

## **FROM ERASURE TO RESIGNIFICATION: MEMORIALISING FRANCOIST WOMEN'S PRISONS**

**Sarah Leggott\***

### **ABSTRACT**

This article explores the memorialisation of former Francoist women's prisons within Spain's contested memory landscape, in which competing interpretations of the history and memory of the Spanish Civil War and ensuing Franco dictatorship continue to cause controversy. Drawing on scholarship on "difficult" and gendered heritage, this discussion situates women's imprisonment within the regime's gender ideology and pseudo-scientific discourses that positioned Republican women as a significant threat to the nation. It then examines examples of sites of women's imprisonment during the dictatorship in three different cities - Madrid, Valencia, and Segovia - highlighting contrasting strategies of memorialisation at each site, with the initiatives discussed highlighting the impact of grassroots activism and civic engagement in shaping commemorative practices. These sites and discussions regarding their memorialisation also serve as a reminder of the gender-based repression and violence suffered by Republican women during the dictatorship.

**Keywords:** Francoist repression; women's prisons; gendered violence; historical memory; Spain; heritage studies; testimonial literature; memorialisation; dictatorship; feminist heritage.

### **INTRODUCTION**

This article explores debates in contemporary Spain about the remaining physical heritage of the repressive Franco dictatorship that was in place from 1939 to 1975. In particular, it examines the different ways in which sites of gendered repression from that period are memorialised in a context of fierce debates about the legacy of Francoism. Through discussion of three case studies, the key aims of this research are to reveal the ways in which the regime's gender ideology led to a particular victimisation of Republican women and to explore the impact of different strategies of that seek to memorialise the gender violence perpetrated under Francoism. It also seeks to fill a gap in existing scholarship around the gendered nature of heritage practice in Spain and the significant impact that grassroots activism and civic engagement can have in the shaping of commemorative practices.

### **CONTEXT**

As competing interpretations of the history and memory of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and ensuing Franco dictatorship (1939-1975) continue to be the subject of debate in 21st-century Spain, so too does the question of how to deal with the remaining material heritage of the regime. While recent decades have seen streets renamed, statues removed, and public figures exhumed, calls for the public recognition and marking of further sites associated with the regime persist, together with calls for the development of new memorials to honour the victims of Francoism. The fact that these proposals continue to generate social and political controversy in contemporary Spain signals the continued lack of consensus over how to memorialise a contested past.

These debates are not unique to Spain, with many communities around the world grappling with how to remember or forget, preserve or destroy, the legacy of painful periods in their history. Scholars have used terms such as "dissonant," "undesirable," or "difficult" heritage to refer to histories that evoke conflicting memories for different groups, and over which there is a lack of agreement regarding their

---

\* Dr., Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, [sarah.leggott@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:sarah.leggott@vuw.ac.nz), <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9962-6518>, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54414/RCYR4665>

representation and interpretation (Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996; Macdonald, 2006, 2009).

Within this broader context, I am particularly interested in how sites of gendered repression under the Franco regime have been marked and memorialised as a means of giving visibility to women's experiences under the dictatorship.

My discussion here focuses on the memorialisation of former prison sites where violent gendered repression took place under the Franco dictatorship, examining the extent to which these are publicly recognised and historically preserved places in 21st-century Spain. This paper will first discuss the gender ideology espoused by the Franco regime and the ways in which this informed the treatment of Republican women, before examining the very different ways in which three significant sites of women's imprisonment, in Madrid, Valencia, and Segovia, have been commemorated.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In addition to being framed by the work on "difficult" or "dissonant" heritage referenced above, this research also draws on scholarship from the fields of heritage studies and gender studies. In particular, it explores the ways in which the pseudo-scientific gender discourse deployed by the Franco regime informed the treatment of Republican women. The discussion is also framed by analyses of women's experiences of imprisonment under the regime and by scholarly work on different approaches to memorials to contested material culture. This research adopts a comparative approach, examining case studies of sites of imprisonment in three Spanish cities, contrasting the different approaches adopted to seek to memorialise the gender-based repression perpetrated at these sites.

