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**Reenactments of Remedios Montero: Oral History of
a Spanish Guerrillera in Testimony, Fiction, and Film**

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... part of the violence against the Jews, notable by its absence in survivor literature, was the sexual abuse of women.
- James E. Young

Let me open by setting the scene of a women's prison in Valencia, Spain, 1953. Female political prisoners, communist resisters of the brutal Francoist dictatorship, gather in the prison chapel for Christmas day mass. Remedios Montero, incarcerated for her participation in the anti-Francoist guerrilla, recalls the event:

En noche buena hacían una misa especial y había un pasillo largo, largo, muy largo y ancho, allí estaba el altar donde hacían la misa y en un sitio se ponía toda la jerarquía, el director, el subdirector, los funcionarios, la gente que traían para que vieran la misa aquella y la presenciaran y por medio nos pasaban a las reclusas y el cura se ponía con el niño Jesús así en la mano y cada reclusa lo iba besando y pasaba a otro patrio. Veníamos las tres y una me decía ¿qué vas a hacer? “Hacer lo que queráis, no hagáis lo que yo haga si no queréis.” Cuando llego a pasar por el niño, yo pasaba formada con todo el respeto que nos exigían, pero no le besé, porque no tenía obligación y no quería besarle. Y una funcionaria muy, muy mala, se llamaba Purificación, me cogió así del cuello y me dijo “bésalo” y en ese momento me puse tan nerviosa [in other versions, Remedios emphasizes her “rabia,” not nervousness], que en vez de besarle, le mordí, le di un mordisco que casi le dejo el dedito

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en la boca. Se quedaron espantados, como estaba la jerarquía allí y todo el mundo me vio, pues estaban asustadísimos. Me cogieron y me metieron en una celda. Me tuvieron un mes en la celda a pan y agua, y sin salir ni ver a nadie y al mes, cuando se cansaron, me soltaron. Las compañeras se reían, me decían “bruta, ahora si que van a decir que los comunistas se comen a los niños crudos.” (*Gavilla Verde*)¹

(On Christmas Eve they had a special mass and there was a long, long, very long and wide passageway, there was the altar where they did the mass and on one part the whole hierarchy was there: the director, the associate director, the officials and guards and the people they brought in so they could see that mass and witness it. And down the middle of the hall we women prisoners would walk. And the priest with the baby Jesus like this in his hand and each prisoner would walk by and kiss the baby Jesus and then move aside to another patio. Three of us approached and one said to me, “What are you going to do?” “You all do what you want, don’t do what I am going to do if you don’t want to.” So when it is my turn to walk by the baby Jesus, I walked by properly and with all the respect they demanded of us, but I did not kiss him, because I had no obligation to kiss him and I didn’t want to. And then a very, very evil prison official named Purificación pushed me like this by the back of the neck and said: “kiss him!” And in that moment, I got so nervous [in other versions, Remedios emphasizes her “anger,” not nervousness] that instead of kissing him, I bit him, I gave him a bite and his little toe almost ended up in my mouth. They were all frightened, since the whole top brass of the prison was there and they all saw me, well they were really scared. They put me in solitary with nothing but water and bread for a month, without seeing anyone and then when they got tired of it, they let me go. My comrades said, laughing, “you brute, now they will be right when they say that communists eat little children raw.”)²

This marvelous and sinister anecdote functions, I argue, as a *mise-en-abyme* for the total memorial enterprise surrounding this Spanish woman, the remarkable and unruly Remedios Montero whose testimonial performances have become the subject of popular film, memoir, and fiction. Her life story chronicles the making of her communist self, and from within a Marxist, working-class worldview, describes the tension between a unique, unorthodox female subject and the pervasive female compliance with conservative, Catholic scripts of nationalistic womanhood. Even under democracy and until her death in 2010, Montero acted as a resistant subject unfettered by the various narrative forms that have sought to represent her over the course of her life.

