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Memories of Repression and Resistance

*Narratives of Children Institutionalized
by Auxilio Social in Postwar Spain*

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Auxilio Social became the main welfare institution in Franco's Spain in which poor women and children, mostly belonging to the "vanquished" in the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), were assisted by a new class of social workers composed of Falangists, priests and professionals. The narratives and memories of the institutionalized children demonstrate their attempt to build an alternative identity to the one promoted by the regime. Although fragmented, this identity became an instrument for resisting the imposition of the regime's monolithic discourse. This particular case sheds light on the extent to which the Francoist elite succeeded in achieving its goals, as well as on the power relations between "victors" and "vanquished" in postwar Spain.

In the last two decades, Franco's "politics of revenge" has been widely analyzed by scholars. Local and regional studies have proliferated, documenting the killings that took place from July 1936 through to the end of the 1940s. Statistics for the number of deaths and details of the identity, profession and political affiliation of the victims, as well as profiles of the killers, have been compiled in various comprehensive surveys. Insights into the mechanisms for continued reprisals against the defeated, such as the Law of Political Responsibilities (February 9, 1939), or the concentration camp and prison system, have added to our understanding of the various methods used by the victors to secure the submission of the defeated after

the civil war's official end on April 1, 1939. The concept of victimhood has been reconsidered, taking into account the "non-quantifiable effects" of violence noted by Conxita Mir—such as fear, isolation or the breakdown of solidarity and family links at a local level. The implications for civil society of informers' denunciations have also been explored. These studies have provided new approaches to an understanding of the repressive apparatus's workings and consequences.¹

Despite this impressive research output, historical studies of postwar Spain have neglected the subject of the Francoist welfare system. Scholars have implicitly accepted the regime's discourse, whereby widows, orphans and the needy had a place in the Francoist "New State" insofar as it decreed specific measures to relieve the suffering caused by harsh living conditions in the 1940s.² Although it was a far from adequate response to the needs of the disadvantaged, the Francoist welfare apparatus has been seen as the acceptable face of a bloody regime, and the common perception among Spaniards is that it is one of the areas where the dictatorship enjoyed a measure of consensus. This article is based on the assumption that repression, autarky and welfare were closely connected in postwar Spain. The military rebels not only provoked the civil war—which resulted from the failed coup of July 18, 1936 and military and civilian resistance to it—but also carried out reprisals resulting in 150,000 deaths and, once the war was over, set up a "legal" framework for continuing the repression against the defeated. The economic policy of autarky (self-sufficiency and isolationism), which lasted till the late 1950s, helped to consolidate victory on the battlefield by preserving the interests of the financial, industrial and agrarian elites through economic speculation and severe exploitation of the labor force. Workers and the popular classes in general, and broad social groups such as prisoners' families, orphans, and the widows of republicans killed in combat or as a result of reprisals, were condemned to penury. The aim was to ensure their acceptance of, obedience to and dependence on the Francoist "New State." A Catholic discourse of national regeneration through submission and expiation provided the rhetorical framework for legitimizing the social exclusion of the defeated. In this context, the creation of a new welfare bureaucracy contributed to the development of a subculture of dependence, which in turn became a cornerstone of the reconstruction of power relationships in postwar Spain.³

Welfare emerged as one of the most useful tools for social control. Although some charitable activities remained in the hands of the Church or of municipal or provincial councils that subsidized hospitals and asylums, welfare constituted one of the clearest forms of state intervention during the dictatorship. From May 1937, the Falangist organization Auxilio Social (Social Aid) became the most important institution in charge of social work.⁴ It played a crucial role in the consolidation of the Francoist state for several reasons. First, its offer of welfare was conditional on the receipt of indoctrination and propaganda. Second, it sought to neutralize the working classes' potential rejection of the regime by creating a basic, cheap welfare infrastructure. And third, it fulfilled a proselytizing function by insisting that all "good Spaniards" should contribute to care of the needy through donations, thus building the "national community" or "New Spain." According to this totalitarian scheme, welfare sought to incorporate the masses into the state; individuals were not conceived as subjects entitled to social rights but as members of a hierarchically ordered, state-controlled "national community."⁵

The recent explosion of historiographical research on the Francoist repression has been followed, in the last six years, by the emergence of a widespread social mobilization for what has become known as the "recovery of historical memory." It has crystallized in the appearance of hundreds of local/regional associations, the excavation of mass graves, and the compiling (by activists working in the associations and by historians) of oral testimonies of victims' relatives. This social phenomenon has been fully reported in the mass media, widening its social impact.

In this new context created by civil activism, I considered it necessary, for several reasons, to add to the corpus of testimonies the memories of people who had been institutionalized in Francoist welfare centers. Oral history allows a "bottom up" approach to the topic of Francoist welfare, providing knowledge about everyday life in Auxilio Social children's homes. Hence, it can shed light on the extent to which this totalitarian project—as it was carefully defined by Auxilio Social's leaders and advisors in lectures, publications and pamphlets—was fulfilled. I also sought to determine whether these memories would fit the dominant discourse that has emerged in the last few years, thanks to the mobilization for the "recovery of historical memory." Although this dominant discourse tends to speak of "historical memory" in the singular, seen as something that

has been lost and is now being recovered thanks to civil activism, for the first time in seventy years, victims of the Francoist repression and their relatives are articulating their diverse memories in the public sphere; these memories had not in fact been “lost,” but silenced in public.