### **1. GENDER IDEOLOGY UNDER FRANCOISM**

In the late 20th century, historians of Spain noted the scarcity of documentation concerning women's experiences during the civil war and dictatorship, with Mary Nash having described historical amnesia on women as "acute," even within the broader public silencing of that history that characterised the first decades of democracy (1991, p.382).<sup>2</sup> The lack of historical studies and reliable official documentation led scholars to turn initially to the testimonial accounts of survivors and witnesses, works that provide important insights into women's experiences of repression and imprisonment, as well as inscribing stories of resistance and agency. Highly significant in this field are the testimonies compiled by Tomasa Cuevas, herself a Communist activist who was arrested, imprisoned and tortured during the Franco years. Following her release, Cuevas travelled to different parts of Spain to gather the testimonies of fellow inmates, accounts that were originally published in three volumes, later reedited as a single volume (2004). Other testimonial accounts recounting women prisoners' memories and experience are those of Sara Berenguer (1988), Juana Doña (1978), Soledad Real (1983), and Remedios Montero (2004), among others.

In more recent years, a growing body of scholarship has sought to foreground the gendered nature of Francoist repression, particularly the sexual violence perpetrated against Republican women, who were punished not only for their political affiliations, but also for transgressing the gender roles imposed by the regime. Under the dictatorship's conservative ideology, known as National Catholicism, women's primary responsibility was to be wives and mothers, with the leader of the women's section of the Falange,<sup>3</sup> Pilar Primo de Rivera, declaring that "the only mission assigned to women in the work of the Fatherland is the home" (as cited in Morcillo 2000, p.45).<sup>4</sup> This restrictive gender ideology was institutionalised by the regime

<sup>2</sup> The silencing of aspects of Spain's recent past during the country's transition to democracy has been widely analysed by historians. See, for example, Aguilar Fernández (2001); Colomer (1998); Morán (1991).

<sup>3</sup> The Falange was the Spanish Nationalist movement that became the sole legal political party during the dictatorship.

<sup>4</sup> All translations from material originally in Spanish are my own.

through legal and social mechanisms which curtailed women's rights to work, travel, and own property without male permission.

Within this traditionalist framework, women associated with the Republic were considered to constitute a threat to Spanish society; as Tabea Linhard notes, "in the rhetoric of Nationalist and later Francoist Spain, politically active women became the culprits of the disasters and the unrestrained violence of the civil war" (2005, p.27). This was based on the regime's view that holding left-wing beliefs, all of which were designated as "Marxist," was symptomatic of psychological illness. This theory was derived from a pseudo-scientific discourse developed by the regime's Director of Psychological Research, Antonio Vallejo Nágera who, drawing on eugenic theories, argued that such beliefs posed an extreme threat to the purity of what he referred to as the "Hispanic race," warning of the dangers of "a social mass contaminated by democratic and Marxist viruses" (1937, p.6). This belief was invoked by the regime to position supporters of the Republic as "pathological, criminalized, and inferior subjects" (Campos, 2014, p.34). Within this discourse, women were considered to pose a particular threat to the future of the nation due to their maternal capacity which, Vallejo Nágera posited, made possible the transmission of their leftist beliefs to the next generation. Furthermore, women were considered to be particularly predisposed to left-wing influences due to their supposed "lack of mental stability, minimal resistance to environmental influences, poor control over their personality, and impulsiveness" (Vallejo Nágera & Martínez, 1939, p.398). This made women a particular target for silencing and erasure, with Vallejo Nágera's call for the imposition of "a very strict social discipline" (1938, p.12) as a "cure" evoked to justify the violence perpetrated against Republican women.