Before the fall of the Spanish Republic to the forces of Francisco Franco in 1939, small groups of the defeated who found themselves in enemy Nationalist territory fled their cities and towns to escape the brutal repression and purges perpetrated by the occupying army. Historian Paul Preston explains that two groups eventually formed the armed anti-Francoist resistance within Spain, “the first 1939–44, the second 1944–51,” whose “single, primordial task [was] the struggle against the dictatorship” (230). The guerrilla constituted “the so-called *huídos* or stragglers, Republicans separated from their units during the Civil War who opted to take to the hills rather than surrender, and the Spanish maquis, the exiles who played a crucial role in the French resistance, and with the gradual collapse of the Germans, were able to turn their gaze to Spain” (Preston 230). A diverse, geographically dispersed, and numerically weak resistance force, the guerrilla consisted of units who maintained defensive positions in mountainous regions throughout Spain. One of the most successful and influential of these was the *Agrupación Guerrillera de Levante y Aragón* (The Guerrilla of Levante and Aragón)—or AGLA—that comprised Valencia, Cuenca and Teruel in the central northeastern region. Enter into this history Remedios Montero who took to the *monte* with her father and brother in 1949 when they faced certain detention, torture, and possible execution as punishment for their clandestine support of the guerrilla fighters operating in the countryside.

This essay, which draws on one Spanish woman’s experience in the anti-fascist project, represents an attempt to move beyond descriptive historical discussions about the role of women in organized clandestine movements fighting the regime. In recent years, Spanish historians (Mercedes Yusta; Fernanda Romeu Alfaro; Francisco Moreno Gómez and José Antonio Vidal Castaño) have likewise reached into discursive and rhetorical examinations of the oral testimonies of male and female participants, exploring the multiplicity of layers that inform oral accounts, including intersections of subjectivity, gender relations, trauma, and memory. Despite good historical treatments of the maquis, there remains a troubling contrast between, on the one hand, a certain amnesia in the public sphere regarding the very existence of a Spanish anti-fascist resistance in Spain that had much in common with its European counterparts (see Moreno Gómez), and popular representations of the maquis in fiction, film, television, and print journalism. I am interested in the caesura between the oral testimonies of women survivors of the guerrilla and how they are refashioned by sympathetic filmmakers and writers enjoined to disseminate an insufficiently explored significant piece of the Dictatorship’s repressive machinery.

Given the currency in contemporary Spanish memory studies of disclosing previously silenced or submerged microhistories, it is worth investigating how the single most visible woman resistance figure

simultaneously *invites* and *contravenes* the insertion of her particular and dramatic history of anti-fascism in both official and popular archives of the Francoist era. Theorists of *testimonio* and oral history have long argued that silences and secrets in reconstructed memory require as much attention as manifest content. This now canonical argument is deployed in two distinct arenas of oral memory studies: the pioneering work of Luisa Passerini on embodied silences and silences “connected with remembering,” and Doris Sommer’s groundbreaking analysis of the purposeful secrets withheld in the *testimonio* of Guatemalan human rights activist Rigoberta Menchú. Had the oral histories of Montero and other survivors of the resistance remained as transcripts or citations in history books, Passerini and Sommer might offer enough substance on how ambivalence about the transmission of a difficult personal past becomes folded into a purposeful account that insists on its silences and its secrets. But cinema has had a central and influential role to play in the contemporary circulation of the history of the guerrilla. The most well known example of the now myriad films dealing the Spanish guerrilla is the 2006 internationally successful *Pan’s Labyrinth*.

The oral history of Remedios Montero, who escaped with her father and brothers to the mountains, illustrates certain problematic consequences brought on by the instrumentalization of the oral histories of the guerrilleros by (what I would call) their compassionate “cultural interpreters.” In his text on the memories of surviving members of the guerrilla unit known as AGLA, José Antonio Vidal Castaño calls Remedios Montero an emblematic figure of the anti-fascist resistance (95). If Montero can be called “emblematic,” it is due to the multiple retellings of her life story to researchers, historians, novelists, journalists and filmmakers, as well as her public lectures and appearances at schools. An enigma inheres in Montero’s attitude toward her public persona, and it remains troublingly unclear if she concedes uncritically to the desire for her story or if she, in fact, endeavors to manage the circulation and proliferation of her image. Does she naively trust history, cinema, and television documentaries to get her story right? One would be hard pressed to miss the irony in the media’s pursuit of Montero, a romantic figure who literally disavows the romance of her history by insisting both on the absence of it with her male comrades and symbolically in her affective distance with interlocutors. Such distance means that Montero inevitably, perhaps intentionally, disappoints. By repeatedly availing herself to an audience that promises to faithfully, and with ideological and historical precision, disseminate or absorb her story, we imagine that Montero would perform as a willing subject of her own testimony. And yet she enacts, in her reiterations, a powerful will to resist her interlocutors’s strivings to proximity. On closer inspection, each of the many versions of her life story turn on a silent affective distance from her interviewer and the narrative produced through the act of collecting the oral history. When I myself interviewed Montero in 2002, I felt I had not

successfully drawn her out, engaged her, and that perhaps the knee pain she suffered that day interfered with her enthusiasm for our shared endeavor. But over the years, as I have analyzed other versions of Montero's testimonies, what comes to light is that her guarded bodily and vocal expression safeguards her sense of agency through the volitional deployment of secrets, silences, ambivalence, hesitation, and withholding.

