

‘We have come to place you at liberty and to burn the convent’: Masculinity, Sexuality and Anticlerical Violence during the Spanish Civil War

Maria Thomas (PhD candidate, Royal Holloway University of London)

This essay is an extract from a PhD thesis dealing with popular anticlerical violence during the Second Spanish Republic and the Spanish Civil War, which was submitted in December 2011.

‘We have come to place you at liberty and to burn the convent’: Masculinity, Sexuality and Anticlerical Violence during the Spanish Civil War¹

In this Spain of henpecked husbands, the priests control the women and the women control the men

‘Lázaro’ in Miguel de Unamuno’s ‘San Manuel Bueno, Martir’²

Though the nuns were threatened frequently by the committee and the militiamen, they were not molested physically at all...in spite of exhortations which the reds made to them, telling them that they were now completely free.

- Report from Madrid’s Diocesan Archive on the civil war experiences of Ciempozuelos’ Oblate nuns.³

On 17-18 July 1936, a group of rightwing army officers staged a military rebellion against the democratically elected government of the Second Spanish Republic. Their coup, which would escalate into the Spanish Civil War, geographically divided Spain and paralysed the republican state, provoking a radical fragmentation of power on territory which remained under republican authority. With the republican police and armed forces dislocated, *de facto* power passed to a chaotic tapestry of newly constituted ‘micro powers’ – such as committees, militia patrols and private prisons (*checas*) – formed by the armed workers who had defeated the rebellion.⁴ In Madrid, eight days after the coup, the Superior of the city’s *Padres Paúles* religious order, José Ibañez Mayandía, was apprehended by a group of militiamen while on his way to say early morning mass. At their recently established headquarters, located in a former religious school, his captors removed all his clothes and tied his hands behind his back. They then forced him to parade through the building’s corridors surrounded by local adolescent boys who whipped him with straps and sticks. The following day, they killed him and buried his body in the garden.⁵

¹ The quote appears in Joan Connelly Ullmann, *The Tragic Week: A Study of Anti-clericalism in Spain, 1875-1912*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), p.21.

² Miguel de Unamuno, *San Manuel Bueno, Mártir* (Spain: Ediciones Cátedra, 2008) p. 136.

³ Archivo Diocesano de Madrid, Persecución Religiosa y Reorganización Diócesis (ADM, PRRD), Caja 5/28: *Estado actual material y moral de la Parroquia de Ciempozuelos*. All further references to Madrid’s diocesan documents are to ‘provisional numbers’.

⁴ Julián Casanova, *La Iglesia de Franco* (Crítica: Barcelona, 2005), p.174; José Luis Ledesma, ‘La santa ira popular del 36: La violencia en guerra civil y revolución, entre cultura y política’, J. Muñoz, J. L Ledesma and J. Rodrigo (Coordinators) *Culturas y políticas de la violencia España Siglo XX* (Madrid: Siete Mares, 2005), pp. 179-182.

⁵ Archivo Histórico Nacional, Causa General (AHN, CG) legajo 1557-1: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exps. 2/61-2, legajo 1557-2: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exps. 5/192, 5/193; José Francisco Guijarro, *Persecución Religiosa y Guerra Civil: la Iglesia en Madrid 1936-1939* (Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros, 2006), pp.375-76.

This incident formed part of a wave of violence against Catholic property and personnel which occurred on republican territory during the five months immediately following the July military coup. The scale, intensity and context of this violence were completely new, but the attitudes and experiences which lay behind it were not. During the first three decades of the twentieth century, long-established, traditional popular anticlerical attitudes among rural and urban workers had become fiercer and increasingly politicised, largely as a consequence of demographic, social, economic and political changes sparked by industrialisation, urbanisation and the effects of the First World War. When the Second Republic was proclaimed in April 1931, huge numbers of workers already shared a strong, markedly politicised anticlerical collective identity. This identity was grounded in rejection of what they experienced as the Church's stifling sway over their everyday lives, its power to determine the meanings of public spaces, and the clergy's unflinching alliance with elite sectors, the monarchy, and the repressive state security forces.

During the peacetime republican years (1931-1936), tremendous expectation aroused by the government's promised secularising measures turned to bitter frustration regarding the practical ineffectiveness of the reforms. As the Church mobilised Catholics on a mass scale against the Republic, manifesting its support for reactionary rightwing political forces, popular anticlerical attitudes were toughened and radicalised. Growing numbers of politicised anticlerical workers, most of whom joined the socialist UGT (*Unión General de Trabajadores*) or the anarchist CNT (*Confederación Nacional de Trabajo*) after April 1931, became increasingly determined to secularise society from the bottom up, battling on the streets with Catholic forces for domination of public spaces. All this meant that when the effects of the military coup radically altered the structure of political opportunities on republican territory, many anticlerical workers had no doubts regarding the clergy's participation in the coup, or the necessity of the Church's disappearance. This is plainly demonstrated by the figures: 6,832 priests, monks and nuns suffered extrajudicial execution during the conflict. The destruction of religious buildings and objects was extremely widespread.⁶