The narratives elaborated around the experience of defeat and repression are basically twofold: the speakers present themselves as victims of Franco’s politics of revenge or as heroes of the anti-Franco resistance. Even if only a few of them were involved in the clandestine political opposition to the dictatorship, they can still be considered the agents of everyday acts of resistance. Given the dominance of these two narrative models, the campaign for the “recovery of historical memory” is producing ambiguous effects. On the one hand, it is favoring the proliferation of less inhibited narratives about traumatic pasts, but, on the other hand, it can also inhibit those narratives that do not fit the dominant models of victim or resistance hero. Thus, I wanted to ask: what kind of narratives were these former inmates elaborating? How do they perceive themselves? That is, what kind of identity have they constructed that enables them to live in twenty-first-century Spain?

The first part of the article analyzes how Auxilio Social was conceived as an instrument of social control and how it was experienced by the most vulnerable group: the children of the defeated in the civil war. It then examines a number of narratives by institutionalized children (taken from five oral history interviews I conducted, along with brief reference to one written testimony I received) in order to explore the extent to which the victorious coalition achieved its aim of forcibly incorporating such children into its model of “national community.” Interviews were conducted in different Spanish cities (Madrid, Oviedo, Segovia and Zaragoza), between December 2006 and June 2007. Some of the interviewees were located via an Internet forum, offered on the website of Carlos Giménez—author of the famous comic strip *Paracuellos* based on the Auxilio Social children’s home at Paracuellos (Madrid) where he himself was institutionalized as a child—where many former inmates of Auxilio Social centers briefly recounted some of their experiences.⁶ Two of the interviewees approached me after the presentation in Zaragoza of my 2005 book on Auxilio Social, *La sonrisa de Falange*, expressing their willingness to tell me their stories. The written testimony consists of a letter dated December 9, 2005, by Julián V., in which he disagreed with my conclusions in that book. As a

child who suffered from ill health, he was sent to the *Hogar Enfermería* (Convalescent Home), where he was carefully tended. Later, since he was a brilliant student, Auxilio Social offered him the chance to gain a university degree, and he went on to become a prominent lawyer. In retrospect, he considers that he should be grateful to the institution.

The conclusions offered in this article represent the first stage of a long-term research project on the subjective experience of those institutionalized in Auxilio Social centers. What I hope to show in this article—tentative as its conclusions may be—is that the use of oral history interviews can add to the knowledge of the Francoist welfare system that can be derived from written documentation, by giving us an insight into everyday life practices and the effects of institutional control on subjectivity. I hope to show that these effects are complex and not always predictable.

FRANCOIST WELFARE: NEW IDEAS, OLD METHODS

In May 1937 Auxilio Social was established as a National Delegation of the Francoist State within the bureaucratic framework of FET-JONS (Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista), the fascist party created by decree (19 April 1937) through the amalgamation of the original Falange with other extreme-right factions, under the leadership of General Francisco Franco. Auxilio Social was largely based on the earlier fascist organization Auxilio de Invierno (Winter Aid), promoted by two Falangists clearly connected with the Falange's most radical wing, Javier Martínez de Bedoya and Mercedes Sanz Bachiller, the young widow of a leading Castilian Falangist. Auxilio de Invierno had an explicit welfare brief, modeled on (and named after) the Nazi organization Winterhilfe (Winter Aid). It began life as an institution aimed at meeting the needs of women, children and refugees, the main victims of military violence, in Valladolid. This gave rise to a paradoxical situation whereby the fight against “hunger, cold and poverty” (as the institution’s publications and press and radio propaganda put it) emerged from within the very ranks of Francoism, as a way of countering the effects of its repressive policies. What started as a local initiative quickly grew into a large-scale enterprise;

by 1939 there were 2,487 canteens, 1,561 kitchens and an additional 3,000 centers for the care of mothers and children.

The welfare provided by Auxilio Social had specific characteristics. First, it was conceived as a totalitarian institution, designed to supersede traditional (or liberal) charity, whereby the rich helped the poor at their discretion. The state was to become the vehicle for the distribution of aid; hence it was crucial for Auxilio Social to have a prominent presence in the Francoist state bureaucracy. When Javier Martínez de Bedoya, secretary of Auxilio Social, was in February 1938 appointed Director General de Beneficencia (director general of charity) by the first Francoist government, the Valladolid team's aspirations seemed to have been fulfilled.

Second, Auxilio Social's leaders sought to modernize welfare provision. Its staff were carefully selected on the basis of two criteria: affiliation to the Falange and professional profile. Propaganda was also a crucial element. Auxilio Social's propaganda office disseminated information about its activities through lengthy newspaper and magazine articles, photographs, photomontages and documentaries, to show Franco's generosity towards men, women and children living in territory conquered from the Republic. In the desperate circumstances of the 1940s, the "white bread" provided by Auxilio Social was presented as the most appropriate instrument for redeeming "red souls;" that is, for securing the consent of the most disadvantaged sectors of the population. If the Auxilio Social elite could win over those hostile to Franco's victory, the construction of the "national community" would be complete.