In order to delve into the scripted and the imagistic reconstructions of Montero's testimony, I began to think about the cinematic retellings by way of the concept of "reenactment," or historical restaging, in documentary film as it has very recently been retheorized by Bill Nichols in a language surprisingly resonant of the way we talk about oral history. Traditionally understood, "reenactments" are the "more or less authentic re-creation of prior events" (Nichols 72). Nichols's rethinking of reenactment through the figure of the specter and the fantasmatic allows us to correlate reenacted events in cinema to the production of desire in *testimonio* (Sommer) and oral history (Passerini). All three performances—the cinematic, the testimonial, and the oral historical—depend on meaning-bearing silences or refusals that render a lack which, in its turn, produces "our craving to know" (Sommer 34). Put another way, reenactments in film and the retellings of oral history "introduce a fantasmatic element that an initial representation of the same event lacks" (Nichols 72). Unable to bridge the gap between original events and their narrative restagings, the historian, interviewer, or spectator might feel deceived upon realizing that the reenactment is an artistic interpretation that has lost its indexical bond to that for which it stands and instead functions as evidence for the "voice of the filmmaker" or writer, or journalist (Nichols 88). By way of these three quite different critical approaches to the representation of difficult memory, we can further explore Montero's oral history as a fraught project that reveals—most clearly when reconstituted in film and fiction—her discomfort with the prospect of entering into history. In drawing out how these concepts converge, I think through how Remedios Montero's oral testimony pushes back against the friendly appropriation of her story in three specific cases: the best-selling novel *La voz dormida* by Dulce Chacón (2002); Remedios Montero's own memoir, *Historia de Celia: Recuerdos de una guerrillera antifascista* (2004); and Vergara's historical docudrama, *Memorias de una guerrillera* (2007).³ Constraints of space permit me to address only one of these "reenactments" of Montero's testimony, the one that most patently manifests the tension between telling, showing, and silence, and therefore exposes Montero's ambivalence toward the dramatization of her narrative: the Vergara film. As should now be clear, one goal of this essay is to attend to the performative attributes of Montero's role in *Memorias de una guerrillera*. There is something subtle in the way Montero holds her body and her face in the film that seems deliberately *apotropaic*: there is a language to her wordlessness and in her body that "deflect[s] an audience's rapport even as [it] summons us" (Yeager 405).

Like many subaltern testimonial speakers, Montero meets us “performing a defensive move in the midst of her seduction” (Sommer 36).

The guerrilla has never, as historian Mercedes Yusta succinctly puts it, been “asunto de mujeres” (women’s business). Although the entire enterprise of the armed resistance could never have functioned without the clandestine support structure operated by thousands of women who supplied food, shelter, medical attention, clothing, and tents, not to mention crucial strategic information about the enemy, very few women actually took to the mountains to participate in the active resistance, or, in the years immediately after World War II, to attempt to escape certain incarceration, torture, or execution, by holding out in the countryside until they could cross over the Pyrenees. The precise number of women who participated in the resistance has not as yet been determined, but estimates have been compiled; to give just one example of the rarity of the phenomenon, of the 281 members of the AGLA, only five were women, and in the center-south zone, of the 1466 maquis, we find the presence of only twenty-six women. The interest in the stories and experiences of these women stand in reverse relation to their numerical representation. More scarce still were women who sought to join the guerrilla as a manner of exercising their profoundly anti-fascist ideological beliefs or political liaisons. Mercedes Yusta, the historian who has written most extensively on the female guerrilla members, emphasizes the natural transfer of women’s domestic functions—providing food, clothing, cleaning—to the *monte* when their immediate male family members fled.

