

# INTRODUCTION

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Something about the book on the top shelf caught my eye. Standing on tip-toe, I turned my head awkwardly to read the title sideways: *Cárcel de mujeres. 1939–1945 (Prison of Women, 1939–1945)*. I managed to pry the volume loose from the books squeezed tightly on each side. Leaning against the shelves, I read on the back cover how a certain Tomasa Cuevas had gathered oral testimonies from women who had been incarcerated in the months and years following the end of the Civil War in Spain in 1939. Leafing through the pages, I paused to read a paragraph here and there.

I left the Madrid bookstore with the volume tucked in my purse and walked back to my pension a block off the Castellana avenue. Later that afternoon I settled near a window in the parlor of the pension and began to read. An hour or two passed. I let the book rest open on my lap and looked pensively out the window on the busy street below, reflecting this hot July evening in 1989 on a strange coincidence of events.

I'd come to Madrid three weeks before to read documents of the Inquisition in the National Historical Archives. Each morning I would leave the pension with notebooks under my arm and walk the three miles or so to the archives, savoring the artful displays of elegant clothing in the boutiques that lined the avenue. From nine-thirty to two-thirty each day I undid cardboard boxes tied with strings and searched through the documents for evidence on how women had fared in the courts of the Holy Office.

Here was a letter from the daughter of an old woman exiled to a neighboring village as punishment for suspected judaizing; now, the daughter pleaded, with the old woman paralyzed by strokes, could she please bring her mother home? There was a request from a younger woman to wear red skirts, which the Inquisition had forbidden as part of her punishment; without colorful clothing, she argued, how could she keep her husband from straying? Letters, petitions, records of proceedings, on and on the documents gave up their grim secrets, the ways large

and small that women had suffered the heavy arm of the church.

From the courts and prisons of the Inquisition, I now returned each day to Franco's prisons. Reading from *Cárcel de mujeres* I lost all sense of time and place. How was one prison different from the other? Had one system of terror simply replaced another?

That was the summer of 1989. Five years would elapse before I met Tomasa Cuevas. During that time I thought about the testimonies and how they deserved an audience outside the Spanish-speaking world. I even tried my hand at translating two or three of them and wrote to the publisher in Barcelona about bringing them out in English. But when no reply came and other projects intruded on my attention, I let slide the idea of translating the testimonies.

Then, at an academic conference in 1993 in conversation with a friend, I happened to mention my intriguing encounter with two different sets of prison texts that summer in Madrid. Coincidence again carried the day: my colleague had met Tomasa at a conference organized by a colloquium of universities to observe the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Tomasa had been brought in as a distinguished speaker along with other women and men. Through our mutual friend, Tomasa and I began to correspond and agreed to collaborate on an English translation of the testimonies. The first step was to select an appropriate number of representative testimonies for one book. By this time I had discovered that Tomasa had published two more volumes: *Cárcel de mujeres: Ventas, Segovia, Les Corts* (*Prison of Women: Ventas, Segovia, Les Corts*) and *Mujeres de la resistencia* (*Women of the Resistance*).

In the summer of 1994 I traveled to Spain, this time with Joanne Allen, whom I'd known since 1966 when both of us were beginning our academic careers as Spanish teachers. Joanne and I had made our first trip to Spain together in 1967, traveling by car for a month throughout the Iberian peninsula. Fresh from graduate studies at the University of California, Berkeley, we were wide-eyed romantics, more ready to quote Machado's poetry at the sight of poplar trees in the lands of Castile than question the legitimacy of a state authority wrested by terror.

Even though professors of ours at Berkeley had been political refugees from Spain, we were blithely unaware of the implications of their status in terms of the current political situation within Spain. We might wince at the sight of the dreaded Civil Guard patrolling by foot or motorcycle in pairs, but our fears stemmed more from allusions in García Lorca's poetry than from the reality of ordinary men and women being imprisoned and tortured right then. Much later, working with Tomasa's books, I would be jolted time and again on realizing what this woman whose story I was translating had been enduring while I was

skimming about the Spanish countryside agog at castles and cathedrals.

The woman who opened the door to greet us was small, barely five feet tall, probably in her late seventies, and despite the added flesh that comes with age, still petite. Her nickname, Peque, which means “little one,” suited her. Tomasa’s expression was open and lively. Even with the reserve normal in first meetings, I knew that here was a woman I would like and trust.

