute of isolation, the fact of lacking any stimulus of mental life, of human life and not only of a tenacious struggle for survival.<sup>197</sup>

With this testimony, she illuminates the wider societal expectations and pressures that demonstrate just one of the numerous ways in which women's experiences of state terror are unique from men's, for one, their relation to longstanding conceptions of gender and gender roles. In this example, she alludes to the "relentlessly imposed" gendered expectations to be desired by men or become a mother, and the agency of whether to do so robbed of women through imprisonment, highlighting one of the inherent unequal experiences between that of incarcerated women from incarcerated men. "This testimony represents the intersectionality of women's experiences in Ventas through communicating the complex and layered inequalities of being a woman and being a prisoner in Franco's Spain. More precisely, it represents the preexisting, inherent inequalities of women in Spanish society by communicating society and the state's gendered expectations, and the feeling of dehumanization and powerlessness it entails."<sup>198</sup>

Here, also, the inconsistencies of the Francoist state narrative are evident – a woman's "greatest" role as a mother was compromised by her imprisonment by the state. Yet, by marking the woman prisoner as "other" and "enemy," the state justifies these contradictions, and the prisoner ironically touches on them with her statement that "it doesn't do a woman much

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<sup>196</sup> Student Name, "Gendered State Terrorism," 10-11.

<sup>197</sup> Anonymous, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 274-275.

<sup>198</sup> Student Name, "Gendered State Terrorism," 11-12.

good...to realize herself as a human being.” “The eradication of their “desirability” through aging in cells, the erasure of “hope to have children” – these factors communicate the gendered expectations of the state and Spanish society, and the utmost cruelty of the state to remove a woman’s agency to be able to make her own choices. In the following testimonies, it is critical to emphasize these differences of perspectives and the ability of narrative analysis to connect and highlight the diversity of women’s experiences inside Ventas.”<sup>199</sup>

## Political and Organized Resistance

As detailed by the Cárcel de Ventas archive, different political groups of women were separated by rooms and galleries, where groups coordinated joint actions of protest and resistance: from collective sit-ins to “clandestine commemorations of those events that marked and reinforced their identity as political prisoners,” such as April 14, the date of the proclamation of the Second Republic.<sup>200</sup> Angustias Martínez Vicente, detained like many other women and girls for her activities in the JSU, stresses the distinctiveness of the political organization of Ventas in her testimony. To illuminate, she details the prison in comparison to former prisons she had been in throughout her incarceration, stating “in relation to the prison I came from, well everything was the same...but different...there was a lot of political work, a lot of social work, a different feeling.”<sup>201</sup> Stressing the character of Ventas as a more politically oriented prison due to its position in the capital and status as the largest women’s prison, she builds on the aspects of organization highlighted by the Ventas archive through discussion of classes, clandestine newspapers, and information networks:

There were classes...cultural courses, because they were all classes of prepared people...and politically too...well, there was an organization made...there was also a newspaper called "our guide," there are no remains left of that newspaper at all, you see. And it was an internal newspaper... we talked about what was going on outside, about the war and the work outside, and then we had the world in brief, the political things, up to date...and later [what happened on] the inside to the outside and [what happened on] the outside to the inside.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> “Ventas, escuela de presas políticas,” Cárcel de Ventas, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://carceldeventas.org/ventas-escuela-de-presas-politicas/>.

<sup>201</sup> Angustias Martínez Vicente, interview by Scott Boehm and Miriam Duarte, *Spanish Civil War Memory Project*, University of California San Diego, February 6-16, 2009, Part 4, 24 :37-24 :51

<sup>202</sup> Angustias Martínez Vicente, Part 4, 25 :49-26 :36.

In addition to the clandestine information networks as described by Martínez Vicente, an additional example of organized resistance was the first hunger strike in January 1946 in response to the punishment of a prisoner who declined the already limited food offered to her.<sup>203</sup> In unity, the women of Ventas also refused their meals, and the resultant song as recounted by Manoli exhibited their defiance and purposes behind the protests, singing:

|                                   |                           |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| In Ventas, in the prison,         | Believe it or not,        |
| In the prison,                    | That they didn't tell me, |
| And with a great morale,          | I lived it                |
| Great moral,                      | Believe it or not,        |
| A strike was organized to protest | Things have changed       |
| Our poor nutrition                |                           |