Remedios Montero was born in 1926 in the countryside of the Castillian province of Cuenca, where her father worked as a forestry guard. Poverty, deprivation, lack of access to formal education, and hunger characterized her early years; she and her siblings grew up admiring the progressive ideals of their Republican father. After the Civil War, Montero’s father and brothers became involved in supporting the resistance fighters in the hills near their home. In 1949, when detention by the often-sadistic Civil Guard appeared imminent, Montero, along with her sixteen-year-old brother and her father, joined the 5th division of the *Agrupación*. The high drama of this episode is only intensified by the fact that Montero’s best friend, Esperanza Martínez (and her father and her two sisters), took flight on the very same night for the same motives. Montero and Martínez remained with the guerrilleros for two years, crossing clandestinely into France in 1951 where they continued to work for the Spanish Communist Party. In their respective oral testimonies, both women describe daily life with the guerrilla as largely dull and physically uncomfortable. By 1948 the guerrilla maintained a defensive position, struggling simply to hold out until they could disband and pass securely into France. This means that offensive attacks on Civil Guard stations, retaliatory executions of Francoist functionaries, and local acts of sabotage had largely become activities of the past. With respect to how

gender relations were lived out under such harsh conditions, Montero and Martínez paint a picture of “absolute equality” with their male comrades: they were not expected, they insist, to do dishes, laundry, or cook. The women attended, along with men, a makeshift school where they were taught to read and write. The women, who were not asked to do guard duty or descend into the outlying villages to secure supplies, carried small pistols for defensive reasons, while the men carried rifles. After studying Marxist literature, the women shared their ideas in political and strategic discussions within the group. In print and on film, Montero and Martínez vociferously disabuse the Francoist “myths” that the few women who joined the maquis did so in the capacity of lovers or prostitutes. Romance and sex were, they aver, strictly forbidden. Despite the atmosphere of camaraderie and high morale the women report, their participation with the maquis was fraught with trauma and intense pain: each lost their fathers in shoot outs with the Civil Guard, and Montero’s younger brother died, hatched by *contra-partida*—spies within the Civil Guard who passed as guerrilla fighters.⁴

In 1951, Montero and Martínez, guided out of Spain and across the Pyrenees on foot, placed themselves at the disposition of the leadership of the Spanish Communist Party in exile. Their assignment, to cross back into Spain and to themselves guide comrades into safety in France, went terribly awry when a traitorous comrade revealed details of their mission to the *Guardia Civil*. Both women were detained by the Francoist authorities and suffered weeks of torture in detention centers before being sentenced to long prison terms. Montero spent eight and a half years in Franco’s prisons, while her beloved comrade Martínez was released after serving fifteen years. Eventually Montero chose self-exile in Communist Prague where she married one of the leaders of the *Agrupación*—Florián, “el Grande”—a charismatic militant who Montero believed had been murdered by the Civil Guard in the early 1950s. Upon the death of the dictator Franco, the couple returned to Spain where they remained active in the Communist Party. Remedios lives still in Valencia, courted by historians, journalists, directors, and writers who (since the 1980s) have sought out video and sound recordings of her engrossing oral history. Her narrative reached even wider audiences when it featured prominently in a best-selling novel and was later incorporated, as video oral testimony, in the acclaimed documentary film by Javier Corcuera, *La guerrilla de la memoria* (2002). By the close of the 1990s, Montero and Martínez became the “go-to” women for a series of popular artifacts produced about the resistance. The AGLA, for its strength, size and communist discipline, has received more historical and media attention than many other of the resistance units spread over the peninsula, historians, writers, and filmmakers found in the *Agrupación* rich narratives of danger, heroism, betrayals, brutal torture and murder, political intrigue, and, most distinctive and radically, the atypical story of heterodox women who joined up with their families in the *monte*. Further evidence of the

appeal and mediatic potential of this history can be found in an unreleased feature-length film about Montero that draws inspiration from her written and oral testimonies.

In 2006–2007, Pau Vergara, a Valencian filmmaker, wrote and directed a historical “biopic” about Montero, *Memorias de una guerrillera*. The film opened in 2007, screened once in Valencia, then never found a home with a distributor. The Film Archive in Valencia holds one copy of the film, but otherwise it remains unavailable to the general public. It is significant that the failure to distribute the film, thus rendering its story silent, mirrors the decades-long history of Spanish anti-fascist narratives buried in inaccessible archives. Through considerable detective work, I secured a copy of the film, the text that strikes me as particularly effective in exploring what I will show to be Montero’s self-decided verbal and corporeal straining against the desires of her well-intentioned audience and interpreters.