Third, Auxilio Social was from its inception strongly marked by Catholicism. Spanish fascism incorporated Catholic faith and practice since the latter represented the most authentic expression of the "essence of the Fatherland" for the Spanish Right in general. The commitment to Catholicism went beyond mere acceptance of its discourse. Mercedes Sanz Bachiller appointed a religious advisor to her fascist team: the Valladolid priest, Andrés María Mateo. On his resignation in 1939, he was succeeded by one of the most ultraconservative and pro-Francoist members of the Spanish Catholic Church, Pedro Cantero Cuadrado. Mateo and Cantero Cuadrado organized a broad network of priests, at local diocese level, charged with injecting Catholic doctrine and practice into the new Falangist institution and with overseeing its activities. The call for a "national syndicalist revolution" was progressively replaced by the

ideals of “social justice” (a key concept of social Catholicism since the late nineteenth century), charity (instead of modern state welfare) and redemption of the “red” population through indoctrination, Catholic education, and strict discipline.

Although the Francoist welfare system was publicly presented as the regime’s “maternal arm,” it proved to be a particularly effective tool for wielding power over the children of the defeated. Once the war was over, the *hogares infantiles* (children’s homes) became Auxilio Social’s most important area of operation. War orphans, children of poor families, abandoned children and prisoners’ offspring—the main objects of the regime’s regenerationist obsession—were institutionalized in these *hogares*. The decree of November 23, 1940 regulating the protection of war orphans allowed the state to separate children from their parents if “there were sound reasons to consider that the child’s moral formation was at risk.” This decree provided the legal framework to enforce a segregationist project clearly aimed at removing children from their republican parents and exercising strict control over them. This practice reached shocking levels of cruelty in the case of incarcerated women, whose children were seized and put up for illegal adoption by pro-Francoist families. In other cases, children were by law allowed to remain with mothers experiencing severe hardship until the age of four. Then they were handed over to Catholic or Auxilio Social schools under state tutelage. Although traditional and Catholic welfare institutions survived and ran their own network of orphanages and schools, Auxilio Social centers were ordered to reserve 75 percent of their capacity for the “orphans of war and revolution.”⁷

Curiously, according to the 1941 instructions of Auxilio Social’s National Secretary Carmen de Icaza, it was forbidden to inquire into the cause of any individual child’s orphanhood. This requirement has been seen as the sign of a desire to overcome wartime divisions, but, in practice, the lack of distinction between orphans of the victors and the defeated was one of the mainstays of a set of disciplinary practices aimed at eroding children’s former identities. The daily routine of the *hogares* evidenced other distinctive features of disciplinary power, such as strict regulation of time, isolation from the outside world (in differing degrees, depending on the child’s age or particular rules), and the enforced lack of material possessions. The narratives of those institutionalized in these homes show that disciplinary practices were experienced on a daily basis; indeed, such

disciplinary practices form the bulk of their memories. Generally, children were allowed home only for the summer holidays, and in some cases for Christmas. Opportunities for contact with one's family were limited. Although mothers were allowed to visit their children once a week, the often long distance between home and the *hogar* made this difficult. As some of those interviewed have related, they did not always receive the money or food sent by their mothers because it was confiscated. The sense of material lack was a constant during their time in the *hogar*. "We had no belongings," Josefa E. insisted.⁸ According to the testimonies of Hilario L. and Pedro F., they never told their families what went on in the *hogar* because, apart from not wishing to add to their mothers' suffering and hardship, they were threatened with punishment if they did. In the case of the children's home at Paracuellos, where Hilario L. lived for six years, when boys dared to communicate their experiences, those in charge intercepted their letters to their families. Hilario L. recalls how he wrote and sent several letters complaining about the harshness of daily life at Paracuellos that were never received by his mother.⁹

Auxilio Social's children's homes had from the start been conceived as spaces where disciplinary power could be exercised. In this respect, some of their inmates' experiences are comparable to those of the inmates of Francoist prisons. However, there is a key difference. Unlike children institutionalized in Francoist welfare centers, male and female political prisoners could develop or maintain a strong anti-Francoist collective consciousness, thanks to the existence of wide solidarity networks constructed inside and outside of prison. The involvement of their families, especially wives, in maintaining prisoners' morale and physical strength was crucial. These spontaneous, informal support networks involved the shared organization of infrastructures devoted to everyday survival (meals, clothes, correspondence, etc.). Such networks provided a rapid socialization in politicized channels of resistance (mainly the clandestine Communist Party) that helped to reinforce political prisoners' anti-Francoist identity on their release.