It must be acknowledged that the accounts in the prior section regarding initial conditions in Ventas demonstrated the already disparaging images of hunger recollected by several prisoners. Hence, for women to employ the hunger strike as a tool of resistance was a decision that further demonstrated what little they had in the early years of the prison, but their resistance to take a chance on their lives despite these existing dire resources to fight for better conditions. In the song, the morale of women is cited as a means for conducting this act of resistance, again linking how social relations proved a critical part of women's experiences inside Ventas. Moreover, the line "believe it or not" is abundant throughout the song. "The implications of the word to believe and its persistence throughout the song reinforced the notion that women prisoners felt unbelieved throughout their incarceration as their characters were the target of state political and media narratives. Further, it communicates that they were perceived by Francoist leadership and society as inherently untruthful, or that they felt their stories were not heard. Observing the history of the categorization of imprisoned women as mentally ill and against the national project by Francoist leadership demonstrates the ease of also neglecting their experiences inside Ventas' walls."<sup>204</sup>

Manoli describes the impact of the counternarrative they produced to this inside the prison through their act of resistance, stating:

The hunger strike, whose results, as I have already said, were fruitful, made the management respect us a little more as political prisoners; it marked a milestone in the history of Spanish prisons, at that time totally overcrowded in all the confines of our homeland; ill-treatment and lack of consideration predominated in those who ruled the

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<sup>203</sup> Cuevas, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 384-385.

<sup>204</sup> Student Name, "Gendered State Terrorism," 15.

destinies of these establishments. From this moment on, we were able to step on our toes, to the point that if at any time the food - scarce and of poor quality anyway - was not in the proper conditions, it was the director himself who visited us in the galleries to apologize for such anomalies.<sup>205</sup>

Through Manoli's recollections, it is understood that the strike hoped to bring attention to the silenced truths of realities inside the prison, such as the conditions of poor and unsanitary nutrition. Moreover, it represents that woman in Ventas, despite their variety of encounters and discriminations, could unite to resist poor conditions and show solidarity with wronged prisoners. In addition, it represents a shift in the prison leadership from the early 1940s into late 1940s, reflected from the apathy and dehumanization that Manoli describes through "ill-treatment" and "lack of consideration" of women to treatment of "a little more respect."

### Fooling the *Sección Feminina*

As previously mentioned, women under thirty had to enroll in *Sección Feminina* courses during their imprisonment or would participate in them for the reduction of their sentences. Toñi recalls her experiences with the SF and the consequent resistance by her and fellow prisoners through sewing workshops, detailing:

We were taken by Falangist ladies, who we had the good fortune that they were superior... We had a schedule to go and they forced us to do labor. We thought that we did not have to resist as we had done in other things; we thought we had to play along with the joke and we started to not learn anything, to be clumsy. There you had us, they started to teach us how to make little felt figures and we spoiled many meters of felt... They taught us how to cut and sew with paper, and ... nothing, we didn't learn... They didn't even dare to give us embroidery, or handicrafts, or anything, because we were so clumsy that we didn't do anything well. The only thing we did do well was that we started to discuss politics and we summoned them to explain things to us, and we showed them that it could not be because of this and this; how the pending revolution was not being carried out according to the points of the Falange; how they were dominated by Francoism and that they were nothing more than the people with whom Franco supported. And we had discussions above all about the workers' problem, about the intellectual; there were many women who were of great value. They had no arguments to refute us...<sup>206</sup>

Here, like several other women's testimonies, Toñi utilizes "we" to represent the joint experience of women, constructing a narrative that implies the solidarity and collectivity of women's resistance against the SF inside Ventas. In Toñi's description, she delivers a crucial means by which women resisted despite mandatory activities of the state that sought to make

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<sup>205</sup> Manoli, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 385.

<sup>206</sup> Toñi, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 333.



Falangist gender ideology prevail. Whereas she describes the SF representatives as feeling “superior” as a gendered extension of state power, she represents a counternarrative produced by the imprisoned women that dismantled the status of these Falangist women by demonstrating how they were rather “dominated by Francoism,” as opposed to women with social, economic, and political agency. Furthermore, from Toñi’s perspective, they were able to reject the idea of knowledge transfer from the state to prisoners by refusing to place an effort in the activities and denying the idea that they had anything to learn from the SF.

Hence, by utilizing a humorous stance, they simultaneously produced these political counternarratives to the SF while leaning into the state’s narrative that they were “mentally inferior others,” by being purposefully “clumsy,” and making a caricature out of the general patriarchal notion that women are less intelligent or weaker than men. The humor women found in these acts of resistance is further expanded throughout the rest of her account. To illuminate, she discusses their organization of embroidery work with a Swiss man outside the prison and their consequent interactions with the SF women:

We made...things of incalculable value in the sense of craftsmanship, and we sold the work we did outside. Precisely one of the days when the Swiss man’s van was leaving to pick up the work that was made in the workshops and from individuals who were in the galleries, the ladies from the [Falange] home came in, and when they saw that, they said: ‘Who makes these things?’ They began to give names and it turned out that we were all from the gallery of the communists, who were the youngest. Those women were going crazy; they realized that they had been the object of ridicule, that they could not teach us anything. There were women there who had been dressmakers for Balenciaga...a specialist in evening dresses, who had been the general secretary of the Needleworkers' Union; there was the general secretary of the Tailors' Union; also the best embroiderer in Spain, who was precisely the one who gave us the job from the Swiss. All the rest of us had learned to do a lot of things.<sup>207</sup>

Toñi’s passage again displays the lightheartedness and mischief that women expressed in the face of a patriarchal society afflicted by state terror that sought to first reduce women’s roles in wider society and then further “other” leftist women based off their political stance. Through this example of making the SF women an “object of ridicule,” women display the small-scale means by which they could reject the oppressive structures that reinforced negative stereotypes around their gender and mental capacity by making a joke out of both the situation and the condition of women in society more broadly. Here, it can be witnessed that deception and some

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<sup>207</sup> Toñi, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 333.

forms of practical jokes were employed to sabotage their mandatory participation in an activity that aimed to reform them through education and labor, like Spanish prisons past.

“Through their political resistance, women adopted the feeling of not being heard, believed, or seen as similarly demonstrated by the hunger strike song by pretending to be the one-dimensional women that the state purported them to be. Furthermore, by feigning participation in the “good works” of Falangist women and rather unravelling their political logic, they resisted the idea of the state that they needed “correcting” of any kind – from sewing to politics.”<sup>208</sup> Observing the examples of information networks, hunger strikes, and practical jokes, women utilized whatever means possible to resist Franco’s campaign of state terror.

## Education

“Education proved difficult to attain within the walls of Ventas and provides a further lens to intersecting inequalities of the women held in Ventas, in addition to the layers previously discussed of socioeconomic background and motherhood. From an age and class perspective, several women’s inequalities in prison compounded through the fact that they were young or uneducated at the time of their imprisonment. These factors meant that an intellectually under stimulating environment in prison left women without the proper tools to be independent or reintegrate in society in the future.”<sup>209</sup> To illustrate the challenges of learning in the early years of Franco’s Ventas, the anonymous prisoner in “*La cárcel*” details the trouble of obtaining basic knowledge materials, stating “We had no intellectual stimulation at all...There were no books.”<sup>210</sup> However, through the efforts of the prisoners, there were hopeful steps ahead in the realm of education that branched beyond the limitations of the state and created counternarratives to those of the state.

“Through organization and persistence, women were able to spend money earned through labor such as sewing on books, creating a network of education among women. Rather than have the prison or SF women serve as its traditional “moral” and “re-educating” force, the women mobilized their agency to create their own, independent education network. Although limited by the spatial and logistical confinements of the Francoist prison system, the women employed freedom of choice in the literature and sources read. Though literacy varied between

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<sup>208</sup> Student Name, “Gendered State Terrorism,” 16-17.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>210</sup> Anonymous, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 276.

the women, those who could read dedicated themselves to teaching others to help bridge the gap between these intersecting inequalities faced by prisoners.”<sup>211</sup> Toñi recalls:

...one of the things that we dedicated ourselves to with real enthusiasm, because we continued with the slogan that we had to make the most of our time, was studying. There was no one who, six months after entering the prison, did not know how to read and write, and many times they were ahead of us, because there were some women who were very intelligent. There was a crazy interest in learning, because they had to write to their families, and they had problems of this kind.<sup>212</sup>

Toñi’s account relays the connections between social relations and education in prison life by detailing the networking between women to promote literacy. Rather than accept the fate of intellectual under stimulation in prisons and their labelling by Franco as incompetent, women possessed what she calls “real enthusiasm” to learn and study. By this means, she illustrates a different picture to the state, insisting that these women were “very intelligent” and had a “crazy interest in learning,” and maintaining that women had content to learn from each other, rather than knowledge solely delivered by the state and Catholic actors.

Once again describing the power of clandestine information networks and collective organization, Manoli describes:

The best thing about the prison was the marvelous organization of the Party, which made you feel completely happy for all the work that was being done there. It was the World War and we read everything we could get our hands on, in addition to the fact that we were able to obtain the English reports that circulated in Madrid clandestinely and in the same way they reached us. We had organized cultural groups, because inside the prison there were many intellectuals serving sentences. There were also well-planned political courses which gave us a great deal of training; we had a - shall we say - traveling library, and with our contributions we bought books which we all read and at the end were raffled among those of us who formed the library.<sup>213</sup>

“Here, Manoli demonstrates how the knowledge transfer present inside prisons extends into the future – prisoners could take knowledge developed with the help of colleagues inside prisons and translate them to post-prison life through one means, by sharing their testimonies. In contrast to the state’s perception of women and girls’ education as a “moral and corrective” force both inside and outside of prisons, women prisoners grasped this education as a different force, one that could offer women different skills than state and party curriculum that focused on spirituality and domesticity. Ventas women, not unlike the Francoist national project, saw

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<sup>211</sup> Student Name, “Gendered State Terrorism,” 18-19.

