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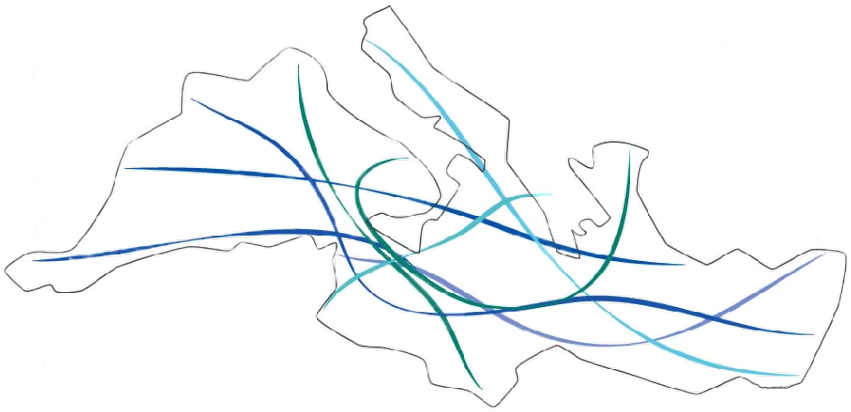
The "ethics of care" in the testimonial narrative of Spanish republican exiled women



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The 'ethics of care' in the testimonial narrative of Spanish republican exiled women

Abstract
This article aims to study two works belonging to the testimonial narrative of the Spanish Republican exile of 1939: *Sola* (1954), by María José de Chopitea, and *Los diablos sueltos* (1975), by Mada Carreño. These testimonial novels were written by women who survived the exodus through the northern border of Spain after the end of the Spanish Civil War, the subsequent experience of concentration camps and other concentrationary places located in the south of France, and the exile to México. Based on his reading of the Shoah literature, Tzvetan Todorov argues that women were more susceptible to helping each other and building spaces of solidarity and collective support. This "ethics of care" that Todorov identifies can be observed in these works of exiled Spanish women. Therefore, this essay studies how the "ethics of care," following the concept of Carol Gilligan, is reflected in these stories with the objective of detecting certain specificities of the female experience of the Republican Spanish exile. Through this study, we will demonstrate that the voice of surviving women is essential to fully and deeply understand the process of territorial dislocation that the Republican community suffered after the Civil War, as well as to assess the contribution that these female narratives have made to the processes of social remembrance.

Keywords: Testimony narrative, Spanish republican exile, French concentration camps, Women

La "ética del cuidado" en la narrativa testimonial de las mujeres republicanas exiliadas

Resumen
El artículo se propone estudiar dos obras pertenecientes a la narrativa testimonial del exilio español republicano de 1939: *Sola* (1954), de María José de Chopitea, y *Los diablos sueltos* (1975), de Mada Carreño. Estas novelas testimoniales fueron escritas por mujeres que sobrevivieron al éxodo hacia la frontera francesa al finalizar la Guerra Civil Española, luego al paso por el sistema concentracionario francés y más tarde al exilio en México. Basado en su lectura de la literatura de la Shoah, Tzvetan Todorov argumenta que las mujeres fueron más susceptibles de ayudarse a sí mismas y de construir espacios de solidaridad y sostén colectivo. Esta "ética del cuidado" identificada por Todorov se observa en las mencionadas obras de las escritoras exiliadas españolas. Asimismo, este ensayo estudia cómo la "ética del cuidado", siguiendo el concepto de Carol Gilligan, se refleja en estas historias con el objetivo de detectar algunas especificidades de la experiencia de las mujeres en el exilio mexicano. A través de este estudio, demostraremos que la voz de las mujeres supervivientes es esencial para entender de manera completa y profunda el proceso de dislocación territorial que la comunidad republicana sufrió luego de la Guerra Civil,

así como también valorar la contribución que estas narrativas de mujeres han hecho a los procesos de rememoración social.

Palabras clave: Testimonio, Narrativa, Exilio español republicano, Campos de concentración franceses, Mujeres

L'etica della cura' nella narrativa testimoniale delle donne repubblicane spagnole esiliate

Sinossi
L'articolo esamina due lavori appartenenti alla narrativa testimoniale dell'esilio repubblicano spagnolo del 1939: *Sola* (1954), di María José de Chopitea e *Los diablos sueltos* (1975) di Mada Carreño. I due romanzi testimoniali sono opera di donne sopravvissute all'esodo attraverso il confine settentrionale della Spagna dopo la guerra civile, alla successiva esperienza dei campi di concentramento e altri luoghi di reclusione nel Sud della Francia e all'esilio in Messico. Sulla base della sua interpretazione della letteratura della Shoah, Tzvetan Todorov ritiene che le donne fossero più disposte ad aiutarsi a vicenda e a costruire spazi di solidarietà e sostegno reciproco. Questa "etica della cura", in base alla definizione di Carol Gilligan, si riflette in queste storie, con l'obiettivo di identificare alcune specificità dell'esperienza femminile dell'esilio repubblicano spagnolo. L'articolo mira a dimostrare che la voce delle donne sopravvissute è essenziale per comprendere pienamente e in profondità il processo di dispersione territoriale subito dalla comunità repubblicana dopo la guerra civile, così come per valutare il contributo che la narrativa femminile ha dato alla memoria collettiva.