As we worked together for three days selecting and ordering the testimonies, I came to appreciate Tomasa’s natural intelligence. Shy on formal education, she nonetheless quickly learned techniques of editing. Soon she was rereading her material with a critical eye, alert to repetition and obscurity. At one point, when she’d finished working on a long section of her own story, she looked at me proudly: “See, Mary, I’m doing what you did.”

If Tomasa learned from me, far more did I learn from her, not merely the outline of her story, but the character of this woman born to poverty and refined in adversity: damaged spinal column, diabetes, heart problems, deteriorating vision, arthritis—effects of age, yes, but also the marks of imprisonment and torture. But if she mentioned her infirmities at all, her tone was matter-of-fact. In large part suffering defines her life. But so, too, does joy: the calls from her husband in Madrid; visits from friends; her daughter, Estrella, and the four grandchildren; the glass of wine and stories we shared at dinners in the nearby restaurant; the champagne and dessert she served our first evening together in traditional celebration of the Eve of the Feast of St. John the Baptist. In spite of age and infirmities, what an alive woman this Tomasa Cuevas!

Tomasa already had seen the need to reduce the number of testimonies when I conferred with her at her home in Vilanova i la Geltrú, a seaport some forty-five miles south of Barcelona. But the length of the original material wasn’t the only problem. I soon realized that a straightforward translation of the material would not suffice for non-Spanish readers. The material itself had to be reshaped: first, to reduce its length and number of different narrators and then to find coherence in those stories. I’d already spoken with Tomasa about bringing her own story sharply into the foreground in order to make her a kind of guide for the reader unfamiliar with the Spanish Civil War and the Franco era.

The need to sharpen the focus on Tomasa grew in the following months when I was translating the stories. Tomasa’s voice was emerging from the aggregate of testimonies as an especially strong and insightful one. Through her I was seeing the forces that shaped political and personal decisions during and after the war more clearly than from the other testimonies, individually or collectively. I credit this understanding to Tomasa’s ability to recapture scenes, conversations, and feelings. But

other women's stories were important, too; they imparted further credibility to Tomasa's story, widening and texturing the canvas of her narrative. Together the stories attest to the magnitude of oppression and, paradoxically, sharpen the brutality inflicted on the individual woman.

The first draft of the translation revealed another vexing problem—repetition. With two or more women narrating their experiences in the same prison, some redundancy was inevitable. But the volume of repetition was making it very difficult to distinguish one voice from another. Convinced that each woman did have her unique voice, I realized with increasing earnestness that my responsibility was to sort out and enhance the individual voices.

At times the task was relatively easy, as with Rosario Sánchez Mora whose job as a dynamiter before imprisonment was a key to her strong personality, or María del Carmen Cuesta, whose innate sense of the dramatic immediately sets her story apart. Other voices are less identifiable but nonetheless powerful: the very inability to articulate eloquently demonstrates in its own way how disfiguring cruelty is to the human spirit. If some testimonies are writ in small letters, they remind us that everyday existence in prison has, like ours, its own kind of humdrum rhythm. Perhaps that humdrum rhythm is as true a representation, if not a truer one, than the sensibility-shattering din of torture and killing.

Editing the testimonies by trimming away repetition and reordering events for the sake of chronological clarity and narrative interest still left unsolved a problem that was inherent in Tomasa's original methodology. In the late 1970s Tomasa had set out on her quest to collect from women she had known in prisons their testimonies about prison life. In the prologues to their stories we hear Tomasa speak about how she met the women, some of whom she'd not seen since their prison days together. In her purse she carried a tape recorder. We can picture the two women seated at a table with tape recorder between them, recalling old times. Now Tomasa interjects a question; now the questions and answers become a dialogue; now the story is an uninterrupted monologue.

But the image of two women in conversation persists—women reminiscing about a common past. For them no explanations are needed. They know where they are in the past; they can see and hear and smell the prison. If one woman refers to the uprising at the Montaña barracks or the Casado coup, the allusion strikes immediate recognition in the other woman. So on the women go, talking about a world to them familiar and firm. They don't require explanations and footnotes to set the context for the life they recount. That context is in their shared memory.