<sup>212</sup> Toñi, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 334-335.

<sup>213</sup> Manoli, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 382.

education as inherently political, as Manoli describes the “organization of the Party” with wartime intel and the “political training courses.” Those that Manoli identifies as “intellectual” and politically literate women and women who had worked before their imprisonment mentored and taught those whom, because of prior socioeconomic and age conditions, possessed limited access to education systems and professional training. Through not accepting the designation of the state as an “unfixable,” “morally corrupt,” and “sinful” group of women, through the literacy training, reading, and independently formed library’s exchange of books, women resisted the state’s narrow agenda for women prisoners to merely be separated from society and knowledge to produce a more independent group of women.”<sup>214</sup> Overall, these educative forces organized by Ventas women, independent from those of the religious-oriented state and SF instruction, produced counternarratives to a woman’s role in society as merely a prisoner, a mother, or a wife.

### Women’s Narratives: Conclusion

In this chapter, the varied experiences and counternarratives to Franco’s state terror were outlined through the themes of hardship, social relations, and political and organized resistance. Examining these testimonies of women prisoners in Ventas, there are several ways in which incarcerated women, despite structural and spatial limitations to their agency, resisted Franco’s campaign of state terror, pre-, during, and post-imprisonment. As previously discussed, rather than be perceived as women with agency to choose their own political beliefs, they were reduced by the Francoist state to one-dimensional, “evil,” “mentally ill” women that threatened state survival. Women refuted this narrative throughout their testimonies by displaying the immense diversity in experiences throughout imprisonment and the true nature of state violence. To begin with, women chronicle stories of their resistance against the ideals of state by detailing the utilization of state terror against them through, for one, the arbitrary nature of their sentencing, and their resistance against the state narratives that they were guilty of crimes, mentally inferior, or being treated with Catholic values and respect inside prison walls. Moreover, they highlight the layers of violence compounded with the gendered experiences of post-war political targeting through discussions of rape, torture, and other violence against mothers and young children in police custody and beyond.

In addition, through recounts of social relations and political and organized resistance, women demonstrated the active ways in which they resisted in the period of their imprisonment

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<sup>214</sup> Student Name, “Gendered State Terrorism,” 19.

in Ventas. Through detailed stories, women describe how because of their gender, inequalities compounded due to additional, intersecting factors such as age, class, and motherhood. In the example of education, it is witnessed how because of women's social status and wartime, women were already at a disproportional disadvantage for schooling, which compounded with other factors such as class. The prison added yet another layer to these difficulties, one that women resisted with their efforts to make all prisoners literate and more politically conscious.

Post-imprisonment, the testimonies themselves provide crucial evidence to their experiences inside a space that the public had limited access to. Through these testimonies, women publicized their experiences after the Francoist dictatorship, viewpoints that countered the dominate state perspective of prisons as sites of religious correction and Francoist political reform as depicted in media such as *Arriba España*. Although published after the dictatorship, women still produced counternarratives that directly juxtaposed to those of the state as a force of moral and political "good," through evidencing state violence in the form of arbitrary prison sentencing, torture, hunger, punishment, and other inhumane conditions. While highlighting these positions as victims of the state, they also demonstrate the power of their agency and utilization of what power they had throughout imprisonment. Through these testimonies, women provided confirmation of their repression and use as political messages and tools of state terror by the Francoist administration shortly after the Civil War and in the years following, but also demonstrate their fight and camaraderie to counter this injustice.

Yet, overall, what legacy did women seek to leave with their individual and collective testimonies of life as a political prisoner under Franco's dictatorship? More broadly, observing the final reflections present in several testimonies demonstrate the significance women found in sharing their experiences of state terror. To illustrate, Toñi sums up the importance of remembering and elevating often marginalized voices of history, in this case, of women's experiences under Franco, and in Franco's prisons. She details:

I have spent many years in various prisons, I have been with many women, we have had directors, some hypocritical, others violent and others rude, and I have seen women react according to all that: they have reacted violently, with hatred, thinking to do the same thing they were doing to them.... But I have always been clear. I do not want, nor have I wanted during all the years I have been in prison, that anyone should have to go through what I and all of us have gone through and seen. I have thought that the regime that did these things had to be fought against, that not for a single moment we had to stop doing something so that it would disappear, so that there would be a different society, not so that we could do the same as they did. I am in complete agreement with the policy of reconciliation... and that is why I agree to talk about everything we have been through, is because above all I would like it to serve as an example to others and

for them to know what a fascist regime and a dictatorship like the one we have had... What I ask the young people and the new generations is to do everything possible so that these situations are not repeated and that will only be achieved if we transform society, becoming very clearly aware of what can be done, but that it is done, that we do not go around blindly and we are wasting time while the others are always remaking themselves. This is a responsibility that I believe we should consider and that the people should think about what can happen again. I have seen so many women die, I have seen so many men disappear who had an incalculable value, I have seen the sacrifice of so many people who have been wonderful and have dedicated their whole lives to make society change... that I ask, in the name of all these men and women -and I believe we have the authority to ask it - that each one of those who understand that we have to change society.<sup>215</sup>

Raising awareness of state terror and the need for social change in a post-state terror society are at the forefront of Toñi's reflections regarding what testifying means to her and Spanish people. She builds on the violent experiences of women to refute vengeance and violence as a response to state terror. Yet, she rejects the idea that forgetting allows a society to heal and move on. To truly progress, and ensure state terror does not reemerge, Toñi posits, society must hold the responsibility to "think about what can happen again, and use whatever means they possess, even if limited, to resist state violence." In like manner, Cloti Alonso, "*La catalana*," also reflects of the intergenerational process of memory transition, and the importance of keeping experiences alive for this procedure, stating:

This story, which will now serve as one more testimony of *Cárcel de mujeres*, began as a result of my niece Nuri's desire to know facts of my life that she wished would not fall into oblivion. Maybe they are very much lived by other companions. I have tried to be as impartial as possible and I have not wanted to highlight the negative side that occurs in all situations, because I sincerely believe that all in all, there was more that united us than what separated us; otherwise not many of us would have survived.<sup>216</sup>

In her concluding words, Manoli emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and remembering the unique gendered sacrifices and resistances to state terror, stating:

If ever a monument were to be made to the persecuted and imprisoned, the family member, the mother, the wife, should not be absent in the first place, because without being conceited, it was THE WOMAN, with capital letters, who fought and sacrificed herself for the prisoner, the imprisoned, the persecuted, the one who walked in the mountains with the guerrillas, the fighter, in the thousand and one battles that had to be fought against fascism, in order to achieve freedom. It is also fair to point out that women who came out of prison, the same as men, in a very high percentage, returned again to join the clandestine struggle with the same ardor and knowing that they could fall again and be more punished by the fact of recidivism; Franco's regime did not

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<sup>215</sup> Toñi, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 324-325.

<sup>216</sup> Alonso, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 438.

manage to castrate the feelings of prisoners despite their cruelty; Franco's regime what it did was to consolidate us because knowing what he granted us, the eagerness to fight for our demands grew more and more, it was consolidated and in prison we tried to educate ourselves in all aspects in order to join the clandestine struggle and with our knowledge and experiences be more useful to our people and to humanity.<sup>217</sup>

In this outlook of her testimony, Manoli stresses the unique experiences of women and their fortitude in resisting state terror, reinforcing the need to recognize gendered experiences across imprisonment. Hence, the resounding, most important counternarrative produced to women in their post-imprisonment testimonies, is one that stands directly in contrast to the Spanish state narrative directly after the dictatorship and one debate that still echoes through Spanish society today – the importance of remembering - rather than forgetting – the past.

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<sup>217</sup> Manoli, interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero, 399.

## Appendix - Prisoner Biographies

### *Testimonios*

**Tomasa Cuevas Gutierrez** (1917-2007) was a social activist and author of the work utilized throughout this analysis, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*. From a young age, she organized communist party activities and the *Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas* or the Unified Socialist Youth in her hometown of Guadalajara, Spain.<sup>218</sup> As a result of these activities, she was detained in May 1939 and sentenced to thirty years in prison, of which she served five years spread throughout the prisons of Guadalajara, Durango, Santander, Amorebieta, Madrid (Ventas), and Segovia.<sup>219</sup> To compose this work, she collected the testimonies of several women's prisoners across Spain, including several housed in Ventas.