Parole chiave: Narrativa testimoniale, Esilio repubblicano spagnolo, Campi di concentramento francesi, Donne

The "ethics of care" in the testimonial narrative of Spanish republican exiled women

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Introduction

"Our life seems like an eternal journey" (Mistral, 1940, p. 37) says the narrator of *Éxodo. Diario de una refugiada española,* and in this confession, we can guess the thought of its author, Silvia Mistral, who represents a generation of Spanish women marked by the tear of the exile from Spain in 1939, once Franco's military troops defeated the Republican front. Exile is not a journey like any other; it is a decision not taken but imposed, which means a turning point in the life story. For this reason, those who go into exile tend to harbor this sensation of permanent transit for a long time, like a journey from which one never returns. The use of the first-person plural pronoun "we" is a constant in the accounts of the Republican exile of 1939, which is defined by its communitarian nature. It was an entire collective, united by the rejection of Franco's regime, which had to escape and insert itself into a new space, the host country. Solidarity networks were, therefore, a necessary condition for this adaptation to take place, not only because many Spaniards sought the help of compatriots who had arrived earlier on Mexican territory, but also because within the exiled community, spaces of work and containment were built, such as publishing houses, newspapers and academic institutions that served to enable the continuity of their intellectual work and social life.

Out of all the literature produced by Spanish Republican exiles, this essay aims to study some works belonging to the testimonial narrative written by women who survived the exodus through the

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northern border of Spain after the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939. In some cases, they were imprisoned in concentration camps and other places of concentration in the south of France. Subsequently, they were able to travel as exiled to other countries, especially in Latin America. In the case of authors such as María José de Chopitea or Mada Carreño, the departure from Spain, the journey to the host country, and the process of adaptation to the Mexican context were marked by the difficulties of being a woman. For this reason, solidarity towards others, or what we understand in this case by "ethics of care," taking the notion coined by Carol Gilligan in the early 1980s, takes on a fundamental value in their testimonial accounts. In tune with this and based on her reading of the Shoah literature, Tzvetan Todorov argues that women were more susceptible to helping each other and building spaces of solidarity and collective support (2009: 84). These spaces of solidarity and collective support can be found in different ways in testimonial narratives written by exiled writers such as María José de Chopitea in *Sola* (1954) and Mada Carreño in *Los diablos sueltos* (1975). In this case, these two works are considered novels, although we can identify a strong testimonial or autobiographical basis that places them in the category of testimonial novels or "self-fictions."

The objective of the essay is to study how the "ethics of care" is reflected in these accounts of women exiled in Mexico in order to detect certain specificities of the female experience of Republican Spanish exile. This study will demonstrate that the voice of surviving women is essential for a thorough understanding of the process of territorial dislocation suffered by the Republican community after the Civil War, as well as to assess the contribution that these female narratives have made to the process of social remembrance[1]. The testimonial narrative produced by women recovers the chaotic

[1] This essay can be read as a continuation of my article published in *Diablotexto Digital. Revista de crítica literaria* under the title "Una memoria transatlántica de mujeres: la experiencia concentracionaria en la narrativa testimonial escrita por españolas republicanas exiliadas en México" (2020), in which I proposed, through the analysis of the testimonial works of Silvia Mistral, Cristina Martín and Mada Carreño, the need to recover the stories that make explicit the experiences of women in the French concentrationary system and in the journey to Latin American exile, as well as the spaces filled by them, which have usually been overlooked in the narratives produced by other writers (Simón, 2020, p. 109).

scenes experienced in border territory, as well as the arbitrariness with which some of them were assigned to different concentrationary spaces called reception centers, where their freedom of movement and action was significantly reduced, as it is the case of the protagonist of *Los diablos sueltos*, by Mada Carreño. The transatlantic journey to Latin American exile plays a significant role in these narratives. Although many women made it accompanied by husbands and children, some of them had to face it alone, as the protagonist of *Sola*, by María José de Chopitea. Both testimonial novels dwell on the different organizational strategies that women put in place in all those spaces associated with the departure from Spain, the French concentrationary system, and the host country in exile. Strictly women's experiences such as motherhood and upbringing are highlighted in these narratives, as well as the recounting of scenes associated with friendship, solidarity, mutual aid, and companionship, virtues that became instances of the recovery of social ties that the war and defeat had damage.

We believe that knowledge about Spanish men and women in exile, as well as the experience of French concentration sites suffered by this community, is limited if female voices are not taken into account. In this sense, the testimonial narrative produced by women becomes a significant object to complete this knowledge, as well as to assess how women narrated their experience in a literary style.

1. The exile of Spanish Republican women: the departure from Spain, the time in the French concentration camp system, and the journey to the host country.

In 1997 Alicia Alted stated that in the literature on the 1939 exile "man is the central figure in historically significant events, both in books predominantly concerned with political issues and in those with a social and cultural projection" (1997, p. 225). Although in recent decades, this diagnosis has been significantly reversed by the emergence of relevant studies that deal with the literature of exiled women and their cultural intervention in the countries of exile[2], there

[2] Among the indispensable studies for a thorough understanding of the cultural production of exiled Republican women are *Exiliadas. Escritoras, Guerra Civil y*

is still much to be done in terms of the recovery and edition or republication of their works, as well as in terms of reflection on the specific and differential aspects of female memory, given the heterogeneity of identities that made up the collective of exiled women. In short, with regard to the recovery of the cultural memory of the republican exile, the literary production of exiled republican women is one of the objects of research that still demands attention and in-depth study by specialized literary and academic critics.