## **2. GENDERED VIOLENCE UNDER THE FRANCO DICTATORSHIP**

Scholars deploy terms such as "sexualised violence" and "gendered violence" to refer to the crimes committed against women by the regime, ranging from beatings and torture to rape and symbolic assaults on the female body. In her study of Nazi violence against Jewish women, Brigitte Halbmayer includes both direct physical assaults, such as rape and forced nudity, and indirect emotional violations, including imposed nakedness, humiliating medical examinations, and suggestive insults (2010, p.30). In the case of Francoist Spain, such violence against women and girls has until quite recently received limited critical attention, with Maud Joly arguing that "the issue of sexualized violence in the war - analysed as such - rarely constitutes an object of history in itself" (2008, p.93). Joly's work, together with that of scholars such as Irene Abad (2009), Gina Herrmann (2013), and Paul Preston (2012), have opened up this field, with Preston confirming that "[m]urder, torture and rape were generalized punishments for the gender liberation embraced by many, but not all, liberal and left-wing women during the Republican period" (2012, p.xix). Republican women who survived imprisonment often experienced enduring physical and psychological trauma. Many were subjected to sexual violence, head shaving, and public humiliation, including due to the administration of castor oil, which caused uncontrollable defecation and was considered a symbolic act of purification. The perpetration of gender specific violence is also confirmed by recent forensic and archaeological work at mass grave sites, with analysis by forensic archaeologist Laura Muñoz-Encinar (2019) unearthing material evidence of this, including the execution of pregnant women.

Much of this violence took place in the many sites of imprisonment that formed part of the regime's vast penitentiary system in which thousands of political prisoners were detained across the country in prisons, detention centres, and improvised holding facilities, which included spaces such as churches and convents. Conditions within these institutions were dire, with Preston's work, as well as studies by Fernando Hernández Holgado (2003) and Ricard Vinyes (2002), documenting the extreme overcrowding and prevalence of disease, malnutrition, and lack of basic hygiene, which contributed to high mortality rates among inmates. Preston notes that "torture and maltreatment provoked many suicides, some of them faked to conceal beatings that had gone too far" (2012, p.477). Women imprisoned under Francoism faced particularly harsh conditions, described by Ángeles Egido León as a "differentiated repression" given that

women's imprisonment was designed to serve the dual function of punishment and ideological correction: "women's prisons were conceived as spaces of moral regeneration and social re-education" (2017, p.24). Female prisoners were thus subjected not only to physical deprivation but also to moral re-education, often led by religious orders that controlled many women's prisons, particularly in the early years of the dictatorship.

### **3. HERITAGE AND GENDER**

While recent scholarship has therefore cast light on women's experiences of imprisonment during the dictatorship, little attention has been paid to the sites of incarceration in recent discussions about the material legacy of Francoism, indicative of a broader marginalisation of women's histories and experiences in the public memory landscape. Scholars have signalled the paucity of monuments commemorating women, noting that, if women are represented at all, they tend to be cast in allegorical or passive roles as, for example, grieving mothers or symbolic embodiments of the nation (Abousnouga & Machin, 2013; Warner, 2000). This is mirrored in the traditional lack of memorialisation of physical sites associated with women's history, indicative of the gendered dynamics of heritage practices noted by Laurajane Smith: "Heritage is gendered. It is gendered in the way that heritage is defined, understood and talked about and, in turn, in the way it reproduces and legitimizes gender identities and the social values that underpin them. A range of assumptions about the experiences of men and women are embedded in the definitions and discourses of heritage" (2008, p.161). In more recent years, scholars and activists have advocated for gendered perspectives to be considered in heritage practices, with Anna Reading, for example, calling for the boundaries of heritage to expand to include "difficult" and gendered histories, including those of sexual violence (2015). This has led to the development of feminist heritage initiatives, both physical and virtual, that seek to reinsert women into national narratives and foreground their experiences of repression and resistance.

These dynamics are evident in the memorialisation of sites associated with the gendered repression of the Franco dictatorship. Many of these spaces were erased from the physical landscape in the later years of the dictatorship, with some buildings demolished and the land sold for development and others reassigned for other purposes. This has been read as a deliberate strategy adopted by the regime, with Cinta Ramblado-Minero noting that the sites' "original history and purpose were covered up, hidden in overlapping layers of meaning that suppressed a violent past. With the end of the dictatorship, no trace was left of the systematic repression that the Francoist state had exerted upon political (and social) dissidents" (2016, p.161). This is where, she argues, the testimonial accounts referred to above play a key role in re-creating for readers in narrative form the spaces that have been destroyed. Likewise, contemporary memorialisation of such spaces contests their erasure, even where the original sites of repression have been destroyed.