**Adelaida Abarca** (1923-?) was sixteen years old when she was arrested in May 1939 and sent to Ventas. Soon thereafter, she was sentenced to thirty years, later reduced to twenty years in prison. Like Cuevas and several of the women housed at Ventas in the initial years following the war, she was an active member of the JSU, and thus targeted for arrest. She spent approximately a year in Ventas before being transferred to the prisons in Tarragona, Gerona, and Barcelona. In 1946, she escaped the prison in Barcelona by forging release documents and fled to France.<sup>220</sup>

**Carmen Machado** (1918-?), from Madrid, was arrested in 1939 at the end of the war and sent to Ventas following several transfers throughout detention centers. At 21-years-old, she was accused of being a "militant" of the JSU and placed in the minors section of the prison, an experience she discusses at detail in her testimony. Sentenced to thirty years, later reduced to twelve years in prison, she also experienced several relocations, spending time in Durango

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<sup>218</sup> Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 12-13.

<sup>219</sup> Cuevas, *Testimonios*, 2-13.

<sup>220</sup> Adelaida Abarca, "Capítulo 16: La fuga," interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 517-528.



and Bilbao prisons. She was released early in November 1941, but later court marshaled twice.<sup>221</sup>

**Cloti Alonso (?-?)** was arrested in May 1939 for the “crime” of supporting the republican regime. After fifteen days of detention at a police station, she was sent to Ventas and later transferred to Saturrarán prison, before returning to Madrid. In total, she served five years of her sentence.<sup>222</sup>

**Josefina Reinoso (?-?)** was arrested when she was fifteen years old in relation to her activities as a delegate of the *Unión de Muchachas* (Girls’ Union) that formed part of the wider JSU. She spent fourteen months in Ventas before her release at the age of sixteen.<sup>223</sup>

**Manoli (?-?)** was eighteen years old when she was detained and tortured for her activities helping the Popular Front after the end of the war and then released on provisional liberty. In 1942, she was arrested for the “reorganization of the Party” and condemned to death, which was later reduced to thirty years imprisonment. After four years in Ventas, she spent the rest of her eighteen years imprisonment between Málaga, Segovia, and Alcalá de Henares, before being released on conditional liberty in 1960.<sup>224</sup>

**Maria Salvo Cionin “La catalana” (?-?)** During the war, she joined the JSU. In February 1939, close to the end of the war, like many other JSU members, she went to France in exile. There, she spent several months in concentration camps, before returning to Spain and being arrested for her activities with the party and accused of producing documents that she

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<sup>221</sup> Carmen Machado, “Capítulo 10: La menor,” interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 127-143.

<sup>222</sup> Cloti Alonso, “Capítulo 5: Las de Madrid,” interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 712-718.

<sup>223</sup> Josefina Reinoso, “Capítulo 5: Las de Madrid,” interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 755-757.

<sup>224</sup> Manoli, “Capítulo 7: Parte de una vida,” interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 381-398.

did not. Throughout her sentence, she stayed in several different prisons, including Les Corts, Zaragoza, and Ventas, among others.<sup>225</sup>

**Antonia García “Toñi” (1922-?)** was seventeen years old when she was arrested for her activities with the JSU and accused of working clandestinely after Franco’s coup d’état. For years, Toñi suffered from chronic pain as a result of electric shock torture suffered in police custody. In Ventas, she worked in the sewing workshops with Cuevas, the author remembering her as a “very sensible and sensitive girl.” Throughout her eleven-year imprisonment, she additionally spent time in the prisons of Saturrarán, Segovia, and Barcelona.<sup>226</sup>

### **Anonymous**

The anonymous prisoner in the “*La cárcel*” chapter (?-?) was imprisoned in Ventas from 1939-1940, a comrade of Cuevas at Ventas that suffered torture during her time in police custody. During her imprisonment, she was also transferred to Segovia with Cuevas.<sup>227</sup>

“*La comadrona*” or “*the midwife*” (?-?) was sentenced to thirty years imprisonment along with her mother and grandmother, accused of “socialist beliefs” to which they were later released. In 1942 and 1946, respectively, the state arrested her again. During her sentence, she spent time in many prisons, including Ventas, Amorbieta, and Valladolid. She was set free and then arrested again multiple times during the Franco regime.<sup>228</sup>

Cuevas recalls the story of whom she calls “*La abuela Saturia*” (?-?) Originally from a town close to Madrid, she was sentenced to 20 years for her work in towns and cooperatives during the war. In Ventas in the early 1940s, Cuevas describes her as a woman with a “magnificent character,” “respected even by the leadership,” and “very loved by the women.”

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<sup>225</sup> Maria Salvo Cionin ‘La Catalana,’ “Capítulo 9: La catalana,” interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 409-438.

<sup>226</sup> Antonia García, ‘Toñi,’ “Capítulo 4: Prisión de madres,” interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 321-346.

<sup>227</sup> Anonymous, “Capítulo 1: La cárcel,” interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 273-277.

<sup>228</sup> Anonymous, ‘La comadrona,’ “Capítulo 5: Las de Madrid,” interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 757-762.