The year 2019 was significant because it marked the 80th anniversary of the Spanish Republican exile. Numerous cultural and academic activities were developed throughout Spain, as well as in the countries that received the exiles. In October of that year, the Cervantes Institute held the International Congress "Women in the Republican Exile of 1939", whose main objective was to pay specific attention to the female collective constituted by very diverse profiles – from the elite of leading and professional women to those unknown and silenced –, as well as to know the places and sites intended for the Republican women, such as concentration camps, hotels, maternity homes or shelters where they shared time and hardships with a childhood also doomed to exile (Instituto Cervantes, 2019). These objectives diagnose the existence of a field of studies that still remains to be explored, since, as explained in a newspaper that promoted the congress, "if the defeated Spain was relegated to the ditches of silence, the female version of history suffered a double abandonment" (Baquero, 2020). Given that the reconstruction of the protagonists of the Republican exile has focused mostly on male personalities, the celebration of this congress and the motivations for its organization show the vacancy that still exists in the detailed study of the cultural production of the women of the Republican exile.

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memoria, by Josebe Martínez (2007); *De Ciudadanas a exiliadas. Un estudio sobre las republicanas españolas en México*, by Pilar Domínguez Prats (2009) and *Mujer, creación y exilio* (España, 1939-1975), edited by Mónica Jato, Sharon Keefe Ugalde and Janet Pérez (2009). Meanwhile, to understand the roles and position of women during the Spanish Civil War from a gender perspective, it is essential to consult *Recuerdos de la resistencia. La voz de las mujeres de la guerra civil española* (1995), by Shirley Mangini.

The exile of Spanish women has its own particularities. To the urgency of leaving Spain, as Alba Martínez Martínez explains, was an added concern of "guaranteeing one's own survival and that of the family group" (2016, 65). This marked the experience of the exiles as they continued to carry out caregiving tasks which had been an important part of their role during the Civil War. Alicia Alted emphasizes this when she explains that during the conflict, women became key elements who had to replace "the recruited man in agricultural and industrial tasks" (1997, p. 223). In this way, Alted continues, in the rearguard, they carried out multiple tasks of care of the sick, children and the elderly; administration; educational work; economic maintenance of their families; information services (espionage, transport of weapons, liaison); displacements from one place to another in case of danger of bombings or attacks; evacuation in shelters; accompanying children on expeditions to other countries, among others (Alted, 1997, p. 224). This kind of multifunctional training continued in force during the exile for many of these women who, given the socioeconomic circumstances, had not only to attend to domestic matters but also to undertake work responsibilities outside the home in order to keep their families afloat. In the words of Alba Martínez Martínez,

> the survival strategies developed by women during the first years of exile oriented gender mechanisms and practices towards roles that little had to do with the traditional discourse that confined women within the four walls of private space and conceived of public space as an exclusively male entity (2016, p. 80).

In the particular case of exile in Mexico, Pilar Domínguez Prats notes that the women integrated a plural and heterogeneous group in terms of age – the majority ranged between 25 and 40 years old –, marital status, socio-educational status – although the majority could read and write, only a minority were intellectual women – and occupations. Some had been active in political and trade union spaces during the Second Republic and later in the context of the Civil War. In contrast, others accompanied their husbands with political responsibilities. There were housewives, workers, professionals such as secretaries, nurses or teachers, intellectuals, and artists (Domínguez Prats, 1999, pp. 300-301). What is certain is that in exile, many women saw their functions and positions within

the family altered by the massive incorporation into the world of work outside the home. While those dedicated to domestic care tasks had to take on other jobs – linked, for example, to sewing or other commercial enterprises –, others who were professionals and intellectuals had to develop less qualified tasks. At the same time, only a minority could devote themselves to their previous professions as teachers, writers, or journalists (Domínguez Prats, 1999, p. 304). These situations highlight the impressive versatility and capacity for adaptation demonstrated by this group. Even under the conditions inherent to their gender, which led them to face difficulties when they wished to break into the public scene, their main objective was to overcome the difficult ordeal of exile. Moreover, that ordeal encompassed various aspects such as the reconstruction and maintenance of daily life, the support of husbands and children, and also the search for and fulfillment of personal challenges. As Alicia Alted states,

> they were those who tried to rebuild in modest homes, mostly rented, in boarding houses or shared apartments, the world they had lost. They preserved the language, the cuisine, the customs of their country and, at the same time, naturally and quietly, incorporated the habits of the host country. They were a key element in the process of integration of their children, and at the same time, they made the permanent feeling of temporariness, the forced and endless exile of the men, more bearable. They did not usually participate in the men's political discussions. They listened and nodded. Their husbands had their *tertulias* in the café; women met in their homes, where they talked about their children, about how expensive life was... They were active protagonists in the collective cultural events and in the Sunday trips (*jiras*). In short, they were always present, but invisible in their rich and little known private world. (1997, p. 230)

Precisely in terms of this eagerness to survive, I am interested in highlighting a particular characteristic that exile acquired for women and that allows me to introduce the commentary on the texts that make up the present object of study. One of the strategies they used to arrive in the host country and integrate into the new environment was linked to the establishment of solidarity relationships. Thus, Domínguez Prats explains that in the context of exile in Mexico, relations of mutual help among women became essential:

Often, women exiles from the same village or from the same political organization shared sewing tasks, and some couples even shared housing in order to save expenses in the early years in Mexico City. The existence of these networks of personal relationships among women as a form of mutual solidarity encompassed many other aspects of exile life and it is a shared aspect with other migrations] (1999, p. 304-305).

This practice developed in exile had been replicated since the departure from Spain and in the concentration camps, shelters, and other spaces of the French concentrationary system where the Republican women stayed. Jorge de Hoyos takes up the subject of the importance of the networks of affection sustained in exile for the configuration or reconfiguration of the identity of the Spaniards in the host countries. Thus, he mentions the solidarity that women professed to each other in various spaces of socialization, such as patios, parks, and stairways in which they shared experiences (de Hoyos Puente, 2012, p. 30). As it will be illustrated through the novels discussed, the testimonial narrative produced by women is prodigal in the recovery of scenes associated with the establishment of bonds with other women in pursuit of helping others and being helped from the moment of departure from Spain to the arrival at the exile destination.