But the reader who stands outside that memory, a stranger to the setting for the events to which the women allude, that reader is like a

person listening to a conversation in a foreign language; she strains to catch a word here or there to get her bearings. Such is our response to much of oral literature, which by nature is informed with assumptions about the listener/reader's familiarity with the subject matter either by dint of shared experience or through research. Tomasa is not oblivious to the possibility that readers are unlettered in her school of experience; she begins her introduction to the first volume of testimonies by referring to the young people of her day who express interest in the early years of the Communist Party and especially want to know about brutality and torture in the prisons of Franco.

Tomasa's awareness of a potential audience beyond a circle of readers from within the context of the Civil War and the Franco years may account in part for her eye to details of time, place, and emotions in the telling of her own story. I think it is clear, too, that the "young people" include Tomasa's own grandchildren, a generation far removed in time and concern from her experiences. She may even have had in mind her daughter, Estrella, who emerges as a vital part of Tomasa's story in Part 2.

So as we listen to the women talking about "old times," we're aware over and over that we are outsiders. We're brought up sharply by a reference to the uprising at the Montaña barracks, unable to get the drift of the conversation just right and fearful to interfere with its flow. But what is the uprising of the Montaña barracks and how are we to appreciate the urgency in voice if we lack information about the event? Certainly, it would not do to interrupt the story with a paragraph of information. Nor would it be realistic to put this information in the mouth of one woman as if she were telling the other one what she didn't know. I decided to provide a context in two ways: notes within the text and a glossary of names, abbreviations, and events. Some events, however, appear so frequently in the testimonies and are of such pivotal importance to the unfolding of the Civil War and resistance to the Franco regime that I have elected to treat them briefly here in the introduction.<sup>1</sup>

The October Revolution of 1934 was a prelude to the outbreak of hostilities in 1936 and, for Tomasa, a coming-of-age event in her career as political dissident. For about two weeks during the so-called Red Days of October workers' committees of the Socialist Republic and workers' militia controlled the mining districts of Asturias. Socialists, Anarchists, and Communists forged solidarity among the miners, resulting in a kind of civil war. The uprising was part of an unsuccessful general strike to protest the claiming of the offices of agriculture, labor, and justice by the conservative party, CEDA, Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Rights). The government brought

in foreign legionnaires from Morocco to help put down the uprising. An estimated one thousand died and some 30,000 were imprisoned. A major result of the failed uprising was to unify the political left around the program of amnesty for the prisoners. Many women were imprisoned and many others mobilized their voices in a call for amnesty for jailed husbands and sons. Although Tomasa did not live in Asturias, she, too, rallied around the call for amnesty for political prisoners.

The unification of leftist groups during the October Revolution of 1934 later acquired identity as the Popular Front and emerged in the elections of February 16, 1936, as a major force in the political scene. Composed of Socialists, Republican Left, Republican Union, Esquerra (Left Republican Catalan nationalist party), and Communists, the Popular Front won 4,176,156 votes as opposed to 130,000 for the Basque Nationalists, 681,047 for the Center, and 3,783,601 for the National Front, that is, the parties of the right. The Popular Front thus won more votes and more seats than did the other alliances. The Communists, however, gained only a total of seventeen seats, a number that indicates the relatively minor position of the party at that time. This is the period, from 1934 to 1936, when Tomasa worked as a political activist in the areas of propaganda and what she calls "agitation." The elections are the ones that she and her friends faithfully commemorated from within prison.

A little more than two years after the election, civil war broke out in the peninsula, triggered by uprisings from within the army. The successful uprising by officers in the Army of Africa on July 17, 1936, spawned military responses in garrisons throughout Spain whereby the army intended to take control of the nation. The focal point for the uprising in Madrid was the Montaña barracks, located in the western part of the city on a site overlooking the Manzanares river. By early afternoon on July 19, 1936, General Fanjul and officers from other barracks in Madrid met at the Montaña barracks where the general gave a speech on the political aims and loyal intent of rebelling against the duly-elected government. The military attempted to go out into the streets with their rebellion, but they were prevented by large crowds that by then had gathered. The barracks fired with machine guns and the crowds responded with gunfire of their own.