The experience of Auxilio Social children was very different. After their years of institutionalization in an *hogar*, most of those interviewed lost contact with those who had been their friends and found it hard to tell their stories to their parents or, once they formed a family of their own, to their spouses or children. Some of them are still reluctant to transmit

their experiences to their families. Although most of them have become socially and professionally successful, they can be divided into those who perceive themselves as survivors of a sort of Darwinian “natural selection” process, and those who consider themselves as victims. The construction of a collective consciousness based on their institutionalized status was hindered by the specific power relationships in the *hogares* and their subsequent dispersion in later life. However, the previously mentioned comic strip has acted as a reference point. The three interviewees who encountered this comic identify with its protagonists, it thus seems to have functioned as a catalyst for the emergence of a common identity as “Auxilio Social children.”

THE EFFECTS OF DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES IN AUXILIO SOCIAL CENTERS

The five interviews I conducted with individuals who spent their childhood in Auxilio Social homes show that silence was one of the most effective tools for eroding the children’s previous identities; indeed, silence about one’s parental background was the implicit rule governing the children’s homes. Bárbara B. remembers the imposed silence as one of the main features of daily life in the *hogar*: “After the evening meal we had to examine our consciences... this meant silence, strict silence... and right through to after breakfast next day, even if one of the girls had died, we were told we couldn’t talk... strict silence.” Meals also passed in complete silence. Nevertheless, silence was not only a disciplinary imposition, but was also adopted on their mothers’ instructions. Bárbara B.’s father Juan was murdered in summer 1936 by rebel officers in Sierra de Luna (Zaragoza). He had been the only republican mayor of El Frago (Zaragoza) during the Second Republic (1931–36), as well as a founding member of the local branch of the socialist trade union (Unión General de Trabajadores). Her mother, a young widow with six children, ordered them not to talk about the causes of their father’s death. Bárbara B. recognizes that she internalized her mother’s instructions: “I was old enough to intuit what was going on... my mother told us never to tell....”¹⁰

Pedro F.’s experience was very similar. At the beginning of the interview, he explained the family situation after his father’s death in a labor accident in 1954. His mother decided to give three of her five children

to state institutions. Pedro F. was in the Hogar Cántabro (Torrelavega, Santander), his brother in the García Morato (Madrid), and his sister in a religious center for those at risk from tuberculosis. It was only towards the end of the interview that he mentioned that his father had been a republican officer during the civil war: “a captain with the Reds” (he uses the regime’s terminology for supporters of the Republic). Apart from this left-wing identity, Pedro F. is ignorant of his father’s specific circumstances before and after the war. Although he remembers vaguely that he disappeared suddenly to be imprisoned for two years, Pedro F. did not know that SNIACE (Sociedad Nacional de Industria de Aplicación de Celulosa Española), where his father worked for several years, was one of the largest enterprises created in the postwar thanks to exploitation of the prison labor force.¹¹ He attributes this ignorance to the fact that his mother’s suffering stopped them from wanting to know:

the fact is, my mother didn’t want to talk about these things, my mother must have had a pretty bad time of it, she never wanted to talk about it... she never involved us or anything... it was a subject that was never brought up, we never talked about it [...] whether at home or amongst ourselves, there was no politics, we didn’t think about these things [...] I’ve never been curious to know... I don’t know if my brother knows anything, I don’t know, I don’t think any of us does, my mother put the fear of God into us to say nothing about who we were [...].

The splitting up of families also worked against the creation of a dissident identity. Bárbara B. was eight years old when her mother decided to give her two daughters to different institutions in Zaragoza. Bárbara went to one dependent on Auxilio Social, though managed by a female religious order. Her sister went to La Caridad, run by the local council. It was common practice to separate members of the same family, usually on grounds of sexual differentiation (with male and female children going to different institutions) or because of age differences; in many cases, the decision to separate siblings had no clear logic. All of those interviewed—with one exception—were separated from their siblings, even if they were close in age. The irrationality of these decisions made them hard to accept for the children; sometimes, as in Bárbara’s case, they were a permanent

source of unhappiness. Hilario L., whose brother was in the same *hogar*, explains that everyday life in the institution did not favor a close relationship between them and he felt almost completely isolated for years. Since the severance of family ties made it difficult to construct a shared family memory, such separation seems to have been conceived as the first step in the long process of “regeneration.”

The severance of family bonds, as well as the difficulty of establishing strong emotional links in the *hogares*, is noted by all those interviewed. Discipline interfered with any attempt on the children’s part to create a sense of mutual complicity. Josefa E. spent several years in two girls’ homes, Agustina de Aragón and María de Molina, both in Madrid. She recalls how, if anyone talked at night, all the girls were punished by the *instructora*. They would be ordered to go outside and do exercises in a dirty playground. During his years in the *hogar* at Paracuellos, Hilario L. experienced the cruelty of disciplinary rigor on a daily basis. If a boy cried or wet his bed during the night, the *instructores* found this sufficient reason to get them all out of bed and give them a lashing with their belts. Hilario L. and Pedro F. were in boys’ homes where, in the latter’s words, the law of “survival of the fittest” prevailed. The sense of having to fend for oneself was a general feature of everyday life in these homes, but was felt especially keenly by the youngest boys, who looked to an older protector as the only way to avoid being bullied by other boys. The authorities’ indifference to the children’s emotional needs generated a chronic feeling of vulnerability that could be partially overcome only through the establishment of a relationship of dependence between the younger and older boys.