2. The testimonial narrative about the French camps and exile produced by women.

From the beginning of the republican exile to the present day, it is possible to reconstruct a set of narratives with a strong testimonial imprint written by women. They are stories presenting different degrees of fictional and literary re-elaboration (ranging from more autobiographical forms such as memoirs to more self-fictional and novel-like forms). Usually, they include the sequence of the exodus from Spain, the period spent in France, in which many of them were confined in spaces associated with the French concentrationary system, and also the journey by boat to host countries, often Latin American and especially Mexico and Argentina. Until the mid-1970s, this narrative was published in exile, as in the case of *Éxodo...* (1940), by Silvia Mistral, which is also one of the first testimonies

published on the subject; *El incendio. Ideas y recuerdos* (1954), by Isabel del Castillo, published in Argentina by Americalée, or *Sola* (1954), by María José de Chopitea, among others.

In the final stages of the Franco regime, testimonial titles were published in Mexico on the female experience in the French concentration camp system and exile – *Éxodo de los republicanos españoles* (1972), by Cristina Martín, and *Los diablos sueltos*, by Mada Carreño (1975) –, but they also began to appear in Spain, at a time when some important publishing spaces were made available, even when democracy was still a long way off. Teresa Pàmies, for example, recounts in *Quan érem refugiats (Segona part de Quan érem capitans)* (1975) her time in the Magnac-Laval refugee camp, near Limoges. The last thirty years have been particularly prolific in publishing women's memoirs about French concentration camps and exile. On the one hand, an interesting example has been the publication of the memoirs of Luisa Carnés*, De Barcelona a la Bretaña francesa* (2014), which had remained unpublished for decades. Likewise, the recovery of the collaborations published in the Spanish press by Cecilia G. de Guilarte in the 1970s, *Un barco cargado de...* (2012), constitutes a relevant case of recovered texts written by influential women in Republican exile. On the other hand, memoirs about the female experience in the French camps and exile emerged in this last period, such as *Mi exilio* (2005), by María García Torrecillas; *Memorias del exilio* (2005), by Francisca Muñoz Alday; *Éxodo. Del campo de Argelès a la maternidad de Elna* (2006), by Remedios Oliva Berenguer; *Crónicas de una vida* (2009), by Benita Moreno García, among others, written by women who were not necessarily active in militant or intellectual and/or journalistic spaces in the host countries. In these works, they bring to light their experiences as republican citizens – workers, mothers, sisters, wives, daughters – who, after many years, decide to publish their works in order to participate in the recovery of memory.

In this last period, it is worth mentioning the publication of a volume in Mexico entitled *Nuevas raíces. Testimonios de mujeres españolas en el exilio* (1993) which brings together the stories of several women who went through different experiences in the context of exile. The compilation of this type of testimonies on intense experiences, such as those of concentration camps or exile,

is a form of collaborative writing that has also emerged in other countries as a way of recovering the experiences of women survivors. Such is the case of Argentina, where, for example, *Ese infierno. Conversaciones de cinco mujeres sobrevivientes de la ESMA* (2001), has been written by several women who came together to tell each other about their experiences in that clandestine detention center during the last military dictatorship (1976-1983). In the prologue of *Nuevas raíces,* it is explicitly stated that the materials come "from the collaboration of several women who were forced to leave their homeland of birth (AAVV, 1993, p. 10), which emphasizes that this publication was group-motivated. The authors, who are not professional writers, linger on the stories of friendship with other women, shared work and travel experiences, thus creating testimonies filled with friendship, solidarity, and comradeship.

It is also interesting the aforementioned volume *De Barcelona a la Bretaña francesa*, by Luisa Carnés, published in 2012. Although it is the autobiographical account of the writer and journalist from Madrid, it is interesting to note the importance of these chronicles to the women she encountered after leaving Barcelona and on her way through the south of France. From some workers who assumed tasks on the war front, such as Montserrat or Amparo Fernández, to an older woman and a nun from a Valencian convent with whom she lived moments of anguish in the borderlands, the predilection for referring to women's stories is noticeable, which reaffirms the intention of rescuing from oblivion the experiences of her peers, as well as the sites they passed through, such as the hostel of Le Pouliguen, in Brittany, mostly inhabited by women (Plaza Plaza, 2012, p. 42) and of which we have information thanks to the testimony of Carnés.

The two works that make up the present object of study – *Sola* (1954), by María José de Chopitea (1915-?), and *Los diablos sueltos* (1975), by Mada Carreño (1914-2000) – have some similarities. First, their authors are women who worked in cultural and intellectual fields, thus, as Domínguez Prats explains, "they had a more visible activity than most of the exiled women", since "they published in the Mexican press, edited books of autobiographical content or fiction and essays, but even so they were not studied and recognized for many years" (Domínguez Prats, 1999, p. 212).

Despite the constraints of their gender, both found in Mexico cultural and publishing spaces where they could develop intellectually.

Secondly, exile was, for them, a turning point in their narrative production. María José de Chopitea came from a bourgeois family from Barcelona and had received a high-quality education in Spain and Switzerland. However, it was not until she arrived in Mexico in 1946 that she collaborated in exile newspapers and participated in literary gatherings. Among other interesting tasks, she was secretary of Acción Democrática Internacional and one of the founders of the Mexican publishing house Premià (OG/JRLG, 2016b: 82). As for Mada Carreño, although she had begun her militant and journalistic work in Spain before and during the Civil War – she participated in the youth movement Alerta and wrote in publications of the Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas – it was during the Mexican exile when she achieved prestige in the literary and publishing world, and also intervened in other artistic fields such as drawing, theater, dance and singing (JB/SJ/EB/OG, 2016a, p. 520). The fact that the two works discussed have been published in Mexico, the country where the two authors were received, shows that the writing project of these women found a way to materialize out of the transatlantic crossing.