⁶ Antonio Montero Moreno, *Historia de la Persecución Religiosa en España, 1936 – 1939* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1961), p.762; Gregorio Rodríguez Sánchez, *El habito y la cruz: religiosas asesinadas en la guerra civil española* (Madrid: Edibesa, 2006), pp.551-60; Julián Casanova, 'Rebelión y revolución: "Abajo la Iglesia, que caiga el poder": La violencia desde abajo', Santos Juliá, Santos (Coordinator), *Víctimas de la Guerra Civil* (Madrid: Ediciones Temas de Hoy, 1999), p.155.

This essay will examine a crucial facet of violence against the clergy: the processes by which male identities, and widespread and evolving popular ideas regarding priests' sexuality and masculinity, influenced the forms and the intensity of the anticlerical violence of the civil war. During the conflict, acts of violent anticlerical collective action were committed primarily by male workers. Although women did take part in attacks upon church property - and occasionally upon religious personnel - they were greatly outnumbered by their male counterparts.⁷ The stripping and humiliation of Padre Ibañez, which graphically displays the intensely masculine face of the violence, is far from unique. The essay makes use of a sample of 151 protagonists of anticlerical acts in the central province of Madrid and the south-eastern coastal province of Almeria. These profiles, which have been extracted from the records of the Francoist dictatorship's military courts and from the *Causa General* (the Franco regime's post civil war quasi-judicial investigation into 'republican wrongdoing'), are employed alongside a combination of further primary and secondary source material.⁸ The essay explores anticlerical violence as an overwhelmingly 'male' phenomenon whose logic and rhetoric were derived from the sexist cultural norms of 1930s Spanish society. In doing so, it scrutinises the complex relationship between male sexuality, masculinity and anticlerical violence. It also investigates the ways in which the rapid social and political change underway during the first third of the twentieth century, and the ensuing struggle to define and fix the fluid boundaries between domestic space and public space which was being waged by male anticlerical workers, had a crucial impact upon the ways in which both priests and nuns were treated by their attackers.

The maleness of anticlerical violence

A cursory examination of this study's sample of anticlerical protagonists from Madrid and Almeria demonstrates, strikingly and unambiguously, the 'maleness' of violence carried out against religious buildings, objects and personnel during the first few months after 17-18 July 1936. In the province of Madrid, eighty-six percent of the protagonists

⁷ For a small selection of these exceptional cases, see AHN, CG legajo 1557-2: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exp. 9/23, 1009-2, exp. 13/5; Montero Moreno, *Persecución Religiosa*, p.395; Luis Miguel Sánchez Tostado, *La Guerra Civil en Jaén: Historia de un horror inolvidable* (Jaén: Catena 3: 2007), pp.148-49; Guijarro, *Persecución Religiosa*, p.404.

⁸ The protagonists have been identified from military court martials (*consejos de guerra*), now housed in the military archives of Madrid and Almeria (Archivo Militar de Madrid (AMM) and Archivo del Tribunal Togado Militar de Almería (ATTMA)) and the records of the Tribunal de Responsabilidades Políticas, held in the Archivo Histórico Provincial de Almería (AHPA, JEE, TRP)

identified by the sample are men; in Almeria, the figure is even higher at ninety-two percent. The vast majority of their victims, too, were male. In the province of Almeria, of the 105 religious personnel killed, not one was a woman.⁹ And although more nuns perished in the province of Madrid than in any other part of the republican zone, victims of anticlerical violence in the capital were still, overwhelmingly, priests and monks.¹⁰ Across the entire republican zone, ninety-seven percent of the victims of anticlerical violence were men.¹¹ These arresting percentages pose a crucial question: why was the anticlerical component of the revolution of summer 1936 so ‘overwhelmingly male on male’?¹²

Anticlerical violence formed part of a wider revolutionary process which occurred in most parts of republican Spain when July 1936’s military coup plunged the state into disarray. Across almost the entire republican zone, burning religious objects and killing religious personnel formed a crucial cornerstone of a proletarian revolution which targeted the representatives of the repressive old monarchical order. These sectors - priests, large landowners, tyrannical local political bosses (*caciques*), industrialists, army officers and rightists - had continued to constitute the *de facto* pillars of power during the peacetime republican years. As a number of recent studies have demonstrated, the agents of revolutionary attempts to redraw irreversibly community boundaries and to reconfigure social relations were, for the most part, men.¹³ In a patriarchal society whose ‘traditional’ cultural norms still confined most women (especially rural women, who constituted the vast majority) to the domestic sphere, substantially restricting their social and political opportunities, it is unsurprising that men were the chief actors in the revolutionary changes. In spite of certain superstructural changes initiated by the Republic, and also in spite of an accelerating