Discipline was applied arbitrarily. Hilario L. talks of feeling permanently under threat, since the *instructores* would patrol the tables where children were eating lunch or dinner, hitting them even if they had not behaved badly. Punishment was conceived not as a logical response to an action that broke previously established rules, but as an exhibition of the Auxilio Social elite’s total power over the children in their care. The attitude of directors, teachers, *instructores* and, to some extent, nuns and priests exhibited an overt inconsistency, as was all too apparent to Pedro F. He recalled how the *instructores*, in charge of discipline, would provoke brutal fights between the adolescents, egging them on to hit each other. They would routinely take advantage of the physical strength of a mentally

handicapped child to turn the quarrel into a public spectacle of violence directed against the weaker boys. Pedro F. concluded: “You never forget things like that, never... what kind of education was that?”

If discipline coexisted with abuse, politicization was another hallmark of welfare in Francoist institutions. Public rooms were presided over by pictures of the dictator, General Franco, and of the leader of the Falange executed in November 1936, José Antonio Primo de Rivera. Boys would parade wearing the Falangist uniform, and education was based on Catholic rituals and the Falangist doctrine that had been appropriated by the regime. However, this attempt to indoctrinate young children was not experienced by them as such. These political practices were considered “normal” during the dictatorship, and children living in the *hogares* did not have a sense of a highly politicized atmosphere.

Discipline, Catholic education and the politicization of everyday life were considered by the Auxilio Social elite to be the appropriate instruments for “regenerating” the children of Republicans who, in theory at least, constituted the greater part of the *hogares’* inmates. In this respect, the Francoist welfare centers implemented the same “regenerationist” project that the prison system attempted to carry out with the adult population. This was based on a mix of eugenicist theories and Catholic ideology whereby pro-republican attitudes were seen as the result of the lower classes’ polluted social and ideological background. Grounded in Catholicism, this discourse could be considered the Spanish variant of the Europe-wide social-Darwinist discourse of “degeneration” that equated disease and disorder. The “other,” perceived as a threat, had to be annihilated or subjected. Antonio Vallejo Nájera, a prominent military psychiatrist, used such theories to explain the origins of the Spanish civil war. He consequently justified state intervention in the private sphere, through segregation from families, Catholic education and disciplinary measures, regarded as efficient methods for correcting erroneous political preferences. Vallejo Nájera’s imprint can easily be perceived in the writings of Auxilio Social’s Education Advisor, Antonio J. Onieva, which expound his pedagogic notions on the role of welfare centers.¹²

It was a widespread belief that Auxilio Social institutions were aimed exclusively at reeducating the children of “reds.” Since no thorough research has been conducted into the political profile of inmates’ parents, this claim cannot be demonstrated by empirical evidence. Some data sug-

gest that it may be inaccurate. For example, in 1944 political prisoners' children under state tutelage in Auxilio Social homes numbered only six out of 10,675, the rest being in Catholic centers. Furthermore, the separation of siblings through their arbitrary placement in different centers meant that children from the same families could end up in different locations within the network of Catholic, Falangist, or state (mainly local and provincial) institutions, depending on a relative's or local authority's recommendation or intervention.¹³

A distinctive feature seems to have been the Auxilio Social elite's conviction that their *raison d'être* was to deal with the "children of reds." It is thus curious that all those interviewed agreed that there was a general lack of awareness of the political affiliation of other children's families. Josefa E., whose testimony stated that her family background was not republican, explained that she and her siblings were placed in Auxilio Social homes thanks to a distant relative's recommendation: "I'd heard they were schools for the children of reds, it wasn't true... my mother had to ask for me to be accepted." This sentence, whose meaning is not entirely clear, suggests a complex emotional attitude: on the one hand, a rejection of identification with the "children of reds," and on the other an uncomfortable sense of being associated with them. When I interviewed her brother some months later, he confirmed to me that their grandfather was a left-wing, pro-republican peasant from Andalusia. Josefa E. may not have mentioned this important information because she considered it irrelevant to the immediate reasons for her placement in an Auxilio Social home (her father's abandonment of the family) or her identity as a left-wing person, forged mainly in the 1960s and '70s. Her ambiguous words could also indicate ambivalence about her family past (acceptance/rejection). What arises here is an unclear filiation with her pro-republican ancestors, as well as confusion about what "being a child of reds" entailed; the phrase seems to have been a shifting category which could mean different things to inmates of the homes and to the Francoist authorities. This confusion is further illustrated in the case of Hilario L., who entered the *hogar* at Paracuellos as late as 1968. According to his testimony, the *instructores'* brutality was aimed mainly at the "children of reds": "And those kids, well... they referred to them as the children of reds... saying the children of reds had been put there [...] to knock discipline into them." When I expressed surprise at the continued

use of discourses and methods from the 1940s still in the late 1960s, he answered: “yes, well... that would have been the children who’d been put in the home earlier on, because we were people with nothing... they were children without a father, mother or resources.” After this confusion about whether those children placed in the Paracuellos *hogar* in an earlier period were “children of reds” or simply destitute, like the inmates of his own generation, he finally recognized that they were totally unaware of other children’s political background.