Thirdly, and in relation to the above, it should be noted that the theme of exile is central in these novels. They allow us to learn about the circumstances experienced by women during the exodus, the passage through the French concentration camp system, and the journey into exile from a perspective that does not usually appear in the narrative produced by men. The individual experiences are intertwined with those of other women with whom they shared the experience; the solidarity and identification with a community of women are fundamental elements highlighted in these testimonies. In all the stations of this journey, there are episodes that show empathy and mutual help towards their companions, towards other women they meet along the way, in the field or on the journey, as well as allusions to gestures of solidarity from other women towards the narrators. In the same way, these narratives include female experiences associated with motherhood, childcare, mutual protection, the suffering of patriarchal oppression, and resistance to

social mandates that are not usually explicitly shown in male narratives. Through the restitution of these female experiences and subjectivities to the discourse on this chapter of the republican exile, it is possible to identify certain feminist practices exercised by these republican women, who carried in their cultural and political formation ascribed to republicanism, as well as in their professional trajectory, the germ of demands that are still on the agenda today.

3. Sola (1954) and Los diablos sueltos (1975): solidarity and "ethics of care"

In *Frente al límite* (*Face à l'extrême*), Todorov associates the capacity for care with the maternal attitude of women in the Nazi concentration camps. Thus, he identifies that they survived better both in quantitative and qualitative terms and attributes this to the fact that "they were more practical and more likely to help each other" (Todorov, 2009, p. 84). Far from any gender determinism, it is true that in the narrative produced by exiled women, there are sequences associated with these gestures of protection towards others, but especially towards other women, as well as the importance in the stories of collective action to achieve common benefits, joint recreational activities in the concentration camps or in the means of transport that led them to the host country and even in exile, experience of friendship between women, motherhood and upbringing, often shared.

These themes are part of the usual repertoire of women's narratives, thus configuring a sort of "ethics of care" reminiscent of Carol Gilligan's concept, who developed the idea that autonomy is illusory, and isolation has a very high price, so we must be aware of the value of interdependence and relationality (Gilligan, 2013, p. 45)[3]. Historically, Gilligan explains, justice has been placed alongside

[3] In the volume *In a different voice* (1982) Gilligan vindicates care as a value that should be as important as justice – usually associated with rationality and, therefore, with masculinity, but which was not so because it was developed only in the private and domestic life of women. Thus, with the concept "ethics of care", the author intended to universalize the obligations of care to the other and to

reason, the mind and the "self," attributes considered to belong to the "rational man," while care, along with emotions, the body, and relationships are qualities usually linked to women, idealized while belittled in patriarchy (2013, p. 54). The revision of this binary system invites redefining these roles because, in a democratic context, care should be understood as a behavior inherent to the human being, so that an "ethics of care" should not be read as feminine but feminist and, therefore, revolutionary or liberating. In line with Francisco Javier León-Correa, the fundamental element of the "ethics of care" is relationality, insofar as "the person is essentially oriented towards interpersonal, family and social relationships". So, he continues:

> The relationship is always essential for the human being, for his personal development – masculine or feminine –, and for the unfolding of his own possibilities in complementarity with the other, and this point serves as a dialogue with the positions of the philosophy of dialogue, of the "I-thou" relationship, and of the "reciprocity of consciences", which is related [...] with the feminist ethics of care of the "concrete other (León-Correa, 2008, p. 58).

The novels produced by women about the Republican exile are prodigal in the selection of narrative sequences associated with this "ethic of care" understood not as an intrinsic feminine behavior, but as a survival strategy and a way of reconstructing the social ties that the war and the tearing of exile had produced at the community level. In this sense, we can consider them as vindicatory discourses of "relationality" as a way of overcoming the adverse political conditions that were imposed on the Spanish republican community.

In *Sola* (1954), María José de Chopitea develops a peritextual fiction in which the dialogue between two women is the fundamental writing motor. In the prologue, entitled "Pórtico," the author mentions her relationship with a certain Montserrat who, in the novel, turns out to be her own fictionalized version. The author declares that since childhood, the two were "dearly inseparable", which is why friendship is the emphasized relationship between them and from which trust is generated so that the girl would confide her personal papers, which constitute the basis of the narration:

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understand relationality as a human behavior, regardless of the burden associated with gender (Camps, 2013, p. 7-8).

I did not reject them nor did I dare, at any time, to interrupt her. She seemed hallucinated. I listened to her in silence with the greatest curiosity and respect, and in her stories, I discovered a Montserrat forged as metals are forged: with suffering and joy (de Chopitea, 1954, p. 11).

Thus, loving listening is the foundational action of this novel, which implies the clearly relational act that is at the basis of the concept of testimony. There is no testimony without the disposition of someone who listens. Therefore, as Gilligan explains, the first step in the re-establishment of broken social ties is the communalization of trauma, that is, "being able to tell the story to someone who listens with the certainty that you can trust the person to faithfully retell it to others in the community" (Gilligan, 2013, p. 15). This gesture originates from the "ethics of care" to which Gilligan alludes and becomes transparent in this peritextual fiction with which María José de Chopitea begins her autobiographical-imprinted novel.