The night was frenzied as more than fifty churches were burned and the workers and their parties extended their control of the city. By the following morning an even larger crowd marched on the barracks and bombarded it for five hours, supplemented by aircraft and artillery. General Fanjul requested help from General García de la Herrán, but it proved impossible to get through to the barracks. At ten-thirty in the morning the general, along with the previous head of the barracks, were

wounded and one-half hour later, the white flag of surrender appeared. But when the crowd went forward to accept surrender, they were met with machine-gun fire until, shortly after noon, they broke down the massive door of the barracks. Historians agree that what followed was a massacre, with most of the officers killed. The survivors from within the barracks were put in the Model prison and General Fanjul was taken away for trial.

The uprising failed in part because the soldiers themselves were divided in their loyalties and in part because the forces of the Republican Assault Guards were overwhelming in number and force. A similar situation obtained in other barracks throughout the city with the result that the city remained loyal to the Republic.

The uprisings of July 19–20, 1936, against the Republican government took place not only in Madrid but also to the south in Toledo and east in Guadalajara where Tomasa and her family lived. As news of the other uprisings reached Madrid, the militia, or fighting units made up of workers rather than regular soldiers, left the capital in taxis, trucks, and private cars to combat the rebels, capturing Alcalá de Henares and then, in spite of resistance by the Civil Guard, Guadalajara. The militias held Guadalajara and by the end of July had captured Sigüenza to the north. Tomasa's account of these days and months of turmoil reveals the terror and suffering for the ordinary person.

By 1937, when Guadalajara was headquarters for the Russian air squadron, the leaders of the rebel Nationalist forces decided to attack Madrid from the northeast, advancing against Guadalajara and once again jeopardizing Tomasa and her family. The attacking force included 30,000 Italians divided into four divisions, 250 tanks, 180 pieces of mobile artillery, a chemical warfare company, a flame-thrower company, about fifty fighter planes, and twelve reconnaissance planes. The advance began on March 8, 1937, hindered by foul weather. On the morning of March 10 Tomasa's birthplace of Brihuega fell to the Italian Black Flame and Black Arrow soldiers. About noon Italian forces who supported the Republic defeated the Black Flame patrol; fighting between the two Italian forces continued throughout the day. At this time Republican aircraft dropped pamphlets promising safe conduct to all Italian deserters from the Nationalists, and rewards of up to 100 pesetas if they surrendered with their arms. The Thaelmann Brigade sustained heavy casualties.<sup>2</sup> On March 12 Republican bombers pounded the Italian mechanized columns and the Republican forces retook Brihuega. On March 18 Republican aircraft bombed the surroundings of Brihuega, followed by heavy Republican artillery. By early afternoon two divisions with tanks attacked, one on the west, the other in the east, thus encircling the town. They had almost completed this

maneuver when the Italians got the order to retreat. The retreat turned into a rout.

In the final days of the war Guadalajara fell to the Nationalists. On March 27, 1939, the Nationalist army broke through the Guadalajara front and joined up with rebel forces advancing from Toledo. The bombings in the final days of the war Tomasa describes in haunting detail.

From Tomasa's story we see how she lived out the war from her corner of the world in Brihuega and Guadalajara: she worked in hospitals, organized sewing shops to make overalls for the militias, planned diversions for the troops, set up laundries for washing soldiers' clothing, recruited men for the front, and persuaded women to take over men's jobs. In short, Tomasa was like countless women in Republican Spain who were mobilized for the war effort.<sup>3</sup>

For Communists the war ended ignominiously with the coup led by Colonel Segismundo Casado, the Republican commander of the Army of the Center who opposed Prime Minister Juan Negrín's policy to continue resisting the Nationalists at a time, in the early months of 1939, when the Republican cause seemed lost. Casado and like-minded opponents of the policy of resistance were especially disillusioned when on February 27, 1939, France and Britain recognized the Nationalist government that had headquarters in the city of Burgos.

Even though Prime Minister Negrín apparently came to agree with Casado's policy of ending resistance and showed his favor by promoting the colonel to the rank of general, Casado proceeded to form an opposition government. At midnight of March 4, Casado broadcast the revolt to the people of anti-Fascist Spain. In the meantime the Communist Party, which had not given up resistance to the Nationalists, defied Casado's action by moving troops against him. Even when Negrín and Communist supporters flew to France on March 5, party resistance continued in Madrid until most of the city was under its control. But by March 12 strife within Republican ranks was appeased and by the terms of an agreement reached with Casado, Communist forces returned to the positions they had held on March 2. The bitterness with which Tomasa and her friends refer to the Casado coup is explainable in part by the next action of the council that Casado had formed; by its order the Communists Colonel Barceló and his commissar were arrested and shot. By March 19 Casado had sent a negotiating delegation to Nationalist headquarters in Burgos. A week of negotiations brought only one outcome—unconditional surrender. On March 27 Casado ordered the surrender of Madrid to the Nationalist commander in University City; two days later he flew to Valencia and from there to Gandia, boarding a British ship for Marseilles. Meanwhile, on the preceding day high-



ranking Communist leaders had flown to Orán from Cartagena, leaving behind a party in disarray and its members, among them young Tomasa, to fend for themselves.