In practice, the phrase “children of reds” became a figure of speech whose function was to reinforce the exercise of power by those belonging to the victorious elite after 1939: the “children of reds” were those requiring regulation, rather than exclusively the offspring of republican parents. The phrase designated a culturally constructed category, which could be imposed from above on any lower-class child, regardless of the parents’ political profile. To have developed a clear anti-Francoist identity during the civil war was not a precondition for being included in it. The creation of this new category by the Auxilio Social elite allowed them to justify their disciplinary measures, no matter how arbitrary. It is striking that this mechanism of control was still operating in the 1950s and 1960s, when the purges of the defeated had diminished, and the decision to place children in state institutions was based on non-political factors: individual poverty, orphanhood because of the parents’ death from natural or accidental causes, or abandonment for personal or economic reasons. Indifference to or nonconformity with the Franco regime could also be identified with the broad category “red.” The label was applied most readily to the poor. The discursive matrix of exclusion was reworked and politicized during the civil war to justify the exclusion of those classed as “enemies of Spain.” This politicized classification scheme was kept alive until the end of the dictatorship.¹⁴

NARRATIVES OF RESISTANCE

The exercise of power generated resistance. The Franco dictatorship did not create the conditions for a fully organized resistance because the ferocity of the repression led to the break-up of the labor movement and all other forms of association. After republican defeat in April 1939, there

was no means of coordinating a widespread, cohesive movement clearly directed at toppling the regime. The *maquis* (resistance fighters), controlled by the Communist Party, embodied the option of armed struggle against the dictatorship but involved only a minority of the population. In recent years, certain scholars of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy have noted the existence of various levels of resistance. Detlev Peukert's classification of types of resistance in Nazi Germany identifies a wide range of dissident attitudes whose objectives and scope could vary. If some activities were clearly directed at overthrowing the dictator (such as sabotage), most were aimed at rejecting specific policies, preserving collective identities, or expressing disagreement with existing rules through insults or minor acts of aggression against local authorities. In the case of Fascist Italy, Luisa Passerini has revealed the importance of the cultural sphere, where the symbolic articulation of resistance crystallized in gossip, jokes and popular songs. These showed that the Mussolini dictatorship was not able to secure the consensus of the lower classes, even if they did not oppose it heroically.¹⁵

Similarly, in Auxilio Social centers, institutionalized children and their families developed subtle strategies of resistance, not aimed at damaging the regime concretely but at questioning some of its policies with regard to social control, disciplinary measures and invasion of the private sphere. This type of resistance was loosely organized, since the principal agents were the children or their families. It was common practice for mothers not to return their children after the holidays, or to challenge Auxilio Social personnel in order to keep their children with them. Children's agency needs to be highlighted in this respect. In a female *hogar* in Santander, some girls used to vomit the food (which they were probably force-fed) until they were given back to their families. Boys ran away from the *hogares* so often that the term *fuga* (escape) was one of the routine terms used to indicate definitive withdrawal. The frequency of escapes was also mentioned by two of those interviewed, Pedro F. and Hilario L., who witnessed several cases in their respective *hogares*. In short, the young were able to reformulate the power relationship in which they had been placed as a result of adults' decisions.

The narratives of those institutionalized by Auxilio Social as children show how they attempted to construct an alternative identity to that promoted by the regime. The career paths followed by those interviewed

show clearly how they distanced themselves from the political principles in which they were educated, opting for varying forms and degrees of left-wing political involvement. Some, such as Bárbara B. and Pedro F. whose fathers were clearly pro-republican, recognized their strong awareness of their family identity, even if they had not been allowed to express it publicly. The fact of having had a left-wing father always served as a reference point in their lives, even though this fact had been silenced on their mother's instructions, or they had been so young when they lost their father that he had been unable to transmit his ideological and political commitment to them. In the previously mentioned written testimony by Julián V., a republican officer's son who was institutionalized by Auxilio Social, he emphasizes that "I was, and still am, a republican, nostalgic for Azaña's Republic, I was always anti-Franco, I have voted for the left in every election since 1977." Some of those brought up in Auxilio Social homes insist that the years they spent in an *hogar* marked their left-wing ideology deeply, as is the case with Pedro F.: "Very much so... I'm a left-winger one hundred percent, and so was my father, though he never got round to telling us because we were little, but I know from my mother...." From an early age, Pedro F. developed his own explanation of what makes people left-wing or right-wing. Dispossession appears to be the key concept:

the person who has nothing has good reason to be left-wing, or else he becomes a thief or speculator and becomes right-wing, otherwise he has to be left-wing... and the person who has a lot of money may be a good person but he's bound to have conservative opinions [...] that's something I learnt when I was a kid, you learn it instinctively... the person who has money is the one who becomes a conservative because he is the one who has something to conserve, right? That seems logical to me.