### **4. VENTAS PRISON, MADRID**

A significant example is Madrid's Ventas prison, where thousands of female prisoners were held in horrific conditions during the dictatorship. The prison was razed to make way for residential buildings in the early 1970s, a move criticised by some as erasing a painful but important chapter of Spain's history. Built in 1931 under the leadership of Republican Director General of Prisons Victoria Kent, Ventas was designed to be a model prison for women that would facilitate rehabilitation for up to 500 prisoners. However, under the Franco regime, Ventas became what has been described as a severely overcrowded "warehouse of women" (Cuevas, 2004, p.17) that would house thousands of prisoners. The excessive number of inmates, together with a lack of food, water and medical care, led to many instances of disease and death. Abuse, humiliation, physical punishment and sexual torture against inmates were also common practice in the prison, documented in both historical analyses and testimonial accounts. The last prisoners were transferred from Ventas to other penitentiary centres in 1969, with the prison buildings then demolished. At that time, no

memorial or marker of any kind was erected to acknowledge the site's history as a centre of imprisonment and repression, with scholars noting "its complete disappearance in a real estate project in which the preservation of even a single element of the building was never considered" (Hernández Holgado et al, 2022, p.642).

It would not be until some decades later that acts of memorialisation would take place, largely due to sustained advocacy on the part of relatives of former prisoners, local residents, historians, and memory activists who sought to preserve the legacy of the prison and its inmates. It also sprang from the grassroots protest movement in Madrid in May 2011, known as the 15M movement, that was sparked by widespread dissatisfaction with Spain's political and economic systems. One of the groups associated with this movement organised memorial events at the former prison site on International Women's Day in March 2012, also installing a commemorative plaque.<sup>5</sup> Their advocacy contributed to an initiative on the part of local authorities to develop a website as a virtual memorial to the prison and its inmates, launched in 2017. The website was later deactivated when right-leaning parties controlled the relevant local authorities, with grassroots groups later relaunching it. A number of other digital initiatives have also sought to narrate and preserve the history of Ventas; with the physical legacy of the site having been destroyed, these digital archives play an important role as a repository for preserving documents, photographs, oral histories, and individual and collective memories of the prison.<sup>6</sup> Further recognition of the site's history came in 2019, when a park at the former prison site was renamed the Garden of the Women of Ventas and a plaque installed; the plaque was later vandalised and removed.

In the case of Ventas, the erasure of the repressive prison space from the physical landscape has been counteracted by grassroots advocacy that has ensured the preservation of memories, whether by material or digital means.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, recent archaeological work has revealed that vestiges of the basements of the former prison do remain underneath the residential buildings. The uses of these underground spaces during the decades of the prison's existence have recently been analysed by historians, who note that during the dictatorship, these were used as cells for political prisoners who had been condemned to death and for women imprisoned for prostitution (Hernández Holgado et al., 2022). The discovery of these remnants of Ventas have sparked further discussion about how these findings might be integrated into public memory and further contribute to the memorialisation of the site.

## **5. PROVINCIAL WOMEN'S PRISON AND SANTA CLARA CONVENT, VALENCIA**

The defacement of the plaque commemorating the women of Ventas mentioned above is not an isolated case, with many such commemorative efforts facing backlash. However, while statues, monuments and other commemorative material are often the target of those holding opposing views, material commemorating women associated with the Republic appear to be particularly targeted. This can be seen in examples in the city of Valencia which has put in place a "historical memory route," named "València en la memoria," that guides visitors to multiple buildings and public spaces in the city that were significant during the civil war and dictatorship, all of which are marked with informative boards in three languages (Valencian, Spanish and English) and feature historical photographs. Among these is the Santa Clara convent, which was used after the civil war as an overflow site for the Provincial Women's Prison. The site and buildings that housed the prison itself are now a school, an example of a site of repression that was repurposed, its history all but erased from the physical landscape, with the exception of a commemorative plaque on one of its exterior walls that reads: "Let us not forget the Republican women who were persecuted,

<sup>5</sup> This initiative was led by the group "Asamblea 15M de la plaza de Dalí."