Her story is very brief, but important to understanding the unique challenges of motherhood for imprisoned women.<sup>229</sup>

### *UCSD SCWMP*

**Carmen Borrell Pérez (1921-?)** from Madrid, was arrested at sixteen years-old for being a “militant” member of the JSU. She arrived in Ventas just days after the execution of *las Trece Rosas* and she spent one year and fifteen days inside Ventas.<sup>230</sup>

**Angustias Martínez Vicente (1919-?)** from Cuenca, was arrested in 1939 for her activities in the JSU and was consequently tortured and imprisoned. Throughout her seven-year incarceration, she was transferred from Cuenca, Uclés, and then Ventas. In 1946, she was released and continued to work clandestinely as an anti-Francoist militant. In 1955, she moved to Chile, where she continued to work against Franco and for the Chilean Communist Party. After the 1973 Chilean coup, she returned to Spain.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Anonymous, ‘La abuela Satoria,’ “Capítulo 1: La cárcel ” interview by Tomasa Cuevas Gutiérrez, *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*, ed. Jorge J. Montes Salguero (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 2004), 283-284.

<sup>230</sup> Carmen Borrell Pérez, interview by Scott Boehm and Daniel Rojo, *Spanish Civil War Memory Project*, University of California San Diego, February 17, 2009.

<sup>231</sup> Angustias Martínez Vicente, interview by Scott Boehm and Miriam Duarte, *Spanish Civil War Memory Project*, University of California San Diego, February 6-16, 2009.

## Conclusion

In the five decades since the fall of the Francoist dictatorship, Spaniards are still grappling with the memory and legacy of the not-so distant past. One reason for these enduring sentiments was that during the democratic transition, bipartisan leadership adopted a *Pacto del Olvido* (Pact of Forgetting) policy by which Spanish political parties agreed to remain silent on official channels of the violent legacy on both sides of the civil war and the dictatorship's crimes, with the idea being to focus on the future of Spain rather than confront and condemn the injustices of the past.<sup>232</sup> Namely, as an extension of this policy, the *Ley 46/1977, de 15 de octubre, de Amnistía* (1977 Amnesty Law) silenced the experiences of victims of the Francoist regime and prevented prosecution of leadership culpable of state crimes.<sup>233</sup> Throughout this period, numerous non-government actors have taken matters of justice into their own hands, in one instance, Spaniards filed suit in an Argentine court under universal justice for crimes against humanity committed under Franco.<sup>234</sup> More specific to this thesis, an extension of this justice in the form of memory transmission is evidenced by Tomasa Cuevas' collected works of women prisoners' testimonies. In addition, digital archives such as the [carceldeventas.org](http://carceldeventas.org) and the UCSD SCWMP endure in their efforts to keep the history of marginalized actors throughout the dictatorship and in the years after alive and accessible.

Yet, in recent decades, the Spanish government has made greater efforts to confront Francoist state crimes, with the 52/2007 *Ley de Memoria Histórica de España* (2007 Historical Memory Law) enacted to formally recognize those impacted by violence on both sides of the civil war as well as throughout the dictatorship, provide state assistance with exhumation of mass graves of victims of Francoist violence, and proclaim the illegitimacy of the judicial system and fair trials under Franco, among other measures.<sup>235</sup> In 2022, the 20/2022 *Ley de*

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<sup>232</sup> Madeleine Davis, "Is Spain Recovering Its Memory? Breaking the 'Pacto Del Olvido,'" *Human Rights Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2005): 858–80. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20069813>.

<sup>233</sup> Mark Nayler, "In Spain, Can Truth Ever Bring Reconciliation?," *Foreign Policy* (blog), January 29, 2024, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/11/20/spain-franco-mass-graves-truth-reconciliation/>.

It's important to note that the Amnesty Law also extended immunity to Republicans for crimes committed during the Civil War but as Nayler describes, the immunity more so favored the Nationalists.

<sup>234</sup> Reuters, "Argentinian Judge Indicts Franco-Era Spanish Minister on Homicide Charges," *The Guardian*, October 16, 2021, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/16/argentine-judge-indicts-franco-era-spanish-minister-on-homicide-charges>.

<sup>235</sup> Jefatura del Estado de España, 52/2007 *Ley de Memoria Histórica de España*, Boletín Oficial del Estado núm. 310 de 27 de diciembre de 2007, <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2007-22296>.