Since the early 1980s, Bárbara B. has been campaigning for official recognition of the site where her father and three other republicans were executed in summer 1936. When the Franco dictatorship was dismantled, she and her husband put pressure on the local authorities to place a commemorative plaque in the cemetery of Sierra de Luna (Zaragoza), to create a public memorial after four decades of private mourning. She has

constructed her identity around two basic sentiments. First, her sense of being a victim of the Spanish civil war whose suffering has to date received no official compensation. Comparing herself with the children evacuated to the Soviet Union during the civil war, who since 2005 have received a more generous pension from the Spanish government, she claims her right to the status of “victim” because she was deprived of a normal family life:

My father was a very hard worker... so I'm told, I never knew him... you see, I never knew my father and I remember nothing, and the child evacuees to Russia get paraded around here, there, and everywhere, I don't get any compensation, there's all this talk about exploited children [but] I've had no compensation... I never spent any time with my father.

Second, her claim to be proud of being a republican’s daughter (in her husband’s words: “she’s proud to say her father was shot, she wouldn’t be so proud to say he’d shot people”) and her assumption of the duty to keep his memory alive once the dictatorship was over (“now my mother’s not here to talk about him, I will”) show a clear affiliation with her pro-republican parents that was not eroded by the nine years she spent in an *hogar*.

In addition to identification with parents, what seems to have produced an evident distancing from the regime’s precepts is the failure of the Auxilio Social elite to win any real ascendancy over the children. Their brutal, arbitrary methods generated in the children more of a sense of having been betrayed than of loyalty, and helped them to formulate readings of their past that broke clearly with the Franco regime. After being socialized in tough principles of order and authority, Hilario L. attributes his present sense of solidarity with the underprivileged to the suffering experienced at Paracuellos: “You realize they made you suffer and you try to make sure it doesn’t happen to others... When I see an injustice, I feel it deeply and I always try to help others in any situation, because I can’t stand injustice... towards lower-class people, towards people you can see have greater needs and problems.” Pedro F. felt deeply betrayed when the priest denounced him to the *hogar*’s director for breaking the rules forbidding contact between boys and girls, something the priest

had learnt as a secret of confession: “what kind of priests were they, who didn’t practice what they preached?... I never went to mass again.” Josefa E.’s perception of her experiences was even more radical. When I asked whether she thought her time in the *hogares* had somehow determined her political preferences, she replied as follows:

You mean, did it stop me from being a Francoist? You bet... right away you thought, “Why do these people treat me like this? Why have I got to sit on my butt on the cold floor? Why do I have to play in the middle of a shitty playground when there’s another playground that’s clean and unused?” I blamed them directly, they were bitches, though I didn’t put it like that at the time because I hadn’t yet learnt to talk like that, but I put it like that now [...] I hated them, I really hated them, I have no fond memories of any of those women... and then you’d come to class in the evening to say the rosary or learn the catechism by heart... and you’d say to yourself, of course everything you read and everything they try to teach you has got an answer but there are questions too... And that’s being a good Christian? Don’t talk to me about being a good Christian. For God’s sake... they taught you to see that despite themselves. So, yes, of course it left a mark.

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The narratives of “Auxilio Social children” confirm that the totalitarian dream of “national community” was never fulfilled. The ruling elite failed to establish hegemony over the inmates, who were able to keep alive their parents’ memory and identify with their families’ political background rather than with the regime’s principles. Consensus was never reached in four decades of dictatorship. Although the regenerationist project had been carefully thought out by doctors, psychiatrists and the professional elite working in prisons and the welfare system, it was hardly applied in practice. The Auxilio Social elite devoted its energies to meting out abuse and punishing any deviation from unclear rules. Implementation of the reeducation project that would create “citizens of the New Spain” was never a priority. Fissures in the power system were instrumentalized by the young to seek out alternatives to the dictatorship’s project and

to construct a dissident identity. Paradoxically, this identity was clearly based on the category that acted as the pillar of power relationships from 1939 onwards: that of being the “child of reds.” Bárbara B. remembers a sentence obsessively repeated by the nuns in charge of the *hogar*: “And the nuns used to say to us that if the tables were turned, we would kill them!” Such fears of a hypothetical revenge headed by the children of republicans reveal the precariousness and weakness of the Francoist “victory,” won by force but not by consent.

Rather than being fixed since they were children, this identity has been constructed by them throughout their life as the result of a wide range of factors, some of them explored in this article. The sense of loss (on account of the death of, or abandonment by, the father), combined with bitter experiences and deep disappointment at the behavior of the Auxilio Social elite, encouraged a sense of victimhood and distancing from the regime’s rules. Moreover, their degree of professional or personal success in adult life seems to have retrospectively affected their readings of their childhood, as the prominent lawyer Julián V.’s written testimony shows. Some of those interviewed, like Pedro F., Hilario L., and Josefa E., came across the comic strip *Paracuellos*. The vividly described stories of hopelessness and loneliness in the comic were quickly recognized by the real-life inmates, who immediately identified with the fictional characters. Moreover, the campaign in Spain for the “recovery of historical memory” has affected the articulation of their childhood experiences by the individuals whose memories are discussed here. It has probably contributed to the widespread feeling among them of being a “victim,” although they do not clearly perceive the relation between this category and Franco’s politics of revenge. Victims, “children of reds,” survivors (but not heroes) who are happy to be alive to tell their experiences today are the plural identities that emerged from their narratives. What I hope this essay has been able to show is that oral sources allow historians to understand the long-term (historical) process of identity construction, in which experiences, as well as the feelings and categories associated with them, are given a particular significance by historical agents.