⁹ Rafael Quirosa-Cheyrouze y Muñoz, ‘Anticlericalismo en Almería’, Valeriano Sánchez Ramos and José Ruiz Fernández (coords.), *Actas de las primeras jornadas de religiosidad popular*, Almería 1996 (Almería: Instituto de estudios almerienses, 1997), pp.194-95

¹⁰ The 107 nuns killed in the province represent 10.6% of the overall total of 1,009 religious victims in Madrid. The calculations are mine, using data from Rodríguez Sánchez, *El habito y la cruz*, pp.551-60; Montero Moreno, *Persecución Religiosa*, pp-762-3; and Ángel David Martín Rubio, *Los mitos de la represión en la guerra civil* (Madrid: Grafite, 2005), p.235.

¹¹ Montero Moreno, *Persecución Religiosa*, p.762; Rodríguez Sánchez, *El habito y la cruz*, pp.551-60

¹² Mary Vincent, “‘The keys to the kingdom’: Religious Violence in the Spanish Civil War, July-August 1936”, Chris Ealham and Michael Richards (eds.), *The Splintering of Spain: Cultural History and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Cambridge, 2005), p.86.

¹³ Manuel Ortiz Heras, *Violencia política en la II republica y el primer franquismo: Albecete 1936 – 1950* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1996), pp.99-109; José Luis Ledesma, *Los días de llamas de la revolución: Violencia y política en la retaguardia republicana durante la guerra civil* (Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 2003), pp.269- 76.

process of social and political mobilisation of young urban women in the 1920s and especially the 1930s, women were still far from being at the vanguard of radical change in July 1936.¹⁴

This drastic exclusion of women from the anticlerical collective action of 1936 probably provides sufficient evidence to justify José Álvarez Junco's assertion that popular anticlericalism was a 'product of the dominant patriarchal and misogynistic culture.'¹⁵ Yet the forms of anticlerical violence, and the discourse which surrounded it in the summer of 1936, reflect the machismo and sexism inherent in Spanish society in other, more complex ways. The historian Mary Vincent has observed that for rural and urban male workers, attacks upon priests became a clear means of asserting their own masculinity and sexual potency – a potency which was culturally inseparable from the raw, revolutionary, proletarian power which they now possessed. For poor urban and rural sectors, direct daily experience of living alongside men who, comparatively speaking, worked very little, reinforced age-old traditional anticlerical lore which asserted that priests were lazy and parasitical. Future syndicalist leader Angel Pestaña, for example, was told by his father, an impoverished mine and railway worker, that: 'I work twelve or thirteen hours to earn fourteen *reales*...and a priest, just by wielding his benediction and saying a few words that nobody understands, earns five *duros*.'¹⁶ Huge number of workers therefore identified strongly with the leftwing and republican anticlerical press's endless portrayal of priests as lazy, bourgeois, leechlike class enemies. They constructed the priest as the diametric opposite to their own, virile,

¹⁴ Helen Graham, 'Women and Social Change', Helen Graham and Jo Labanyi (eds.), *Spanish Cultural Studies* (Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.99-115; Mary Nash, *Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War* (Denver: Arden Press, 1995), pp.7-17; Carmen González Martínez, 'Mujeres antifascistas españolas: trayectoria histórica de una organización femenina de lucha', *Las mujeres y la Guerra Civil Española, III Jornadas de estudios monográficos, Salamanca, octubre 1989* (Ministerio de Asuntos sociales: Instituto de la Mujer, 1991), pp.54-55; Shirley Mangini, *Memories of Resistance: Women's Voices from the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), pp.4-6.

¹⁵ José Álvarez Junco in Casanova, quoted in *La Iglesia de Franco*, p.205.

¹⁶ Ángel Pestaña, *Lo que aprendí en la vida* (Bilbao: Zero, 1973), p.9; Jerome R. Mintz, *The Anarchists of Casas Viejas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p.72,73(n); *Fray Lazo*, 03/09/1931 and *La Traca*, 03/09/1931 in Julio de la Cueva, 'El anticlericalismo en la Segunda Republica y la Guerra Civil', Emilio La Parra López and Manuel Suárez Cortina (eds.), *El anticlericalismo en la España contemporánea* (Biblioteca Nueva, 2007); Rafael Comiche Carmona, '¡Trabaja!', *Estudios*, No. 96, 08/1931, p.6; José Álvarez Junco, 'El anticlericalismo en el movimiento obrero', Gabriel Jackson, *Octubre 1934. Cincuenta Años para la Reflexión* (Madrid, Siglo XXI, 1985) pp.283-89.

working class power. In this context, priests' chastity was seen as proof of weakness, effeminacy and 'unnatural' sexuality.¹⁷