Told in the first person, the novel delineates a Montserrat who defines herself as an independent and autonomous woman from the first pages. In Barcelona, before leaving the country, she worked as a telephone operator at the Hotel Majestic, historically identified as one of the gathering places for politicians and diplomats during the Second Republic. Towards the end of the Civil War, she establishes a love affair with a member of the Mexican diplomatic corps, with whom she finally flees Catalonia. The selection of images during the story of the messy and distressing exodus is linked to the experience of women from the identification of the protagonist herself as "one of so many Spaniards snatched away by the flood of defeat" (de Chopitea, 1954, p. 133). Thus, in the border chaos the narrator describes the episode of a woman giving birth at the side of the road: "In a ditch, at the side of the road, a woman was giving birth; others helped her. The passers-by, not stopping, watched, respectfully, the advent of a new life". It also refers to the desperate situation of another woman with a cadaverous face (de Chopitea, 1954, p. 136) who decided to throw her child into a van to be received by a *Mosso d'Esquadra* [member of the Catalonia's autonomous police force] and thus save his life amid the exodus and the danger of the bombardments.

The women's flight to the French border was marked by this type of extreme situation during which they were involved in the care of children, the care of the sick and elderly, and the self-preservation of their own lives, even in vulnerable circumstances such as pregnancy. In *Sola*, as in other women's narratives, these types of specific scenes of their experience are visibilized. An example is found in *Éxodo. Diario de una refugiada española*, by Silvia Mistral, a less fictionally loaded story than María José de Chopitea's novel. The narrator – close to the figure of a chronicler – recovers episodes associated with solidarity among women, such as a group of women who robbed a truck with merchandise and distributed it among those passing by (Mistral, 1940, p. 26), as well as harsh experiences undergone by women, such as the suicide of a nurse, who could not tolerate the anguish caused by the chaotic situation of the exodus and threw herself into the river (Mistral, 1940, p. 39).

The vulnerability of a woman traveling alone, that is, without the company of a husband, is evident in the story right from its title. José Carlos, the diplomat with whom Montserrat is romantically involved, must embark to Mexico while they are in border territory. She does not have documentation, and separating from her partner causes her great insecurity, since if the authorities discovered her, "she would end up in a concentration camp without remedy" (de Chopitea, 1954, p. 161). Therefore, she decides to go to Geneva as soon as possible in search of a family that had taken her in some time before, during her studies in that city. There, the protective figure of a woman, Maman Suisse, who receives and contains her during those days, emerges. It is the relationship with a woman, in this case, a maternal one, that brings her security in these circumstances.

Montserrat's adventure continues until she manages to embark to Mexico from Bordeaux, thus initiating the account of the journey to the host country. The port cities from which one departs for exile are spaces strongly associated with transit. These are places where dislocated and wandering subjectivities circulate and see the materialization of uprootedness as well as uncertainty in the face of the newness generated by the imminent relocation. At the Central Travel Agency in that city, the protagonist meets a Japanese woman who is applying for free accommodation. The girl finds it difficult to

make herself understood in French and is clearly in financial trouble. Montserrat offers her company and the promise to put her up with her at the Young Women's Christian Association (Y.W.C.A.), for which she has a letter of recommendation. She then comments: "As if we had always known each other, together we went to Notre Foyer, which was the name of that Association in Bordeaux" (de Chopitea, 1954, p. 276). It is interesting to note the comment about this social organization that was founded in the United Kingdom to offer assistance to women in vulnerable conditions and that Montserrat contacted to ask for shelter prior to her departure. Like the Red Cross, through, for example, the Elna Maternity Home, this association may have provided support to republican women through the intermediation of women from other countries who came into contact with them, as Montserrat describes after her encounter with the ladies in Geneva.

The ship voyage ended without major sorrow for the protagonist, who was relieved to start friendships with "transitory friends" such as the Japanese woman and two Filipino women. The conversation and recreation among the four of them mitigated the anguishing effects of the journey to exile. Having just arrived in New York City, Montserrat again experienced a feeling of insecurity before the unknown environment that was only reversed by expressions of help from other women, such as, for example, a stranger who invited her to take a room together in order to safeguard their savings (de Chopitea, 1954, pp. 288-289). Thus, the solidarity she had shown with the Japanese woman now returns to herself in the gesture of this stranger. The networks of mutual aid among women are invisible but active in this context of uprootedness and wandering. In that North American city, before leaving for Mexico, she makes contact with other members of the Y.W.C.A. who invite her to visit some of the city's tourist attractions.

Montserrat's arrival in Mexico is full of disappointments. Although she celebrates her reunion with José Carlos, the truth is that expectations have been much higher than reality. The relationship soon falls apart and, even worse, is filled with episodes of violence towards her. Scenes of jealousy, physical violence, and even death threats turn the relationship into a hell from which Montserrat cannot easily escape. Even so, she overcomes the adverse

circumstances and decides to look for work and stable housing. Doña Carmelita, the landlady of the establishment where she is staying, accompanies her with tenderness and attention. It is usually women's networks – friends, co-workers – who support her after the violent episodes that plunge her into deep crises and damage her health. Hence, at a certain moment she affirms: "Thanks to the courage that my new friends instilled in me, I was able to overcome that crisis of anguish and remorse" (de Chopitea, 1954, p. 418).