If readers are short on contextual information so also are the narrators themselves. Over and over I am reminded both from the text and conversations with Tomasa that she and the other women interpreted the larger context of the Civil War and the dictatorship according to their own necessarily limited experience. Their moral judgments about who is right and who is wrong are based on their experiences. Tomasa states repeatedly that she is no theorist, that her role in the Communist Party always has been that of a doer. Policy making is for the theorists, among whom her husband, Miguel Núñez, is a notable example. She has been one of the many rank-and-file members who have put policy into action.

At times Tomasa does hint at the larger picture, as in allusions to the party's change of policy about the *guerrilla* when she and Miguel worked and lived at a dam near Seville. The word *guerrilla* means a little war, and it refers to the subversive actions carried on by opponents of the regime both inside and outside of Spain. The fact that the people carrying out the "little war," that is, the guerrillas, were operating in both Spain and France gave rise to a clash in leadership between the two resistance groups. In October of 1944 guerrillas from southern France attempted to join effort with guerrillas in place within Spain to spark a general uprising against the Franco regime. When that effort failed, the Communist Party changed its policy; the new policy was to infiltrate Spain with small groups of guerrillas from France so that by collaborating with groups inside Spain they could wear down the regime through terrorism—blowing up trains, attacking Civil Guard barracks, destroying power lines.

From 1945 to 1948 these tactics demanded the regime's attention, but they did not mobilize wide-spread revolution. The policy was effectively laid aside in October, 1948 when the Soviet Union Communist Party called for the evacuation of guerrillas, a decision carried out in 1950 and 1951. Tomasa refers to this decision by the party to end guerrilla action; she states that it was 1948 when she and Miguel were carrying out that decision in southern Spain.

Meanwhile the *guerrilla* continued in cities with bank robberies and attacks on Falangist offices, terrorist activities that did not go uncontested from within Communist ranks. Tomasa's friend, Victoria Pujolar, mentions Cristino García and Gabriel León Trilla, both of whom favored terrorist tactics. Their fate demonstrates party strife with respect to urban *guerrilla*: on September 6, 1945, Trilla was stabbed to death in an abandoned cemetery for his disagreement with the view of party lead-

ership that terrorism was counterproductive, while Cristino García was arrested on September 22, 1946, in Alcalá de Henares and shot on February 21, 1947, along with nine other guerrillas.<sup>4</sup>

The testimonies reveal that Tomasa and the friends she mentions in Part 2, Victoria Pujolar, Adelaida Abarca, and Angelita Ramis, were involved in urban resistance, though it is not clear if or to what extent they participated in terrorist activities. From their accounts the women set up contacts between the party and prisons, provided support for prisoners, and made connections between party leadership in Spain and in France. Only in Esperanza Martínez's testimony do we see first hand the life of rural guerrillas. Captured in 1952, Esperanza had been with the guerrillas during years when groups lived a hand-to-mouth existence and their activities were primarily defensive.

For Esperanza, Tomasa, and the other women who tell their stories, their understanding of the politics that informed the life-and-death struggle in which they found themselves is limited. For the most part, these women began their work in the Communist Party by joining the youth movement. Although the Communist Youth could claim only 14,000 members before the elections of February, 1936, after joining with its Socialist counterpart in April, 1936 to form the JSU, *Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas* (Unified Socialist Youth), membership dramatically increased.

Tomasa's initial attraction to the party is understandable in light of the grueling hardships of her youth. Not only does the opportunity for a better life that the party promised appeal to the young teenager but also the trust that older members place in her. Subsequent events—war and imprisonment—confirmed her commitment to the party.