This belief that priests were not 'real' men explains to a large degree why they were so often stripped, humiliated and tortured sexually. Militiamen almost always forced captured priests to remove their cassocks; these flowing, feminine 'frocks' (as militiamen often described them) were powerful symbols of the clergy's 'abnormal' sexuality and their idiosyncratic 'otherness'.¹⁸ In Almeria's *Cuartel de Milicianos* prison, the parish priest of the nearby town of Garrucha was forced by guards to strip. They then refused to provide him with replacement clothes, inviting his fellow prisoners to contemplate his ordinary, fleshy, male body.¹⁹ Aboard Almeria's *Astoy Mendi* prison ship, guards ordered one monk from the city's Santa Domingo convent to undress; they then painted the initials 'UHP' on his torso (a phrase meaning 'proletarian brothers, unite!' which emphasised the necessity for collaboration and cooperation between members of all working class organisations).²⁰ In Torrelaguna (Madrid), the parish coadjutor and the chaplain of the Carmelite convent were detained by militiamen and driven to the outskirts of the town. Their captors stripped them naked, tied their feet together and then forced them to run across a field full of burrs and thistles. When this macabre game ended, they were both shot and their corpses were thrown into a nearby river.²¹

As militiamen attempted to impose what was, in reality, an extremely inflexible and narrow definition of male sexuality upon priests, they brought prostitutes into prisons to 'tempt' clerical inmates into breaking their chastity vows. In the town of Instinción (Almeria), militiamen tried to convince the Chaplain of the *Esclavas de la Divina*

¹⁷ José Álvarez Junco, *The Emergence of Mass Politics in Spain: Populist Demagoguery and Republican Culture, 1890-1910* (Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2002), pp.81-3; Vincent, *Splintering*, pp.86-89; Maria Pilar Salomón Chéliz, *Anticlericalismo en Aragón: Protesta y movilización política, 1900 – 1939* (Universidad de Zaragoza, 2002, pp.162-68; de la Cueva, *Anticlericalismo*, p.223

¹⁸ Vincent, *Splintering*, pp.85-6; Álvarez Junco, *Mass Politics*, p.82; Miguel Ángel Melero Vargas, 'Sobre el asesinato de siete capuchinos en Antequera', Lucía Prieto Borrego (coord.), *Guerra y Franquismo en la provincia de Málaga* (Universidad de Málaga, 2005), pp.46-47.

¹⁹ AHN, CG legajo 1164-1: Almería, pieza No. 10, exp. 2/71

²⁰ AHN, CG legajo 1164-1: Almería, pieza No. 10, exp. 3/63

²¹ ADM, PRRD, Caja 4/7, *Sacerdotes Mártires*; Caja 6, *Pueblos: Torrelaguna*

Infantita to marry one of the convent's nuns.²² In its most extreme cases, this masculinised violence manifested itself in gruesome sexual torture. Priests' corpses, recovered from roadsides and fields, were found 'horribly mutilated' or 'destroyed'; sexual organs were removed from many cadavers.²³ Two graphically demonstrative examples of this mutilation are those of the Catalan priest Tomas Comas y Boada, whose attackers tied him to a tree, cut off his genitals and burned him alive, or that of the bishop of Barbastro, who bled to death over several hours in August 1936 after a local man amputated his testicles.²⁴

In the discourse which surrounded this violence, disgust provoked by priestly celibacy was, paradoxically, accompanied by intense ethical censure of the clergy's predatory sexual behaviour. Spanish working class women may have been physically absent from the bulk of 1936's macabre anticlerical proceedings, but their changing position in relation to men in fact lay at the core of the masculinised violence. By the 1930s, many working men, intent upon defending their patriarchal power in the face of the rapid social and cultural changes of the 1920s and 1930s, became engaged in an increasingly fierce competition with priests for access to, and control of, women.²⁵ By the 1930s, ethical criticism regarding the clergy's 'natural lechery', which stemmed originally from direct experience of clerical behaviour and was then transmitted by word of mouth within families and communities, was already deeply rooted in the popular consciousness. The medieval practice of *barraganía*, for example, by which the secular clergy had been permitted by the church authorities to live with concubines, was preserved *de facto* well into the twentieth century by those priests who cohabited with their 'housekeepers' or 'nieces.'²⁶ Rumours of improper sexual relationships between parish priests and female parishioners were a common feature of many communities.²⁷

²² AHN, CG legajo 1164-1: Almería, pieza No. 10, exp. 2/414; Vicente Cárcel Ortí, *La Gran Persecución: España 1931-1939* (Barcelona: Planeta, 2000), pp.227-28.; Alfonso Bullón de Mendoza and Álvaro de Diego, *Historias orales de la guerra civil* (Barcelona: Ariel Historia, 2000), pp.208-9.

²³ AHN, CG legajo 1557-2: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exp. 9/6; 1457-2: Tarragona, pieza No.10, exp.8/12; ADM, PRRD, Caja 2, *Informe de la Parroquia de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción de Aravaca*; Guijarro, *Persecución Religiosa*, p.402; Bullón de Mendoza, *Historias orales*, p.206.