*Memoria Democrática* (Democratic Memory Law) has more greatly challenged these long-repressed policies on official non-recognition of state terror. The preamble to the law, delivered by King of Spain Philip VI, addresses these past political and judicial failures of the post-Franco governments, stating that Spaniards should possess the “inalienable right to know the historical truth about the process of violence and terror imposed by the Franco regime, as well as about the values and acts of democratic resistance carried out by those who fell victim to its repression...”<sup>236</sup> To similarly address these long-marginalized perspectives of democratic resistance, this thesis utilizes the lens of gendered state terrorism to provide the possibility for understanding the long-silenced character of gendered state violence in Spain, the hardships experienced by imprisoned women, and the plural ways in which women resisted this terror. These memories matter then, now, and in the future, as there still exist Spaniards and people around the world who celebrate and honor the legacy of Francoism rather than denounce it. A stark example of this lingering support by the far-right of the legacy of Francoism were the 2018 protests at the controversial Valley of the Fallen monument, by which hundreds of Spaniards gathered to object the exhumation and relocation of Franco’s remains.<sup>237</sup> Hence, much must be done to continue to elevate and understand micro-histories of Francoist violence, such as those of the women of Ventas.

Throughout this work, the threads between gender, religion, Francoism, and state terror have been established through analysis of state narratives, historiography of Spanish women’s prisons, and women prisoner’s testimonies. Through analysis of official state narratives and the escalation of the women prison population under Franco, gendered state terrorism proved a critical tool of building the dictatorship’s “legitimacy” through weaving a narrative of survival against their so-called political and moral threat – “red” women. More specifically, Francoist narratives of women’s social roles and the motivation of the state to imprison those contrary to these conceptions through legal, political, and media channels emphasized the protection of the family over women’s rights and the eradication of “leftist women” as paramount for the state, contributing to a wider attempt to legitimize terror by the state towards women. Official

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<sup>236</sup> Jefatura del Estado de España, 20/2022 *Ley de Memoria Democrática*, Boletín Oficial del Estado núm. 252 de 20 de octubre de 2022, <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2022-17099>.

<sup>237</sup> Constanza Lambertucci, Sara Gonzalez Boutriau, and Natalia Junquera, “Hundreds Protest to Keep Franco’s Remains in Valley of the Fallen,” *EL PAÍS English*, July 16, 2018, sec. Spain, [https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2018/07/16/inenglish/1531725040\\_906868.html](https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2018/07/16/inenglish/1531725040_906868.html); “Spain Far Right Protest against Moving Franco’s Remains,” *BBC News*, July 15, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-44838849>.

narratives and the general historiography of Spanish women's prisons further demonstrate that Franco's rule of state terror merely marked a continuation of state violence against women in Spain that utilized longstanding elements of religion, labor and conservative gender roles, but on a greater scale, marked by increasingly extreme measures including codification of religious morality and larger scale imprisonment as a moral-political corrective force.

In contrast, women presented counternarratives which characterized Francoist measures as violent, denounced the so-called Catholic "values" of the state, and represented the multilayered, intersectional experiences of women. In a wider lens, gendered agendas continually play a role in state terrorism throughout global history as women are employed and expected to be symbols of the nation to represent and reproduce value sets, as portrayed by the Francoist state's emphasis on wifhood, motherhood, and the continuation of Catholic values in the legal, educational, and propagandic spheres. Observing the case of Spain, the phenomenon of state terrorism should continue to be examined through a gendered perspective and analysis of testimonies because it can begin to shed light on often sidelined populations, of which the women prisoners of Ventas composed part of, though not without displays of determination and agency in their testimonies. The analysis of testimonies through a perspective of gendered state terrorism also permits a view into in what unique ways women challenge and counter state terror and its narratives of "othering." As previously discussed, in Spain, an absence of proper judicial accountability for crimes against women and girls under Franco remains. Before these testimonies, the state narratives of women prisoners under Franco could remain the predominant voice, the reverberation of a decades-long dictatorship unchallenged by legal rulings that suppressed dissent in favor of forgetting. However, these women, through the power of their individual and collective voices, bravely resisted this status quo.

In reflection on the thesis, further research remains necessary to understand the localized and plural experiences of women in state terror campaigns in Spain and beyond. As aforementioned, the limited institutional documents surrounding Franco's prisons make testimonies a crucial source of investigating everyday realities of prison life, experiences of state terror by women, and counternarratives to state narratives produced by women. Though long demolished, the memory of Ventas remains alive with women's testimonies, and hence, the stories of other women prisoners' experiences across Spain remain critical sources for future scholarship to determine broader experiences of gendered state terror in women's prisons under Franco. As demonstrated by this thesis, conceptualizing gendered state terror and

understanding its unique, localized manifestations can allow for more productive, intersectional future research on state terrorism, its actors, and both the repression and agency of those impacted moving forward, keeping often marginalized memories alive.

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