Although Tomasa was in no position to assess the role of the party in the political life of the Republic, historians tend to view the effects of the Communist Party as problematic. The PCE, *Partido Comunista de España* (Communist Party of Spain), had been founded in 1921 when a younger radical youth group joined with members who had left the PSOE, the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (Spanish Socialist Workers Party), a Marxist-Leninist party founded in 1879 by Pablo Iglesias that advocated a workers' state and government. The role of the PCE in Spanish political life was minimal until the war because the party was unable to have an impact on either the PSOE or the CNT. The CNT, the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (National Confederation of Work), was an anarchist labor union founded in 1910–1911 that believed in no government at all outside of unions or libertarian communes.

At the outbreak of the war the Communists had only sixteen deputies out of 473 in parliament, and the total number of Communists

in Spain probably did not exceed 50,000. At the end of the first year of the war, the numbers had increased to about 300,000, thanks in large part to the growing popularity of the Soviet Union for sending military aid to the Republic while western democracies stood by in silence.

But the PCE was not without internal strife, another fact that receives scant attention from Tomasa and her companions for whom the party was the model of discipline and loyalty. In its internal wrangling, the party reflected the state of the Republic in general in that supporters were far from agreement in their political aspirations and methods in spite of the threat of a common enemy. Granted a coalition of left-wing Republicans, Socialists, and Communists had been formed under the rubric of Popular Front prior to the February, 1936 elections, but the name was no guarantee against the danger posed by competing ideologies from within Republican ranks.

In early May of 1937 wrangling turned to out-and-out warfare in Barcelona, the city to which Tomasa repeatedly turns and returns as the center of her political life. At the heart of what has been called a mini-civil war within the Civil War was long-standing acrimony between POUM and PSUC. POUM, Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification), was a revolutionary Marxist party founded in September, 1935 from a Trotskyist Left Communist Party composed of workers and peasants. Holding to the belief that workers must seize political power, POUM and the CNT united in opposition to PSUC, the Partido Socialista Unificado de Cataluña (Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia). PSUC had been established in July, 1936 with the uniting of the Catalan Communist Party, the Catalan branch of PSOE, and two other organizations. In effect, PSUC was the Communist Party in Catalonia.

Ideological differences among these factions were acute, and they inform the thinking and activities of Tomasa and her husband, Miguel Núñez. The PSUC was derided for its conservative bent with respect to the Catalan middle class and the defense of private property and the free market. Its main target was Largo Caballero, Prime Minister from September 4, 1936 to May 17, 1937. The PSUC wanted Largo Caballero out of office because he opposed the party's proposals to create a united Socialist and Communist Party and to bring the army under the control of the party and Soviet advisers.

By the spring of 1937 PSUC had succeeded in regularizing the militia and the militia patrols, thus depriving the workers of their own army and police force. This action, among other measures, triggered fighting in the streets of Barcelona. On May 3 the PSUC police commissioner seized the ground floor of the central telephone exchange, a building long held by the CNT. Fighting spread to the streets, with members of

PSUC on one side and the CNT and POUM on the other firing at each other from behind street barricades. The hostilities were heated but short-lived; on May 7 the CNT broadcast an appeal for the cessation of fighting. Casualties from the riots totalled 400 dead and 1,000 wounded. Subsequently, the Communists forced the resignation of Largo Caballero, who was replaced by Dr. Juan Negrín, a man whom Socialists, Communists, and Republicans could support.

Historians tend to draw a line between the policy and the methods of the Communist Party. The party's policy of strong central government made sense in the teeth of the larger war being waged against the Nationalists, but its terrorist methods against opposition from within the Republican side drew harsh criticism. The Stalinist secret police in Spain, headed by Alexander Orlov, was especially vicious in the months following the May uprising, virtually eliminating POUM and murdering its leader, Andrés Nin. One of its most outspoken critics was George Orwell, who in articles and in his book, *Homage to Catalonia*, exposed as trumped-up the charge of siding with fascism brought against POUM leaders at their trial in October of 1937. In spite of such criticism, POUM leaders were convicted of rebellion against the Republic and of conspiring with Franco.

One aspect of Spanish Communism that is fresh in the women's testimonies is the role of women in the party. Esperanza Martínez concludes her story with biting criticism of the party for its general disparagement of women: on the one hand, women were not sufficiently educated in party philosophy to assume leadership responsibility, and on the other, the same men who criticized women for lack of education were reluctant to facilitate the education that would qualify them for positions of leadership. Ironically, this double bind is precisely the same one by which the church had dominated women for centuries.

