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Review of Aurora G. Morcillo, (In)Visible Acts of Resistance in the Twilight of the Franco Regime: A Historical Narration

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Morcillo, Aurora G. *(In)Visible Acts of Resistance in the Twilight of the Franco Regime: A Historical Narration*. Historical Gender Studies, Volume 2. Bielefeld: transcript, 2022. 329 pp.

In 1989 Aurora Morcillo interviewed female members of the student movement in her hometown of Granada before leaving to start her graduate studies in the United States. These women provided young Aurora with a model for the academic life that she would soon inhabit while their stories prompted her to investigate Catholic women's organizations in the Francoist university and the bio-power of the regime—the subjects of her dissertation and first two monographs, *True Catholic Womanhood: Gender Ideology in Franco's Spain* (2000) and *The Seduction of Modern Spain: The Female Body and the Francoist Body Politic* (2010). Following these projects, Aurora returned to oral history. Armed with the critical insights of Henri Lefebvre, Gilles Deleuze, and María Zambrano among others, she widened the scope of her research to encompass the “women who have made it possible for me to live the life I have lived” (287). This included her initial set of informants, many of whom she reinterviewed, as well as female members of her family and women from their working-class environs. As a fully realized “Thinker/Historian as Poet” (39), Aurora decided to cast aside her “academically trained understanding of what was an acceptable way to report on the past” (287) to paint richly textured life stories that “capture the emotional landscape of late Francoism” (19). When Aurora's journey came to an untimely end with her tragic death in 2020, her husband, Charles Bleiker, reciprocated the intellectual and emotional commitment that Aurora had shown to her interlocutors by seeing this monograph through to its final publication. The result is a multifaceted two-part text that weaves together autobiography, theoretical reflection, ficto-critical narration, and poetry to examine the everyday acts of resilience that women endured during the Franco regime.

Part I examines the testimonies of middle-class activists from the Francoist university of the 1960s and 70s through the theoretical lens of visible space. Building on the work of Henri Lefebvre and Doreen Massey, Aurora argues that the Francoist development plans of the 1960s, “led to the realignment of gender relations in Spain” as urbanization, migration, and tourism re-signified physical and symbolic spaces (29). Chapter 1 explores the friendship between Concha (d. 1990) and Amalia at the University of Granada, tracing their divergent experiences living at home and in the dormitory and their convergent experiences

of political radicalization. Chapter 2 focuses on the love story between Socorro and Jesús to examine their intersecting experiences of radicalization, communist militancy, hiding, arrest, interrogation, and torture. Chapter 3 uses interviews of Joaquín (b. 1948) and Arturo (b. 1948) from the Oral Histories Collection of the Archivo Histórico de Comisiones Obreras de Andalucía to explore the fragmentation of the student opposition during the 1968-1969 academic year. Chapter 4 tells the story of Amparo (b. 1950), who directed “action from the rear” in 1967 and 1968 as a member of the radicalized Jesuit university organization FECUN, which consisted of six students who became three romantic couples (98). Chapter 5 focuses on Julia’s memories of her arrest during the 1970 State of Emergency as a seventeen-year-old Communist militant. Chapter 6 is dedicated to Marga (b. 1953), a professor of Early Modern Spanish History, who joined the Spanish Federation of University Marian Congregations FECUM before landing in the Communist party. Her story complicates triumphant narratives of a political transition that ushered in sexual freedom and gender equality through the discussion of faculty rank, the perceived intellectual value of gender as a “useful category of historical analysis,” and reproductive rights.

A theoretical Intermezzo ties Part I to Part II. In it, Aurora introduces the concept of invisible time, whereby “stories are told of constant adjustments to shifting circumstances,” capturing the process of self-reinvention that occurs through “invisible quotidian routines” (140). She argues that visible space (the primary theoretical focus of Part I) and invisible time (the primary theoretical focus of Part II) collide in oral history, calling for the elaboration of historical narratives based on the Deleuzian concept of “becoming.” Focusing on the “trinity” of Auroras —grandmother, mother, and author—the Intermezzo provides readers with a preview of the family’s “becoming,” or historical unfolding, at both the individual and generational levels. The missing final chapter of the book, which was to be based on Aurora’s interview with her parents, serves as a painful reminder of this unfolding cut short.

Part II examines the testimonies of working-class women with little to no formal schooling through the theoretical lens of invisible time. Chapter 7 focuses on the life story of Patrocinio (b. 1917), Aurora’s mother’s first cousin. When Patro was four-years old, she was freely given to the childless owners of a local butcher shop out of economic necessity. Later, when Aurora’s mother (b.1933) turned thirteen, she moved in with the recently widowed Patro and her four children. This mutually beneficial arrangement shielded Aurora’s mother from

serving as a domestic in a house of strangers and allowed Patro to sell offal in the market as a financially independent woman. Chapter 8 focuses on Aurora's aunt Pura (b. 1926). Dancing around Pura's "tightly guarded memory vault," Aurora reflects on the negotiation of acceptable topics during the initial interview and ultimately enlists her cousins—Pura's daughters Marian and Pepi—as additional interlocutors (179). The result is a fascinating meditation on memory construction and self-fashioning against the backdrop of the Spanish Civil War, the Algerian War of Independence, and the evacuation and resettlement of *pieds-noirs* in France. Chapter 9 tells the story of Valentina (b. 1943), who saved enough money to help her family migrate from Córdoba to Barcelona, where she fell in love with the trade union organizer Antonio. In many ways, Valentina's narrative revolves around her beloved Toni: from her sexual awakening to his political repression, torture, and untimely death. Chapter 10, continues the discussion of migration by tracing the parallel life stories of Esperanza (b. 1923), who worked as a maid in Paris during the 1950s, and Adoración (b. 1940), who worked as a guest factory worker in Germany during the 1960s. Chapter 11 is dedicated to Aurora's father's younger sister Luz (b. 1945), who persevered in the face of sorrow and disappointment, embodying the crucial role "women the Regime mostly forgot" played in providing for their children and future generations (285).

Moving from the densely theoretical to the lyrically narrative, this nuanced work has much to offer a variety of audiences, including, but not limited to, historians of Modern Europe, oral historians, and scholars of Spanish Cultural Studies. Because it is available for purchase and as an [open-access PDF](#), instructors can easily assign one of the monograph's standalone chapters to fit distinct curricular needs.

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