²⁴ AHN, CG legajo 1557-2: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exp. 9/6; AHN, CG legajo 1415: Huesca, pieza No. 10, exps. 4/294-306, 4/309-218; AHN, CG, legajo 1409-1: Barbastro, pieza No. 1; Pilar Salomón, *Anticlericalismo*, p.294

²⁵ José Álvarez Junco, *Octubre 1934*, p.287; Vincent, *Splintering*, p.287.

²⁶ Manuel Pérez Ledesma, Studies on Anticlericalism in Contemporary Spain, *International Review of Social History* 46 (Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, 2001), pp.227-55; Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth: An Account of the Social and Political Background of the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), pp.48-9; Victoria Sau, *Diccionario ideológico*

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, condemnations of priest's 'sexual incontinence', channelled through the leftwing and republican anticlerical press, became ever more vehement. This criticism frequently revolved around the confessional, portrayed as a devious clerical means of invading the domestic sphere, interfering in conjugal relations and seducing women.²⁸ In a situation where the priest could 'talk to [women] alone, and of intimate matters...seduce them with his honeyed words and advise them on delicate matters such as the marriage bed', the secular clergy became, for many men, predatory rivals 'with all women under their power.'²⁹ In 1936, this angry deprecation was present in the way militiamen taunted captured priests. In Almería's *Ingenio* prison, communist bakery worker turned prison guard Francisco Martínez Matarin interrogated one captured priest on a daily basis regarding his sexual misbehaviour. On one occasion, Martínez Matarin displayed a photograph in which his prisoner appeared surrounded by grinning children from the *Cofradía de Niños Hebreos* (a Catholic lay society composed of children) and asked him if they were all his.³⁰

Anticlericalism and private and public spheres

The growing intensity of men's perceived sexual competition with priests can only be understood in connection with the battle being waged by various actors to define and fix the boundaries between the private and public spheres during the first three decades of the twentieth century. On the one hand, the state began to extend its influence ever further into the domestic sphere - into people's homes and private lives. On the most negative, violent level, this growing state penetration meant the arbitrary and draconian public order measures of the Restoration Monarchy (1874-1931) or the Second

feminista, Volumen 1 (Barcelona: Icaria, 2000), pp.55-7; Arturo Barea, *La forja de un rebelde: La forja* (Barcelona: Random House, 2006), pp.25-27.

²⁷ Pilar Salomón, *Anticlericalismo*, p.171; David D. Gilmore, *The People of the Plain: Class and Community in Lower Andalusia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp.148-49.

²⁸ María Pilar Salomón Chéliz, 'Las mujeres en la cultura política republicana: religión y anticlericalismo', *Historia Social* (no.53, 2005), pp.103-18; Beatas sojuzgadas por el clero: la imagen de las mujeres en el discurso anticlerical en la España del primer tercio del siglo XX, *Feminismo/s: revista del Centro de Estudios sobre la mujer de la Universidad de Alicante* (no. 2, 2003), pp.47-48; Manuel Delgado, *Las palabras de otro hombre: anticlericalismo y misoginia* (Barcelona: Muchnik, D.L, 1993); Richard Maddox, *El Castillo: The Politics of Tradition in an Andalusian Town* (University of Illinois, 1993), pp.160-1.

²⁹ Álvarez Junco, *Mass Politics*, p.81.

³⁰ AHN, CG legajo 1164-1: Almería, pieza No. 10, exp. 2/27

Republic's drastic legislation against street vendors and the homeless.³¹ But it could also be seen in the Republic's reformist push for state-driven political, economic and social modernisation – in social welfare initiatives or the advent of 'teaching missions' aimed at bringing education and republican culture to isolated, 'culturally neglected' rural areas.³²

On the other hand, social and cultural changes sparked by industrialisation and rural-urban migration at the turn of the century saw women moving, falteringly and unevenly, from the exclusively domestic orbit into places of increased public visibility. Although the nineteenth century Spanish workforce did already have a female component, women now entered the world of industrial labour and – in spite of considerable obstacles – the leftwing labour movement on a much greater scale than before. In 1931, intense public discussion sparked by the Republic's legislation of female suffrage and legal equality left men in no doubt that women's 'traditional' position was in flux. In a situation where leftwing men did not always trust women politically, and where activists' revolutionary politics rarely extended to a reevaluation of the traditional female role of wife and mother, their attempts to reinforce control over women by keeping them in the domestic orbit propelled them redouble their verbal (and later physical) attacks upon potential challenges to 'traditional' patriarchal relations in the home. This led them, inevitably, to their traditional rival: the priest.³³

This mentality, which was pervasive across the leftwing political spectrum, corresponded to an image of women as weak, suggestible, and in need of patriarchal authority and guidance. In this context, women were seen by many leftwing anticlerical workers as an ideological, political liability as well as a sexual one. By the 1930s, men were statistically far less observant than women; in the urban workers' districts and parts of the rural south where mass attendance was practically non-existent, the

³¹ Chris Ealham, *Class, Culture and Conflict in Barcelona, 1898-1937* (London and New York: Routledge/Cañada Blanch Studies on Contemporary Spain, 2005), pp.17-22, 63-84.