In Vergara’s film predictability reigns. It borrows from the least inspired tradition of tired television docudrama or the made-for-television ‘true story,’ but it also demonstrates pretensions to historical fiction with its employment of shifts to black and white and talking head interviews. This is evident not only in the poor production values, but also in the use of the oft-employed pattern of intercutting sequences of testimony with dramatized reenactments. In *Memorias de una guerrillera*, the director alternates interview footage of Montero with recreations of scenes from her life between 1949 and the 1960s. Vergara employs the “realist dramatization” variety of reenactment: “The suspenseful, dramatic reenactment . . . is the most contentious because it is the least distinguishable from both that which it reenacts and the conventional representation of past events in fiction” (Nichols 88).

At this point, let us return to the scene of the Christmas day mass with which I opened. Linked temporally and narratively to an anecdote in which Montero explains to a hostile priest that she refuses to pray and take communion because she does not consider herself a Catholic, Montero’s aggression toward the baby Jesus during the kissing devotion stands out as one of the most cinematic and perversely humorous of the core chapters she has narrated on dozens of occasions. The story is told by Esperanza Martínez in her own 2010 memoirs; Montero related it to Tomasa Cuevas in the 1980s, to Vidal Castaño in 2002, to members of the memorial organization *La Gavilla Verde* in 2002. And yet it disappears from the two most recent—and last—works based on her life: her own book of memoirs (2004) and Vegara’s film (2007).

Significantly, the defacement of the infant Jesus figures prominently in the most widely read version of Montero’s life—Dulce Chacón’s consciously *oral* novel, *La voz dormida*—wherein the novelistic structure and the shifting narrative voices echo testimonies collected by the author from former women political prisoners. If the baby Jesus anecdote was a

story Montero loved to tell and others loved to hear, why is the event now erased from public view?

Because reenactments forfeit their representative bond to original events in its execution, the recreation has the potential to retrieve something—an object or a state of mind—resonant of or corollary to the original historical representation. Although Vergara does not reproduce the story of the prison mass, I posit that in *Memorias de una guerrillera*, the complex valences of the disfigurement of the baby Jesus seep through in sequences suggestive of the same sexually and institutionally inflected dialectic between repression and rebellion that the original incident puts on display.

In order to unpack this proposition, we need to return to the original scene and observe the complex and layered representational network operative within it. Although the ubiquitous figurine or doll of the baby Jesus in mid-twentieth century Spain renders him a light skinned, blondish infant in *pañales* and perhaps a simple gown, the iconic image of the baby Jesus in his full regalia is that of the internationally venerated Infant of Prague, originally a Spanish Carmelite object of devotion brought to Bohemia in 1628.⁵ The Infant of Prague, increasingly venerated in Spain around the 1930s, is a significant representation of the baby king, and symbolizes authority and royalty. He could arguably have been experienced by those beholding him as standing for not merely the power of the Church but its penetration within the Franco regime. Because the infant is connected to Christmas there would have been, as Montero and other women prisoners describe, kissing devotion that day. The doll would have had little feet under his gown, and we can imagine a devotion where people would have come up to it, an attendant would have pulled up the gown, and the women inmates would have kissed the feet.

Montero's description of her refusal to place her mouth on the feet of the figure of the infant Jesus is cast in strictly anti-clerical tones.⁶ Her hatred of the church, mere disinterest in her youth, came on full force, she explains, when the Francoist police who tortured her would take breaks between beatings—delivered at “sexual range”—so they could attend mass.⁷ The hypocrisy enraged her:

Es algo que al que no haya pasado por allí, no sabría de lo que son capaces. Porque eran de estos del mundo que te malpalean, te dan patadas, te . . . , bueno, las cosas. Metían astillas entre las uñas, me acuerdo que no arrodillaban encima de garbanzos, medio asesinada, bueno, bárbaro, eran unas torturas que dices, ¿cómo puede ser que haya personas que pueden hacer esto a otros semejantes? Pues, lo hacían. Y no nos dejaban descansar, nada más que el domingo, después de que te daban una paliza. Y te dejaban tirado en el suelo, te decían, ‘mira, ahora puedes descansar porque vamos a misa.’ Y me decía, pero bueno, ¿y esta gente en qué cree? ¿En Dios? Porque vamos, tener el cinismo de

dejarme medio muerta allí y decir que se iban a misa. Eso me daba tanta rabia, tanta rabia que me hice, que yo creo que la rabia que tenía es lo que me hacía resistir tantas cosas.” (Gallagher 99)

(Well it is something that if you have not been through there yourself, you would not know what they were capable of . . . they beat you, they kicked you, they . . . well, they did, things. They put slivers of wood under your fingernails, I remember they made me kneel on top of dried garbanzos mixed with coarse salt, half dead, well, barbarous, they were tortures that you asked yourself, how can it be that there are people who do this to others? Well, they did it. And they would not let us rest, only Sunday, after they had given you a good beating. And they left you sprawled out on the floor and would say, ‘look, now you can rest, because we are going to mass.’ And I said to myself, my, my, what do these people believe in? In God? Because, come on, to have the cynicism to leave you there half dead and say that they were going to mass. That enraged me so much that I turned . . . that I think that the rage I felt helped me resist many things.)