<sup>6</sup> For extensive discussion of the website and other digital initiatives, see Hernández Holgado (2018, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> A similar example of grassroots memorialisation is seen in the case of Madrid's Provincial Prison, known as Carabanchel. The prison was demolished in 2008, despite protests from local groups, who advocated for its preservation as a site of memory. Local community activism later saw the creation of a memorial garden at the site. For discussion of this initiative, see Hepworth (2015).

the women who fought against the dictatorship, and all the women imprisoned under discriminatory laws.”<sup>8</sup>

The Santa Clara convent still stands on its original site, with its history marked by a commemorative board featuring historical information about its use as a prison for a period of almost three years from mid-1939. As in Ventas and other sites of imprisonment, conditions for prisoners in the convent were horrendous, confirmed by research undertaken by Ana Aguado and Vicenta Verdugo: “In the Santa Clara Convent Prison, overcrowding meant that cells were shared by eight or ten inmates, in deplorable and degrading conditions. The lack of food, water and minimal hygiene led to children becoming infected with scabies, and tuberculosis, meningitis and an epidemic of whooping cough” (2011, p.76). The appalling conditions in the prison-convent are alluded to on the commemorative board erected at the site, which also features a photo of some of the women held there after the war. The board was, however, targeted by vandals soon after being erected, with the photo particularly defaced to obscure the women’s faces, an act denounced as an attempt to once again erase the presence of women from historical memory. While the council repaired the board, it has been repeatedly vandalised in the same way.

Despite the vandalism carried out on the information board at the convent, the historical memory route established in Valencia constitutes a comprehensive attempt to memorialise sites of difficult heritage in the city, including sites of women’s imprisonment. However, this is far less ambitious than the project to memorialise and reframe the former prison in the city of Segovia, a unique and quite groundbreaking initiative in the Spanish context, which has seen this former site of imprisonment and repression transformed into an arts centre and democratic memorial.

## 6. SEGOVIA PRISON

The former prison in Segovia has a long and multifaceted history. In operation from 1924 to 2000, its shifting purpose and population over those years reflect the broader political and social changes in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Spain, as does its current function as a democratic memorial. Designed by architect Joaquín Odriozola, the prison was constructed in a style that reflected the predominant penal philosophies of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, based on British philosopher Jeremy Bentham’s 1785 concept of the panopticon. This model used a circular structure with a central observation tower, allowing supervision of all prisoners from a central point, a model originally aimed at emphasising surveillance and control over corporal punishment. At the time of its opening, the prison served as a women’s reformatory, later becoming a modern penal hospital for men during the progressive years of the Second Republic.

However, the prison’s function and philosophy changed significantly with the outbreak of the civil war, with the prison becoming overcrowded with male political prisoners. The conditions discussed above with regard to Madrid and Valencia were replicated here, and the extreme malnutrition, poor hygiene, and lack of medical care led to the spread of infectious diseases, especially tuberculosis. In an attempt to counter this, the regime established dedicated anti-tuberculosis penitentiary sanatoriums in a number of centres, with the prison in Segovia redeployed for this purpose between 1941 and 1943, before becoming a sanatorium for women prisoners with tuberculosis until 1946. For the following decade, from 1946 to 1956, the site became the Central Women’s Prison of Segovia, the period of its history of particular interest for this discussion.

The objective of the designation of the facility as a women’s prison was to relieve some of the pressure on Madrid’s overcrowded Ventas prison, with political prisoners in particular transferred to Segovia. The prison came to house many prominent political detainees, including Soledad Real, Juana Doña, and Tomasa Cuevas, women who, as mentioned earlier, produced important testimonial accounts that inscribe their stories of repression and resistance. As at the other sites discussed, life inside the prison was marked by overcrowding, poor sanitation, inadequate food, and limited medical care. In addition, Vega

<sup>8</sup> The school is the Colegio Público 9 d’Octubre located in the Paseo de la Petxina.

Sombría and García Funes have pointed to the bitter winter climate in Segovia as an exacerbating factor: “In addition to the hunger caused by meagre rations and extremely poor-quality food, those in Segovia endured a serious aggravating factor: the harsh winter cold, which lasted far longer than it does today” (2011, p.291). However, they also highlight the solidarity and camaraderie that developed among the prisoners, who continued to organise themselves along political lines (Vega Sombría and García Funes, 2011, p.311).

Following the closure of the Central Women’s Prison of Segovia in 1956, the building was repurposed as a women’s reformatory, imprisoning so-called “fallen women” who had been detained for offenses related to prostitution. In the later years of the dictatorship, it again held male political prisoners, eventually closing in 2000 when a new penitentiary centre was opened in Segovia.