³² Rafael Cruz, *En el nombre del pueblo* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2006), pp.48-49; Sandie Holguín, *Creating Spaniards: Culture and National Identity in Republican Spain* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), pp. 56-80; Helen Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.36 and *Spanish Cultural Studies*, pp.100, 107; Pilar Folguera, 'Espacio público y espacio privado en el Madrid de la Restauración: su influencia en la vida cotidiana', Ángel Bahamonde Magro and Luis Enrique Carvajal (eds.), *La sociedad madrileña durante la Restauración: 1876-1931*, Vol.I (Madrid: Consejería de Cultura, 1989), pp.315-26.

³³ Frances Lannon, 'Women and Images of Women in the Spanish Civil War', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, Vol.I (1991), p.222; Nash, *Defying Male Civilization*, pp.20-5.

community's tiny 'religious minority' was always female.³⁴ The leftwing and republican anticlerical press, seizing upon this 'ignorant' and 'superstitious' ongoing female devotion, claimed that confessors persuaded credulous women to assume ultra-Catholic, rightwing, reactionary political positions. This meant that through the confessional, that symbol *par excellence* of the Church's battle to control individual consciences, women would readily reveal details of their husbands' 'sinful' political activities to eager clerical ears. This assumption had permeated the 1931 parliamentary and media debate over female voting rights. According to many on the anticlerical left, female suffrage threatened 'to extend the disruption which the clergy brought into the home to the sphere of public power'. Female voters, already 'instruments of [the priest's] concupiscence' would also become naive pawns in 'his mercenary calculations' in the political arena.³⁵

Given this ferocious battle against clerical interference in the domestic sphere, it is unsurprising that the confessional booth made a dramatic entrance into the public arena after July 1936. A postcard issued by the illustrated magazine *Mundo Gráfico* at the beginning of the conflict revealed that in Madrid, militiamen had moved cubicles 'which once collected whispered secrets' from churches to central plazas and roundabouts. The booths, completely demystified and stripped of their former power and meaning, were used by boisterous militiamen to hear people's 'confessions' or employed as sentry boxes or newspaper kiosks. Also in Madrid, members of the anarchist CNT found a new, practical use for the confessional booth of Covent of the Sacred Hearts on the centric street of Fuencarral in Madrid, converting it into a henhouse.³⁶

³⁴ ADM, PRRD, Caja 6, *Pozuelo de Alarcón*; Boletín Oficial del Obispado de Madrid-Alcalá (BOOM), 02/05/1935, *Crónica de la Misión General en la Diócesis*, Núm. 1,630 02/05/1935; Shubert, *Social History*, pp.161-3; Frances Lannon, 'Los cuerpos de las mujeres y el cuerpo político católico: autoridades e identidades en conflicto en España durante las décadas de 1920 y 1930', *Historia Social* (no. 35,1999), p.66 and *Privilege*, pp.17-19.

³⁵ *El Radical*, 16/10/1933 in Pilar Salomón, *Feminismo/s*, pp.43-46. Or, as British writer John Langdon Davies bluntly explained in 1936, 'every worker who has a woman in his house who goes to confessional knows that he is being betrayed.' John Langdon Davies, *Behind the Spanish Barricades* (London: Reportage Press, 2007), p.151.

³⁶ AHN, CG legajo 1557-2: Madrid, pieza No. 10, Exp. 5/376; Archivo General de la Administración (AGA) (03) 084.001 F/00778, 32.001/7: Glorieta de Bilbao; (03) 084.001 F/00778, 32.001/22: Confesionario, Olavido; AHN, CG legajo 1557-2: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exp. 5/376; ATTMA, Consejo de Guerra 382/1147, Emilio Gómez Camacho y Otros; AHN, CG legajo 1164-1: Almería, pieza No. 10, exp. 3/103Bullón de Mendoza, *Historias orales*, p.215.

The same sentiments lay behind the ‘revolutionary exhumations’ which were carried out across the republican zone in the early months of the conflict. On the one hand, the digging up and public display of mummified religious remains from church crypts was a crushing ethical indictment of priests’ sexual hounding of women. Those who disinterred the bodies, influenced by years of popular hearsay and anticlerical propaganda, presented the corpses of women and young children as proof of pregnancy and sexual abuse within convents. On the other hand, the exhumations provided a brutal opportunity to attack the Church in its own intimate sphere.³⁷ The events held the clergy’s ‘rotten soul’ up to public scrutiny, turning the tables firmly on lascivious priests and their sexual and ideological incursions into the private sphere.³⁸ These actions, although evidently revolutionary, were underscored by an attitude towards women which revealed anticlericalism as a collective identity rooted profoundly in patriarchal perceptions of gender roles and gender relations. It was an identity which not only excluded women; it also saw them as a reactionary obstacle to ‘progress’.³⁹