If the torture she endured before prison reinforced her anti-clericalism and thus explains her repulsion for the mass and its symbols, then the sexual overtones of the pantomime Montero refused to act out remain nevertheless striking. This leads us to ask if we are in the presence of a reenactment of sexual violence sublimated to the religious ritual? In its details, the image as related by Montero reads as exceedingly sexual—the pushing the head down to kiss the toe evokes both oral sex and the penitent Magdalene kissing the feet of Christ.⁸

Sex and sexual violence stand as the resounding silences of the complete corpus of Communist women’s testimonies about the Spanish Civil War, the period of state terror in the immediate postwar, the experience of exile, the guerrilla and the Francoist penitentiary system. If the testimonial record obscures, silences or cloaks in shame acts of sex—consensual, coerced or violent—historians have attempted to uncover these episodes only very recently. In their respective studies, historians Maud Joly and Irene Abad describe the power of one type of “*violencia sexuada*” (sexed violence), the public shearing of the hair of Republican women. Here is one act of sexual degradation that its victims could not readily silence for its patently exteriorized and intentionally public nature. Documented in photographs, reprinted in the press (and later in history books) the shaving of the head is a form of sexual violence that garnered its power from its display in the public sphere, quite usually and literally in the town plaza. Missing in the research conducted by Abad and Joly is a creative attempt to *read through* the “*cabezas rapadas*” (shaved heads) or, in Joly’s language, “*los cuerpos afeados*” (bodies made ugly) in order to scratch away at the tough protective

crust overlaying memories of associated acts of sexual violence and spectacles of humiliation. The disappearance of histories of rapes, sexual abuse, and sexual harassment lived by Spanish Republican women ought to be of paramount concern to memorial and human rights organizations and to those of us—historians, literary and film scholars, anthropologists, etc.—who study the Spanish Civil War and *el Franquismo*.

The Communist injunction to keep the affective and the sexual private proves powerful in the oral histories of Montero and Martínez who insist: in the maquis, love affairs were strictly prohibited. In prison, no rape, no forced fellatio. And yet one does not have to read or listen all that deeply to find evidence of sexualized violence and abuse perpetrated against their bodies and minds. In one description of her torture, Montero introduces an ellipsis, a breach, a secret withheld: “Te dan patadas, te . . . , bueno, las cosas” (They kicked you, they did to you . . . well, things). In the oral histories published by Tomasa Cuevas in the single most substantial and longest collection of women’s testimonies about the Francoist penal system, we come across accounts of electrical currents placed on women’s nipples in the interrogation chambers, reports of the “rape of the other,” and beatings on the stomach and womb with the intention to render Republican women infertile. The studies by Joly and Abad also present evidence of abuses similar in their details. One should not come away, however, with the impression that reports of gendered violence and sexual tortures abound. To the contrary, the landscape of Republican women’s postwar experiences looks remarkably devoid of reports of gendered violence.⁹ This silence stands in the service of both the puritanical nature of Communist memory and the testimonial subject’s determination to retain a dignified sense of agency even in the face of surveillance, deprivation, shame, humiliation, and sadistic mistreatment.

It would not seem to strain credibility to imagine that women prisoners fellated their torturers or the priests assigned to their jails. Moreover, during torture sessions, Montero and Martínez were pressed not only to reveal the names of their comrades, but also to “confess” that they had joined the resistance as the lovers or whores of their men. According to the discursive logic of their torturers, sexual abuse could be justified since the women were “whores” to begin with. Maintaining silence under torture was a virtue of life-saving potential. The extension of that silence, that refusal to be degraded to the position of sexual playmates of the maquis, into the period of democracy poses no mystery. As Mercedes Yusta and Vidal Castaño explain, such silence is a symptom of the absolute denial [of love and sex]. It is more than a faithful reflection of reality and owes itself to a strategy of survival, functioning as a mechanism to deny the most cruel and frequent accusation that these women had to hear at the moment of their arrest and in the long hours of interrogation and beatings (Yusta 86). Thus, one plausible reading of Montero’s “castration” of the baby Jesus is that the anecdote