The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century saw the development of an ambitious project, led by community and arts organisations in collaboration with local authorities, to repurpose the historic prison building as the Segovia Creative Arts Centre. The centre, which opened in 2010, seeks to promote multidisciplinary cultural innovation, showcasing performances, exhibitions and events across the visual arts, theatre, music, and literature. While significant renovation work was undertaken prior to the opening of the cultural centre, the basic architectural structure of the former prison has been retained. The centre also displays educative materials outlining the building’s history, with an explicit statement that the objective of the project was to transform what had been a space of repression and confinement into one of creativity and artistic freedom: “The restoration project preserves the structure and layout of the former prison, but gives the spaces a new meaning to convey the metaphor at the heart of this initiative: imagination, innovation, and creativity will make Segovia and its citizens freer” (Ayuntamiento de Segovia, n.d.).

## 7. DEMOCRATIC MEMORIAL, SEGOVIA

This preservation and repurposing of the prison space as a centre for creativity and community engagement is in itself a remarkable project of commemoration and reframing. However, even more striking is the permanent exhibition “Democratic Memorial of Segovia: The Francoist Prison (1936-1977)” that is housed in several restored prison cells at the site. The establishment of this memorial was the result of sustained advocacy by the Segovia branch of the Forum for Memory, one of the principal memory activist organisations in Spain, which organised a series of exhibitions, publications and events to publicise the prison’s history. They also erected a monument in a neighbouring park in memory of the women who had been imprisoned there, an initiative undertaken in collaboration with the Association of Former Political Prisoners. The proposal to establish a permanent memorial at the former prison site, initially proposed to the city council in 2009, was eventually approved in 2016, thanks to the support of the political party United Left. The memorial was opened in 2019 with four former prison cells restored, with a further five opened in 2024.

The memorial in the former prison building seeks to honour the victims of Francoist repression who were held there as a means of ensuring remembrance of their stories and of this period of Spanish history, while also serving as an educational resource about the site’s history. The exhibition is meticulously documented, outlining details of the different phases of the prison’s history, with two of the cells dedicated specifically to memorialising the stories and experiences of the women detained there as political prisoners. Displays in the cells feature numerous historical documents, such as individual prisoner records, sentences and appeals, as well as photographs and fragments of letters and testimonies. In addition, detailed information boards explain the different facets of life within the prison walls, including subjects such as medical care, nutrition, and religious and disciplinary practices. The names of each of the prisoners held there are also inscribed on the information boards as a means of inscribing their identities and ensuring their permanence in the historical record.

Both the Creative Arts Centre and the Democratic Memorial in the former Segovia prison are

examples of what James Young has designated “counter-monuments,” “painfully self-conscious memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very premises of their being” (1993, p.27). Such counter-monuments do not seek to offer closure nor relieve discomfort about a difficult past; rather, they aim to provoke reflection and highlight that memory is a dynamic and contested process, reflecting Young’s notion that memory should remain open to reinterpretation, especially in the context of traumatic histories like the Holocaust. In the case of the reframing of the prison in Segovia, the recontextualization of the site and its repurposing as a creative arts centre facilitates critical reflection and engagement with aspects of the city’s difficult past. The democratic memorial also points to the power that grassroots activism can have in framing the memorial landscape.

The memorial in Segovia is both informative and moving and has the potential to make a powerful impact in the process of remembrance of the repression perpetrated under the dictatorship, as well as serving as a model for other sites. However, while the memorial seeks to reach a wide range of audiences through guided tours and the hosting of public history initiatives, challenges of accessibility and visibility remain. Public opening hours are limited, with the site only open to the public for particular events or for guided tours; these are held infrequently, usually only once a month, as they rely on the participation of volunteers associated with the Forum for Memory. As indicated above, the establishment of the memorial was made possible by support from leftist political parties who governed the city council in Segovia at that time; the council is currently led by the right-leaning Popular Party, which is generally unsupportive of historical memory initiatives, making further funding for the memorial unlikely in the short term. Unfortunately, the impact of these constraints mean that public awareness of the memorial is limited, as is the ability for its pedagogical potential to be fully realised.