‘Liberating’ the nuns

These patriarchal assumptions governed women’s treatment at the hands of anticlerical protagonists after July 1936. Priests and monks, seen as powerful and therefore culpable for the Church’s many perceived crimes, were ‘punished’ in staggering numbers. Nuns, however, like the rest of the female population, were generally viewed by militiamen as helpless victims of priests’ masculine power. This translated into the idea that female members of the religious orders, devoid of the ability to make reasoned judgements and decisions, had been duped into becoming nuns. This image of powerless victimhood generally saved nuns from the violence meted out to their male counterparts.⁴⁰

Interestingly, it also somehow managed to override years of anticlerical propaganda and

³⁷ AHN, CG legajo 1557-1: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exps. 4/189, 9/28, legajo 1530-2, exps. 10/1-10/43; ADM, PRRD, Caja 4/3, *Cosas Sagradas: Cementerios y Sepulturas*; AMM, Consejo de Guerra 353/17862, Carmen Corao Monterde y Ramón Caballero Tato.

³⁸ Bruce Lincoln, *Revolutionary Exhumations in Spain, July 1936*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.27 ,No.2 (Cambridge University Press, April 1985), pp.253-260; Mateo Santos, Reportaje del movimiento revolucionario en Barcelona, cited in Vicente Sánchez-Biosca, *Cine y Guerra Civil Española, del mito a la memoria* (Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 2006), p.75; Jean-Richard Bloch in Francisque Gay, *Dans les flammes et dans le sang: Les crimes contra les églises et les prêtres en Espagne* (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1936), pp.35-36.

³⁹ Mangini, *Memories of Resistance*, pp.25-27

⁴⁰ Vincent, *Splintering*, p.86.

popular hearsay which accused nuns of infanticide, abortion, kidnapping and torture.⁴¹ Similarly, it ignored the ideological power as ‘cultural reproducers of Catholic Spain’ possessed by the thousands of nuns who were still employed as teachers in 1936. Indeed, the 1930s anticlerical press objected to nuns’ educational participation not on the grounds of their power as indoctrinators, but due to their failure to conform to gender stereotypes: education and social work, it was alleged, should be left to those women who ‘know what a mother’s love is.’⁴² Accordingly, across the entire republican zone, the 296 nuns killed represent just 4.3% of the overall victims of anticlerical violence.⁴³

As these figures show, female religious personnel did not entirely escape death. In Madrid, the 107 nuns killed represent 10.6% of the province’s 1,009 religious victims. This elevated figure can be explained in terms of the mounting public panic generated in the capital throughout October and November by air raids and the advance of rebel troops. In November, against a backdrop of renewed political fragmentation provoked by the flight of the government, a desperate scramble occurred to track down and execute the city’s ‘fifth column’ of traitors and spies. A mixture of intense paranoia and extreme political opportunity ‘demolished the dykes of gender’ which had protected female religious personnel in places like Almeria; amid *sacas* (a term meaning the removal of prisoners from jail and their collective execution) and mass shootings, over seventy nuns were executed during late October and November 1936.⁴⁴

Yet these killings were by no means the norm. In Madrid, Almeria, and countless other republican regions, nuns were usually spared from physical harm, but obliged by militiamen to abandon their residences and to carry out manual tasks to aid the war effort. Sometimes they were allowed to remain in their convents and work under supervision, but only if they removed religious symbols from the walls.⁴⁵ In Alcalá de

⁴¹ Demetrio Castro, ‘Palabras de fuego: El anticlericalismo republicano,’ *Journal of Contemporary Spanish Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Routledge, July 2005), p.205.

⁴² Casanova, *Iglesia de Franco*, p.191; Lannon, *Historia Social*, pp.72-4.

⁴³ Rodríguez Sánchez, *El hábito y la cruz*, pp.551-60; Montero Moreno, *Persecución Religiosa*, pp.762-3

⁴⁴ AHN, CG, legajo 1557-1: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exps. 2/258-9, 3/141-2, 4/42-3, legajo 1557-2: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exps. 4/100, 5/8; José Luis Ledesma, ‘Una retaguardia al rojo’, Francisco Espinosa Maestre (ed.), *Violencia roja y azul: España 1936-1950* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2010), pp.180-81; Rodríguez Sánchez, *El hábito y la cruz*, pp. 21-186, 551-609; Ángel David Martín Rubio, *Los mitos de la represión en la guerra civil* (Madrid: Grafite, 2005), p.235; Montero Moreno, *Persecución Religiosa*, pp.762-63.