Although the protagonist of the novel does not manage to overcome the patriarchal mandates, since she comes to justify the gender violence that José Carlos exercises over her – sometimes due to his alcohol and drug excesses – and even agrees to marry him, the truth is that the ending can be read in the key of resistance. Montserrat makes a radical decision in the last part: she separates from José Carlos and moves to Arroyozarco, where she rebuilds her life with the rubble of dreams (de Chopitea, 1954, p. 463). There she assumes an active role as she commits herself to the indigenous and peasant community. She taught children to read and write. She quickly made contact with the women of the area, who reached to her "to write a letter to the absent relative; then, to seek advice", and she adds: "that is how I entered not only into the homes, but also many times into the hearts of the families" (de Chopitea, 1954, p. 470). Her days are filled with social work and companionship to this rather neglected population in which she works as a teacher and counselor. Among all these people, she is particularly protective of Cecilia, whom she accompanies during the gestation of her son and whose upbringing she shares when they both end up settling in the Mexican capital.

From Montserrat's life story, the title of the novel admits two readings. Judging by the level of dependence exhibited by the protagonist in the first part, which corresponds to her departure from Spain and her landing in Mexico, it alludes to loneliness as the absence of male companionship, that is, of a man's protection of a woman. However, in exile, this protagonist becomes empowered and overcomes the adverse circumstances to which she was pushed precisely by the violent action of José Carlos. Therefore, a second interpretation allows us to vindicate the strengthening of this woman's independence who can rearrange her life in pursuit of

personal and professional goals with the help of other women and without the company of a man. From this point of view, loneliness does not have a negative significance, but rather reaffirms a woman's autonomy in a society whose threats are fought by the construction of solidarity networks of peers who act in pursuit of mutual help.

Solidarity among women is also a central theme in *Los diablos sueltos* (1975), by Mada Carreño, a novel in which, as in *Sola*, one can sense the fictionalized recreation of the author's experience. Born in Madrid in 1914, Mada Carreño was a writer, journalist, and translator. She participated in publications of the Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas and the newspaper *Alerta*. When the war ended, she managed to move to France with her husband, Eduardo Ontañón, and then embarked on the Sinaia in 1939 to Mexico. There she worked as a journalist in *Revista de Revistas*, the newspaper *Excélsior* and *Hoy y mañana*. She ventured as María José de Chopitea into the publishing world since, together with Ontañon and Joaquín Ramírez Cabañas, she co-founded the Xochitl publishing house (JB/SJ/EB/OG, 2016, p. 520). She also devoted herself to poetry and children's literature, which, together with the romantic novel, was cultivated especially by exiled women, a literary source of work that allowed them, although with time limitations, to develop other cultural and literary activities.

Los diablos sueltos was published in 1975 by Novaro and was reprinted in 2019 by Josebe Martínez in Renacimiento publishing house. The novel is narrated in the first person by Marina, a journalist, and activist who lives in Valencia during the last stages of the Civil War after having left the party. The story focuses on her departure from Spain accompanied by her husband Ignacio, as well as on her stay in Ravissolet-sur-Pré, a border town where she is lodged. Together with other women, she lives there in a house prepared by the authorities for Spanish refugees. Thanks to her knowledge of the French language, Marina is employed in the home of a lady of the village. As in *Sola*, we perceive some autobiographical references that lead to establish a self-fictional pact between the novel and the reader.

The first important association between women arises at the beginning when Marina and her sister are living together in Valencia

after their retirement. Thanks to repeated flashbacks, it is possible to know part of their family's past. Raised in a traditional family, they were no strangers to patriarchal mandates. The older sister, Celia, was prevented by her parents from studying music because of the "dangers and terrible misfortunes" (Carreño, 1975, p. 21) that women could suffer in that field. The brother, León, was destined to continue his father's work in the bookbinding workshop. With a rebellious spirit, Marina managed to defy those mandates and decided to study and write in newspapers as part of her activist life, which provoked the respect and admiration of her sister (Carreño, 1975, p. 22). Marina is a strong and defiant protagonist, determined to challenge the preconceptions in vogue, strongly influenced by the model of the republican woman, with modern and progressive ideals, a regular participant in the intellectual and political circles of the Second Republic.

Even in retreat, she will exercise political and journalistic commitments alongside her husband Ignacio, from whom she must separate at the French border. Although they agree to meet again in Camprodón, Marina faces the road on her own, and the rest of the novel takes place with the desire for this reunion. Just as in *Sola*, this protagonist develops without the protection of a man in a moment of extreme vulnerability, such as the exodus. At the border, there are recurrent episodes in which she interacts with other women, either assisting or accompanying them. Once in Camprodón, although she does not manage to find her partner, she approaches a police station, where she finds a group of mostly women waiting for their husbands to come and pick them up. Amid an atmosphere of anguish and chaos, Marina intercedes in the care of her friend's daughter and organizes, together with three companions, the feeding of the children and the preparations to resume the journey (Carreño, 1975, p. 139). At different moments of the itinerary, the protagonist will act to bring order in the midst of confusing or disorderly scenes in which the role of women is fundamental for survival in the absence of their partners.

At another point along the way, in Molló, the protagonist goes to a hospital to look for her friend Oliva, who was pregnant and had been taken to the hospital as a result of an indisposition. Overcrowded with women, children, and sick people, the hospital

served as a shelter, and it is there where the protagonist perceives for the first time the uneasiness before the impossibility of leaving, as the soldiers who stood by the entrance warn her. Overcrowding, confusion, lack of supplies and insufficient personnel are part of the scenario. Amid the chaos and in the absence of a doctor or a nurse, Marina herself assists the laboring woman (Carreño, 1975, p. 164). The hospital experience, although negative, shows her that the company of other women is a form of survival. Therefore, once she recovers her calm, she decides to rest and chooses to approach a group of women who sleep in the precariousness of that space and who constitute for her a safe shelter:

> I get as close as I can to my neighbor, who is wrapped from head to toe in a dark blanket. I press myself against the softness of her flesh, against her sour smell, until a delicious warmth begins to invade my knees (Carreño, 1975, p. 166).