## CONCLUSION

The memorialisation of the former prison in Segovia serves as a powerful example of the influence that sustained grassroots advocacy can have in championing attempts to preserve and mark sites of repression in a context of shifting political and social dynamics and continued debates about dealing with the legacy of Francoism. While the memorialisation of the sites of women’s prisons in Madrid and Valencia has been less ambitious, the initiatives developed at each nevertheless play an important role in ensuring that the histories of these sites and the repressive practices undertaken within them are not erased from public history and memory.

This research has revealed the ways in which very diverse commemorative strategies have been deployed effectively by memory activists in Spain – whether in the form of more modest plaques and information boards or in larger scale initiatives such as digital archives and immersive memorial exhibitions – can be effective in inscribing into the historical memory the gender-based repression and violence suffered by Republican women under Francoism. More broadly, the initiatives discussed here play an important role in the continued efforts in contemporary Spain to deal with the “difficult” heritage of civil war and dictatorship, while also highlighting the ongoing complexities and challenges inherent in that process.

## REFERENCES

- Abad, I. (2009). Las dimensiones de la “represión sexuada” durante la dictadura franquista. *Revista de Historia Jerónimo Zurita*, 84, 65-86.
- Abousnnouga, G., & Machin, D. (2013). *The language of war monuments*. Bloomsbury. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472542120.ch-007>
- Aguado, A., & Verdugo, V. (2011). Las cárceles franquistas de mujeres en Valencia: Castigar, purificar y reeducar. *Studia Histórica. Historia Contemporánea*, 29, 55-85. <https://revistas.usal.es/uno/index.php/0213-2087/article/view/8604>

- Aguilar Fernández, P. (2001). *Justicia, política y memoria: Los legados del franquismo en la transición española*. Instituto Juan March.
- Ayuntamiento de Segovia. (n.d.). *La Cárcel - Segovia Centro de Creación*. Retrieved October 15, 2025, from <https://www.segovia.es/portada/la-carcel/>
- Berenguer, S. (1988). *Entre el sol y la tormenta: Revolución, guerra y exilio de una mujer libre*. L'Eixam.
- Campos, R. (2014). Psiquiatría, raza y represión en el primer franquismo: Antonio Vallejo Nágera. In A. Altarriba, S. Buj, R. Campos, E. Castillejo Cambra, F. Gracia Alonso, R. Gubern, & R. Pallol Trigueros (Eds.), *Los intelectuales y la dictadura franquista. Cultura y poder en España de 1939 a 1975* (pp. 19-45). Pablo Iglesias.
- Colomer, J.M. (1998). *La transición a la democracia: El modelo español*. Anagrama.
- Cuevas, T. (2004). *Testimonios de mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*. Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses.
- Doña, J. (1978). *Desde la noche y la niebla: Mujeres en las cárceles franquistas*. Ediciones de la Torre.
- Egido León, Á. (2017). Mujeres y rojas: la condición femenina como fundamento del sistema represor. In A. Egido León (Ed.), *Cárceles de mujeres. La prisión femenina en la posguerra* (pp. 11-29). Sanz y Torres.
- Halbmayer, B. (2010). Sexualized violence: On the cultural construction of gender and violence. In B. Halbmayer (Ed.), *Gender and violence in historical and contemporary perspectives* (pp. 25-42). StudienVerlag.
- Hepworth, A. (2015). Preservation or destruction of *lieux de mémoire*: Contested spaces in the realm of memory. *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research*, 21(2), 283-294. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13260219.2015.1092643>
- Hernández Holgado, F. (2003) *Mujeres encarceladas*. Marcial Pons.
- Hernández Holgado, F. (2018). Carceldeventas.madrid.es: Historia de una prisión de mujeres. *Nuestra Historia: Revista de Historia de la FIM*, 5, 177-183.
- Hernández Holgado, F. (2020). Memoria pública y digital sobre dos cárceles femeninas del franquismo. *Historia y Memoria*, 21, 173-197. <https://doi.org/10.19053/20275137.n21.2020.9868>
- Hernández Holgado, F., Martín Talaverano, R., Murillo Fragero, J.I., & Sánchez Laforet. J.M., (2022). Los sótanos de la prisión de Ventas: de prisión modelo para mujeres a víctima del Desarrollismo. *Vegueta: Anuario de la Facultad de Geografía e Historia* 22(2), 605-647.
- <https://doi.org/10.51349/veg.2022.2.12>
- Herrmann, G. (2013). 'They didn't rape me': Traces of gendered violence and sexual injury in the testimonies of Spanish Republican women survivors of the Franco dictatorship. In N. Adler and S. Leydesdorff (Eds.), *Tapestry of memory: Evidence and testimony in life-story narratives* (pp. 77-96). Transaction. <https://doi.org/10.51349/veg.2022.2.12>
- Joly, M. (2008). Las violencias sexuadas de la guerra civil española: Paradigma para una lectura cultural del conflicto. *Historia social*, 61, 87-94.
- Linhard, T.A. (2005). *Fearless women in the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War*. University of Missouri Press.
- Macdonald, S. (2006). Undesirable heritage: Fascist material culture and historical consciousness in Nuremberg. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 12(1), 9-28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527250500384464>
- Macdonald, S. (2009). *Difficult heritage: Negotiating the Nazi past in Nuremberg and beyond*. Routledge.