provides her a way of communicating a story of sexual coercion without having to actually talk about it. The interpretative possibilities of this little story multiply if we approach women's accounts of Francoist prisons and detention centers through the optic of James E. Young's realization that almost without exception in Holocaust testimony, gender and sexuality are split off from the accepted narrative blueprints survivors tell. Part of the "dehumanization . . . included their sexual degradation . . . that part of the violence against the Jews, *notable by its absence* in survivor literature, was the sexual abuse of women" (1782; emphasis added). In prison, the grotesque humiliations and violations of Montero's beliefs were as much a part of the criminality of her treatment as the physical beatings committed against her under bodily torture. Whether or not Montero experienced the violence she wielded against the kissing devotion as vengeance for sexual victimization, the story at the very least illustrates Montero's fierce and audacious anti-clericalism. In breaking the baby Jesus she rejects the gestures—the bowing of the body, the lips on the feet of the Christ—devised to cast her as a sinner.

A refusal to cooperate with the Catholic mass reemerges, *paralleled* in her reluctance to participate as an informant in later projects of historical memory based on her life—including her own memoir—despite her insistently expressed desire to have her experiences serve a didactic function for future generations. Two sequences of reenactment or simulation in the film *Memorias de una guerrillera* supplement the absence of the above-described spectacle. The first entails Montero, playing herself in the present, walking into the restaged scene of her father's murder by the Civil Guard. Montero steps slowly around the recently shot bodies of her father and a number of comrades, mowed down in an ambush. Utterly alone among the carnage, she gazes detachedly down upon the still bleeding body of her father, kisses her own hand, and bends over to place her kiss on her father. In a later sequence, Vergara creates a reenactment of Montero's torture in an interrogation room. The young Montero, framed in a high angle medium shot, lies beaten, bloodied and unconscious on the concrete floor. Again the present day Montero appears in the *mise-en-scène*, a medium close up focuses on her feet stepping in to place behind the unresponsive body on the hard floor. Cut to a low angle camera that peers up at today's Montero who bends over to stroke the forehead of the actress playing her former self. And again, a kiss placed tenderly on the cheek. Yet, as in the previous reenactment, Montero does obeisance badly, perfunctorily. We receive no sign of emotion. If Vergara's actors overplay their roles throughout the film, Montero, playing herself, stalwartly rejects the kind of therapeutic dramaturgy that Vergara imputes to her in the hope that "seeing" her father's corpse, and witnessing her own torture will illicit in her (and in us) the cathartic release that has eluded her compassionate cultural interpreters up until this moment. These crucial scenes oblige the audience to bear witness

to a clumsily manufactured effort at something like “making peace with one’s past,” or “putting to rest inner demons,” or more likely still, a coming to terms with the traumas of loss and torture.

In a moving essay about Holocaust testimony, Patricia Yeager describes how the speaking survivor’s body wards off our efforts for intimacy. Like Yeager, I read Montero’s desubjectivized participation in the reenactments looking for “the effect of a gesture or glance, an undecidable moment when the act of witnessing confounds identification. As secondary witnesses, we may feel a redoubled empathy in such a moment, and yet it is exactly in this moment when the act of witnessing confounds identification. As secondary witnesses, we may feel a redoubled empathy in such a moment, and yet it is exactly in this moment that a witness’s body language marks our nonentry into the place of intimacy” (417). In restaging her rebellion, Montero’s corporeal and psychic recoiling from the *mise-en-scène* of Vergara’s design ruptures the indexical relation between the historical event and the memory he attempts to reproduce in the present. The rigidity of her bodily stance cannot be attributed only to her advanced age. Rather, the reluctance we observe in her movements weigh with memories, as Passerini explains, transmitted without words, “such as those incorporated in gestures, images and objects” (27). She will hold on to her secrets and her silences even today, for they continue to endow her precarious self, so brutalized psychically and physically, with agency.