After the war the PCE emerged as the principal clandestine opposition to the Franco regime from within Spain. But internal strife continued to weaken the party, and discontent with what members perceived as a failure in the party's own democracy led to its near demise. During the process of transition to democracy after Franco's death in 1975, the PCE lost out to PSOE, which came to power in the elections of October, 1982 and dominated Spanish politics until its loss in the March, 1996 elections. Meanwhile elections of 1986 had seen the PCE forming the nucleus of a leftist coalition known as Izquierda Unida (United Left), and most recently, in the 1996 elections, the political fortunes of Spanish Communism declined even further.

Although some women allude to the failure of democracy within the party, they do not remotely suggest that Spanish Communists were guilty of political crimes or even consider the possibility that brutality

marked the Republican as well as the Nationalist side. Here again, we must remember that these women's vision was that of participant rather than observer or historian. Prisoner to filth, hunger, torture, and uncertainty of execution, the Communist woman could not be expected to rationalize her suffering on the basis that her enemies might be enduring like conditions. Historians may cite the figure of over 89,000 executions and murders in Republican Spain during the war and describe in brutal detail the torture and murder of nearly 8,000 priests and nuns as evidence that suffering was not exclusive to Republican sympathizers, but even today those reports are no source of comfort to women like Tomasa whose understanding of events was forged in torture and refined in the sounds of executions carried out at dawn.

Nor do the women hint at the dark workings of SIM, the Servicio de Investigación Militar (Bureau of Military Investigation), which was a secret police under the direction of the Communists, supposedly for the purpose of ferreting out spies. Its methods of torture were the same as those used by the Soviet secret police in Spain and many men were said to have been murdered by its agents.

We who stand apart from the events that Tomasa and her companions relate must appreciate the necessary limitations on their vision and grant to them the truth of their experience. At the same time, we ought not dismiss the possibility—and in this case the fact—that war generates a cruelty that may infect the best of political intentions. If there is a larger lesson to be learned from the map of human suffering that is the Spanish Civil War, that lesson is the immeasurable value of peace. Or, as Tomasa says at the end of her story in the original Spanish text: “*Peace* and democracy for all oppressed peoples. *Peace* for all the world.”

Conversation over dinner in the summer of 1994 at the home of Joanne Allen's friends in Vilanova was powerful testimony to the truth that we measure the world from the window of our own experience. The friends who had invited the three of us for dinner were a couple in their late seventies, the same age as Tomasa. No sooner had we sat down to the table than Mr. García leaned toward Tomasa, seated at the other end of the large table, and said, “Tell me, Señora Tomasa, what did you do during the war?”

I gasped inwardly at the sudden and only too-real prospect of a “nice” dinner turning ugly. For two hours, Tomasa and Mr. García talked; after feeble attempts to change the subject, Joanne and I resigned ourselves to silence and perhaps an early leave-taking. All three people had supported the Republic, but there the similarity stopped. Mrs. García had inherited the family home and land; Mr. García owned a small

business; Tomasa was a proletarian by birth and experience. The Garcías had no sympathy for Communist theories or practices. Mr. García told Tomasa outright that her party was dead. She, in turn, did not deny the truth of his observations, but neither did she second his opinion. For a woman who had validated her belief in the party through imprisonment and years of separation from husband and child, silence was a telling response. What words could substitute for the reality of self-sacrifice?

All the while Mrs. García was busy serving her guests from the abundance of delicious food she had prepared. But suddenly she erupted. In a rapid-fire barrage of Spanish and Catalan she told her story: how her family home had been run over by the dregs of a popular army, by men who were little better than beasts—dirty, boorish, cruel. She didn't care if they fought for or against the Republic: they had violated her family home and she would never forgive them. If the Tomasa-Mr. García confrontation made us squirm uncomfortably—though by this time Joanne and I had given up responsibility for what we were sure was a disaster in-the-making—Mrs. García's outburst confirmed our worst fears. The sweet, motherly Mrs. García bearing plates of food from kitchen to dining room had metamorphosed before our very eyes into a kind of maenad, crazed by memories of brutish soldiers blaspheming the God of hearth and family. Not one of us uttered a word: Tomasa, Mr. García, Joanne, and I, a silenced Greek chorus, as it were.