- Montero, R. (2004). *Historia de Celia: Recuerdos de una guerrillera antifranquista*. Octaedro.
- Morán, G. (1991). *El precio de la transición*. Planeta.
- Morcillo, A.G. (2000). *True Catholic womanhood: Gender ideology in Franco's Spain*. Northern Illinois University Press.
- Muñoz-Encinar, L. (2019). Unearthing gendered repression: An analysis of the violence suffered by women during the Civil War and Franco's dictatorship in southwestern Spain. *World Archaeology*, 51(5), 759-777. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00438243.2020.1740775>
- Nash, M. (1991). Two decades of women's history in Spain: A reappraisal. In K. Offen, R. Roach Pierson, & J. Rendall (Eds.), *Writing women's history: International perspectives* (pp. 381-415). Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-21512-6\\_21](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-21512-6_21)
- Preston, P. (2012). *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and extermination in twentieth-century Spain*. Harper.
- Ramblado-Minero, M.C. (2016). Imprisonment is a permanent scar: Women's penitentiaries in Francoist Spain. In M.J. Martínez-Alfaro, & S. Pellicer-Ortíz (Eds.), *Excavating memory: Sites of remembering and forgetting* (pp. 153-171). University Press of Florida. <https://doi.org/10.5744/florida/9780813061603.003.0008>
- Reading, A. (2015). Making Feminist Heritage Work: Gender and Heritage. In E. Waterton & S. Watson (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research* (pp. 399-414). Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137293565\\_25](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137293565_25)
- Real, S. (1983). *Las cárceles de Soledad Real*. Alfaguara.
- Smith, L. (2008). Heritage, gender and identity. In B. Graham & P. Howard (Eds.), *The Ashgate research companion to heritage and identity* (pp. 159-178). Ashgate. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315613031-9>
- Tunbridge, J.E., & Ashworth, G.J. (1996). *Dissonant heritage: The management of the past as a resource in conflict*. Wiley.
- Vallejo Nágera, A. (1937). *Eugenésia de la Hispanidad y regeneración de la raza*. Española.
- Vallejo Nágera, A. (1938). *Psiquismo del fanatismo marxista: Investigaciones psicológicas*. Española.
- Vallejo Nágera, A., & Martínez, E.M. (1939). Psiquismo del Fanatismo Marxista. *Investigaciones Psicológicas en Marxistas Femeninos Delincuentes. Revista Española de Medicina y Cirugía de Guerra*, 9, 398-413.
- Vega Sombría, S., & García Funes, J.C. (2011). Lucha tras las rejas franquistas: la prisión central de mujeres de Segovia. *Studia Historica. Historia Contemporánea*, 29, 281-314.
- Vinyes, R. (2002). *Irredentas: Las presas políticas y sus hijos en las cárceles de Franco*. Temas de Hoy.
- Warner, M. (2000). *Monuments and maidens: The allegory of the female form*. University of California Press.
- Young, J.E. (1993). *The texture of memory: Holocaust memorials and meaning*. Yale University Press.