While compelling for its efforts to employ reenactments and testimonial footage in order to bolster the truth effects of its dramatized biography, as an artifact that unabashedly attempts to contribute to the archives of memory about the Franco regime, *Memorias de una guerrillera* is highly problematic. This is so for a variety of reasons, among them the showy effect of shifts into black and white in order to create a simulacrum of historical footage, luridly stylized dramatizations of executions and torture, and the surprisingly poor acting by seeming nonprofessional actors whose theatricality, explains Jonathan Kahana in a theoretical piece about reenactment, “calls into question the authenticity of their gestures” (47). When Vergara places the real Remedios Montero into scenes restaging the murder of her father and her own torture, the director strives for a “Shoah effect”: he employs “an unsettling combination of Freudian technique and method acting to unearth traumatic histories through harrowing on-location interviews” (Kahana 49). Still, despite the film’s countless flaws, Vergara cannot be accused of naive filmmaking. He manipulates familiar canonical techniques of documentary, including the talking head interview and the return to the scene of the crime. Just as the scenes of forced kissing, cast in the mold of Nichols’s “realist dramatizations,” Vergara too understands that reenactments “fulfill an affective function . . . contribut[ing] to a vivification of that for which they stand . . . an inflection that resurrects the past to reanimate it with the *force of a desire*” (88; emphasis added). The force of

desire remains ours, the spectators, and Montero walks off the scene unmoved by the performance she has ultimately refused to deliver. And through her stiff, refractory gestures and the lack of emotional reactivity in both the reenacted scenes and the interview sequences, Montero unveils reenactment as a “*discipline*, with both punitive and critical valences” (Kahana 57). Her act, not unlike reenactments of tortures in more recent times, “provokes us to consider not only where we reenact elements of the structure of power that makes torture possible, but also where these reenactments constitute central and paradoxical components of our oppositional discourse” (Beckman 135).¹⁰ Montero’s *affective* noncompliance with Vergara’s direction in these reenactments suggest that she comprehends better than her director that techniques of historical restaging foil the desire to present the past and confound the spectators’s will to intimacy.

Notes

1. See alternative versions of the “Baby Jesus Story” in Vidal 116; Cuevas 613.
2. A separate essay could be written focusing just on the shifting versions of this anecdote and its meanings across time and contexts. In some instances of the telling, Montero says that the prison officials were so intimidated by the solidarity among the female inmates that they did not “dare” punish her in solitary, while in others she claims she spent one (or three) months in an isolation cell. In other versions, Montero describes the toe of the baby Jesus flying up in the air after she bit it. See Cuevas, Martínez, Vidal Castaño, *Gavilla Verde*.
3. Montero’s own memoir can be considered a “friendly appropriation” since its existence owes much to the prodding of historians who knew her. It is likely that she received editorial advice from at least one of her historian friends.
4. Montero and Martínez relate their experiences with the maquis in various texts and across three decades. See: Cuevas; Vidal Castaño; Corcuera; Vergara; Gallagher; *Gavilla Verde*, as well as Montero’s memoir and Martínez’s autobiography, *Guerrilleras: La ilusión de una esperanza*.
5. See www.pragjesu.info/en/ on the Infant of Prague.
6. I have to thank the historian of the church, Colleen McDanell, for her generous communication regarding the Infant of Prague. Bill Christian also helped shed light on the cult of the Infant of Prague. Angela Cenarro was instrumental in helping me find images of more typically “household” baby Jesuses of 1940s and 1950s Spain. Gina Psaki and Pam Thomas gave important feedback on earlier versions of this piece.
7. The term comes from David Grossman’s *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*.
8. For a closer reading of sexualized violence in the testimonies of Montero and Esperanza Martínez, see Gina Herrmann, “They didn’t rape me”: Traces of Gendered Violence and Sexual Injury in the Testimonies of Spanish Republican Women Survivors of the Franco Dictatorship.”
9. On the modes of torture perpetrated against women prisoners in the Francoist penal system, see the oral histories collected by Tomasa Cuevas in her *Testimonios de*

mujeres en las cárceles franquistas, essays by Maud Joly and Irene Abad, and Ricard Vinyes's *Irredentas*. The memoirs of former political prisoners Soledad Real and that of Juana Doña stand apart from the larger testimonial record in their graphic description of sexualized torture.

10. The reenactment of torture Beckman refers to here is the re-performance of waterboarding performed at Abu Ghraib. Montero's witnessing of an actress reenacting her own tortures and suffering might not appear at first glance to warrant comparison with the employment of a repeat performance of torture in order to contribute "informed" opinions to the debates surrounding the relative harshness of interrogation techniques utilized by American military personnel in Iraq and Afganistan. I argue though that Beckman's point sheds light on Montero's participation in the Vergara film, a participation that presses her into an unwilling collaboration of sorts with the structure of power that tried to destroy her and that simultaneously opens a space for her to exercise her natural capacities for opposition, resistance, and survival.

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