As suddenly as Mrs. García had launched the denunciation, she ceased. She turned to pouring coffee and heaped our dessert plates with sponge cake and Spanish meringue. Soon Mr. García and I were deep in discussion about business in Spain and the United States. Mrs. García, Tomasa, and Joanne went outside to sit on the verandah and look at family pictures. And Tomasa was the first person to answer Mrs. García's invitation to see the upstairs apartment they had made for their married son and family. When the five of us said good-bye, it was as if we were all the best of friends. Tomasa might mutter "fascists" under her breath on the drive home, but she had known the Garcías' political leanings beforehand and it was clear that nothing would have stopped her from going with us to their house for dinner.

Of course, Mr. and Mrs. García were not fascists. But their politics were realized in different circumstances than were Tomasa's. And just as Tomasa's views cannot be changed neither can theirs.

That scene has replayed itself many times in my head. I've come to see it as a microcosm of Spanish society today. Old hostilities and old pains are not dead; they rise up in the particular event of a conversation and form a disposition to the meaning of life and death that ultimately defines individual identity.

There is one other aspect of Tomasa that remains for the telling—her relationship with her husband, Miguel Núñez. I've not met Miguel personally, but his presence I feel everywhere in their Vilanova flat: a photo of him taken in Cuba, handsome still in his middle years, with every bit the look of the intellectual; shelf upon shelf of books on politics, philosophy, history, sociology, literature; paintings and photographs revolutionary in mood. And I wonder at this union of the intellectual and the proletarian, as if Miguel and Tomasa were a metaphor for the ideals they advocate as Communists.

But there is something between them rooted more deeply in the heart than political commitment. There is a love I hear in Tomasa's voice when Miguel calls from Madrid, three or four times a day to see how she's feeling, as happened on our visit in January, 1996, when she was suffering from a cold and flu. The Catalan writer, Teresa Pamiès, honored their relationship in her preface to the first volume of testimonies where she wrote with deep admiration of Tomasa's strength to claim her identity apart from her well-known husband, who has served as a member of the PSUC executive committee and the Central Committee of the PCE:

If Tomasa Cuevas had not been the companion of a leader, surely today she would occupy a position of responsibility commensurate with her proven organizational talents and a natural intelligence enhanced by an unblemished record. But the heart has its reasons and no one should inquire into the life of a couple. In this society made by men, a woman who has the "misfortune" to fall in love with a leader must resign herself to life as his lover, secretary or nurse or else renounce union with him.

Noting that neither option was right for Tomasa, Pamiès admires her for being her own person rather than simply "the tail of the comet." "Tomasa radiates her own light," continues the writer, "and only she knows how difficult it has been to share the militant life with her husband. Her light may not dazzle, it is true," writes Pamiès, "but it is no less authentic."

In this prologue Teresa Pamiès honors as well Tomasa's determination to gather these women's stories and bring them into print. Others would have thrown in the sponge in face of the mountain of work required by the project, asserts Pamiès:

Kilometers and kilometers of tapes; hundreds of notebooks filled with transcripts of the tapes done by young friends, leaving to her—because she was the only one who could do it—the horrendous job of putting in order, coordinating, and verifying material that was important but often repetitive. Trips to various cities and villages, the search for old

friends dispersed throughout Spain or exiled, prodding the recalcitrant and the weary—and all that in spite of a health broken by a life of painful physical work since childhood, abuse in police stations, precarious living conditions and taking care of sick and aged family members.

When I began to translate these testimonies about women and prison, I could not foresee the effects that knowing Tomasa in person and in her story would have on me and on my attitude toward the work of translation and editing. What began as an intellectual enterprise with moral overtones has become a spiritual odyssey, brought to fruition in part by intellectual skills. But the full fruit of this odyssey is the realization that more than anything I would like to honor my friend, Tomasa, by helping to bring *her* story to the appreciation of a new audience.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the following people for their generous help in the preparation of this book: Joanne Allen, for accompanying me on two visits to Tomasa's home and with her sense of humor and linguistic skills forming in large part the bridge of trust and understanding that is necessary in this kind of collaborative work; Amanda Powell, for putting Tomasa and me in contact with each other and reading thoroughly the completed manuscript; Robert Richardson, my colleague at California State University, Sacramento, and cartographer par excellence, who generated the maps for the book; and Terence Manns, Director of Graduate Research and Studies at the university, who made possible partial funding for the first trip to meet with Tomasa.