After a few days, Marina manages to get on a truck with republican women and sets off for a new shelter located in Ravissolet-sur-Pré. Upon arrival, she quickly intercedes as a translator between her companions and the local authorities. Thus, her knowledge of French positions her as a representative of the group and brings her some advantages. Although the narrative does not delve into the living conditions in the shelters, it does highlight Marina's participation in the tasks of intermediation with the authorities and the organization of the cleaning and care routines. Through her intervention, she manages to improve certain material aspects of her companions' daily lives, such as food and clothing. She even manages to get a second house set up for the group's comfort.

An interesting aspect of the novel is how the refugee women bond with their neighbors in the village, which shows that some shelters of the French concentration camp system had very permeable borders through which these exchanges were possible. During the first days in the village, the refugee women circulate in the streets and meet their local peers, who invite them to have coffee or lunch in their homes. Unlike the men in the concentration camps, the Spanish women enjoy a kind of freedom, although conditioned by the continuous surveillance of the authorities. On one occasion, Marina meets Mme. Talebot and succeeds in being employed in her house, where she has access to much more

convenient lodging than in the two houses where the authorities accommodated the other refugees. Mme. Talebot makes her protégée, and it is there that she gains access to newspapers and news about other refugees. She also overhears conversations between the house owner and other women, through which she learns that a group of Republican women had arrived in the neighboring town and, less fortunate than her and her companions, had been imprisoned (Carreño, 1975, p. 225).

From a position that could be considered privileged, Marina continues her fights to improve the living conditions of her companions in the shelter. She asks the mayor for an improvement in the food supply and then gets the mayoress to organize, with the help of other women from the town, a donation of clothes for the refugees. The bonds of solidarity between them grew stronger as the days went by. At the same time, she organizes a visit to a women's shelter located in a nearby town, Revel. There she intends to make contact with possible acquaintances. The women there do not enjoy the freedom of circulation that they have in Ravisolet. She, therefore, tries to influence the authorities of this village through the mayor and thus amplifies the bonds of solidarity with her community of reference. Establishing ties, which we can read as gestures of “relationality”, permeates the actions of the protagonist, who assumes that in order to adapt to this new situation in France it is necessary to strengthen community ties both with her peers and with the French ladies of the town, and eventually with other republicans in similar conditions.

The novel concludes when Marina finally manages to reestablish contact with Ignacio and also with her sister Celia. The last scene at the station shows the protagonist waiting for a train that takes Ignacio to Paris. Unfortunately, she does not manage to see him, and with some desolation, she sets out on her way back to the Talebots' house. Again, the train station contributes to the sense of transience that surrounds all these women who, like Marina, have left Spain and for whom the state of wandering consolidates as the days go by.

Final comments

The feeling of tearing runs through the pages of the two novels we have discussed in this opportunity. In both protagonists, Montserrat and Marina, we can guess the background of the experience lived by two women, María José de Chopitea and Mada Carreño, who found in Mexico publishing opportunities to make known their literary work and became spokespersons through their pen of a whole generation of Spanish republican women marked by exile. Hence, in addition to the possible autobiographical correspondences that allow us to consider these stories as self-fictional, there is a powerful testimonial intention registered in these novels insofar as they speak out against the oppression experienced by women during those episodes of the departure from Spain, the time spent in shelters, hospitals and other spaces that were part of the French concentrationary system, the journey and the settling in the host country.

It is not arbitrary that in different moments of the exile – one in the mid-fifties, the other twenty years later – the themes selected by these authors stand out for recovering the experience lived particularly by women and the conflicts they suffered while visibilizing the areas through which they passed in that period marked by the confusion and disorder of the flight from Spain in 1939, all aspects that were not mentioned in the testimonial narratives produced by other writers. Although the novels suggest that these women felt vulnerable and unprotected in the absence of their companions, many of whom were imprisoned in other concentration camps, the fact is that, for the most part, the different types of women who appear in these pages show strength and autonomy to face the extreme situation they were going through. Moreover, they mainly establish bonds of solidarity, companionship, and mutual help with other women. They accompany one another during the exodus, organize and protect each other. As they carry their children, they count on the collaboration of others to keep them alive and healthy. They help each other in extreme situations such as childbirth and violence against them. When they come across the elderly and the sick along the way, they make their knowledge and their bodies available to assist them. In the shelters they reach, they replicate organizational strategies they practiced during the war and the departure from Spain. They share food and

clothing and organize educational and entertainment activities. They delimit tasks and collectively think about how to overcome economic obstacles. These narrative sequences and many others associated with the women's experience are compiled in these novels, which differ from those written by men, as they prioritize the theme of caring as a necessary element for survival. Hence, we identify in them the configuration of an "ethic of care" that rejects individualism as a valid form of survival. On the contrary, the option for survival is based on preserving or reinventing community relations in unfavourable scenarios.

In *Strangers Knocking at the Door* (2016), Zygmunt Bauman believes that, in the face of the international economic crisis, responsible for the emergence of millions of migrant individuals who live in conditions of extreme precariousness and who are continually rejected in first world countries where they seek to improve their living situation, the only answer is solidarity among human beings, since there is no other way to overcome this crisis (Bauman, 2016, p. 24). More than 70 years ago, for these Spanish Republican women, protagonists of an experience analogous to that of so many refugees who are currently in incessant transit, solidarity became a fundamental tool to resist the threat of a totalitarian power that expelled them from Spain, as well as to build a new home for themselves in the host country. From their memory, captured in the pages of these novels, we can extract pieces of lessons to improve our own ways of inhabiting the world we live in.

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