NOTES

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1. See Santos Juliá, ed., *Víctimas de la guerra civil* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 1999) (revised version 2006); Julián Casanova, ed., *Morir, matar, sobrevivir: La violencia en la dictadura de Franco* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2002); Conxita Mir, *Vivir es sobrevivir: Justicia, orden y marginación en la Cataluña rural de posguerra* (Lleida: Milenio, 2000); and “Violencia política, coacción legal y oposición interior,” *Ayer*, no. 33 (1999): 115–45; Carme Molinero, Margarida Sala, Jaume Sobrequés, eds., *Una inmensa prisión: Los campos de concentración y las prisiones durante la guerra civil y el franquismo* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2003); Javier Rodrigo, *Cautivos: Campos de concentración en la España franquista, 1936–1947* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2005); Ángela Cenarro, “Violence, Surveillance and Denunciation: Social Cleavage in the Spanish Civil War and Francoism, 1936–1950,” in Pieter Spierenburg, Clive Emsley and Eric Johnson, eds., *Social Control in Europe, 1800–2000* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004), 281–300.

2. For an example of an uncritical approach to Francoist welfare, see Mónica Orduña Prada, *El Auxilio Social (1936–1940): La etapa fundacional y los primeros años* (Madrid: Escuela Libre Editorial, 1996).

3. Autarky and its consequences have been analyzed by Michael Richards, *A Time of Silence: Civil War and the Culture of Repression in Franco's Spain, 1936–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Carme Molinero and Pere Ysàs, “El malestar popular por las condiciones de vida: ¿Un problema político para el régimen franquista?” *Ayer*, no. 52 (2003): 255–80. The concept of a “subculture of dependence” was elaborated in relation to Mussolini’s Italy by Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 97–98.

4. Auxilio Social continued to operate throughout the Franco dictatorship. After Franco’s death in 1975, it was integrated into the Ministry of Labor and Social Security.

5. This has been highlighted in my book, *La sonrisa de Falange: Auxilio Social en la guerra civil y la postguerra* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2005).

6. See www.carlosgimenez.com/correo-libro/index.htm; Carlos Giménez, *Paracuellos* (Barcelona: Ediciones Amaika, 1977). The series continued until 2003; the complete run has been reissued in Carlos Giménez, *Todo Paracuellos* (Barcelona: Debolsillo, 2007).

7. Ricard Vinyes, Montse Armengou and Ricard Belis, *Los niños perdidos del franquismo* (Barcelona: Plaza y Janés, 2002); Pilar Fidalgo, *A Young Mother in Franco's Prisons* (London: United Editorial, 1939).
8. Interview with Josefa E., Segovia, December 6, 2006.
9. Interview with Pedro F., Santander, December 8, 2006; interview with Hilario L., Oviedo, December 7, 2006;
10. Interview with Bárbara B., Zaragoza, January 9, 2007.
11. Isaías Lafuente, *Esclavos por la patria: La explotación de los presos bajo el franquismo* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 2002), 99.
12. On Vallejo Nájera, see Vinyes, Armengou and Belis, *Los niños perdidos*, 31–54. For the military officers' racial mentality, see Paul Preston, "The Answer Lies in the Sewers: Captain Aguilera and the Mentality of the Francoist Officer Corps," *Science & Society* 68, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 277–312; Helen Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War 1936–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 117–24; and Antonio J. Onieva, *Mitos pedagógicos. Contribución al conocimiento del niño español* (Madrid: Afrodisio Aguado, 1943).
13. The figures for inmates are given in Vinyes, Armengou and Belis, *Los niños perdidos*, 227–32.
14. For the politicization of exclusion, see Richard J. Evans, "Social Outsiders in German History: From the Sixteenth Century to 1933," in Robert Gellately and Nathan Stoltzfus, eds., *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 20–44.
15. See Detlev J. K. Peukert, "Working Class Resistance: Problems and Options," in David Clay Large, ed., *Contending with Hitler: Varieties of German Resistance in the Third Reich* (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 1991), 35–48; and Luisa Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class*, trans. Robert Lumley and Jude Bloomfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). For the Spanish case, see Ismael Saz, *Franquismo y fascismo* (Valencia: Universitat de València, 2004), 171–96; Jordi Font, "Nosotros no nos cuidábamos de la política": Fuentes orales y actitudes políticas en el franquismo. El ejemplo de una zona rural, 1939–1959," *Historia Social*, no. 49 (2004): 49–66; Ana Cabana, "Entre a resistencia e a adaptación: A sociedade rural galega no franquismo (1936–1960)" (Ph.D. diss., Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 2006).