⁴⁵ ADM, PRRD, Caja 1/2, *Servicio de Prensa de la Delegación de Asuntos Religiosos*, 01/01/37; AHN, CG legajo 1557-2: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exps. 5/65, 5/256, 5/346, 5/409, 5/420; Montero Moreno,

Henares (Madrid), three *Religiosas Adoratrices* detained by FAI militiamen in October 1936 were taken to a requisitioned convent where they worked with sixty other nuns, making clothes for militiamen out of church decorations.⁴⁶ In Cuevas de Almanzora (Almeria), the town committee evicted the *Hijas de la Caridad* from their school and hospital, but called them back almost immediately because they were needed to care for the sick and wounded.⁴⁷

Although these nuns complained of being threatened, mocked, and made to listen to blasphemy, ‘speeches of a Soviet tone’ and ‘words which could not be heard without blushing’, their own testimony reveals that they rarely suffered physical or sexual abuse. A typical rural case is that of the Almerian nun Madre Adoración Bautista de San Pedro, who was apprehended in the town of Chirivel by local militiamen following the coup and taken to the central plaza. She remained physically unharmed, but her tormenters subjected her to a barrage of ‘dirty’ words and phrases which only subsided when local people protested over the nun’s treatment and instructed the militiamen to take her home.⁴⁸ In spite of strenuous claims to the contrary made by Francoist propaganda, there are very few documented cases of nuns being raped during the conflict.⁴⁹ Testimony from Madrid reveals that although nuns were sometimes strip searched upon being apprehended, this sensitive task was usually delegated to militiawomen.⁵⁰ When Cardenal Gomá returned to the Episcopal Palace in Toledo after the city fell to the rebels in October 1936, he discovered that militiamen had slept in his bed, drained his wine collection, damaged his religious ornaments and left over two hundred pairs of shoes in his entrance hall. His nun housekeepers, however, had been scrupulously respected by the palace’s new occupants.⁵¹

Persecución Religiosa, pp.430-34; Dolores Ibárruri, *Memorias de la Pasionaria: La lucha y la vida* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1985), pp.319-25; Gregorio Gallego, *Madrid, Corazón que se desangra* (Madrid: Gráficas Elica, 1976), pp.108-13; Paul Preston, *El holocausto español: Odio y exterminio en la Guerra Civil y después* (Barcelona: Debate, 2011), pp.366-68.

⁴⁶ AHN, CG legajo 1557-2: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exp. 5/10-11

⁴⁷ AHN, CG legajo 1164-1: Almería, pieza No. 10, exp. 2/192

⁴⁸ AHN, CG legajo 1557-2: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exp. 5/199, 5/382, legajo 1530 exp. 1/206, legajo 1164-1; Almería, pieza No. 10, exp. 2/193, 2/478.

⁴⁹ The sexual molestation and murder of five nuns in the village of Riudarenes in Girona (Catalonia) is one of the few recorded cases. Sanabre Sanromá, Josep, *Martirologio de la iglesia en la diócesis de Barcelona durante la persecución religiosa 1936-1936* (Barcelona: Imp. de la Editorial Librería Religiosa 1943), pp.183-211; 470-1; Preston, *Holocausto*, pp.322-23.

⁵⁰ AHN, CG legajo 1557-2: Madrid, pieza No. 10, exps. 5/253,5/270

⁵¹ Carta del Cardenal Gomá a D. Luis de Despujol, 06/10/1936, José Andrés-Gallego and Antón M. Pazos (eds.), *Archivo Gomá: Documentos de la Guerra Civil*, Vol. I, Julio-Diciembre 1936 (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2001), pp.182-84.

As we have seen, the men who attacked priests in the republican zone of Spain after July 17-18 1936 saw priestly chastity as a sign of effeminacy and weakness. Accordingly, they attacked priests in violent, mocking - and often extremely gruesome - ways which allowed them to reassert their masculine power, not only over their victims but over women as well. Female virginity in contrast - tied up as it was with ideas of masculine self control and *miliciano* honour - was respected fervently and almost universally.⁵² Yet while nuns' decision to renounce the 'traditional' female role of wife and mother may have been respected, it was by no means understood. Conversely, in a society which presented few opportunities for women in the first third of the twentieth century, entry into the religious orders could be a way for women to overcome the daily marginalisation they faced, albeit at the expense of a putatively more modern understanding of their social and sexual liberty. Yet for many working men, this rejection of the domestic sphere was deemed so 'unnatural' that it could only have occurred under priestly coercion.

These deeply sexist attitudes are demonstrated perfectly by the rhetoric of 'liberation' which accompanied militiamen's dealings with nuns in 1936. An enthusiasm for moving women from the convent to the family had featured heavily in anticlerical press and political discourse since first decade of the twentieth century; its most infamous proponent was Alejandro Lerroux, the Radical anticlerical politician who in 1906 had urged his followers to 'lift the veils of the novices and elevate them to the category of mothers.'⁵³ In the 1930s, as men tried to control the rapidly shifting, permeable boundaries of the private and public spheres, they struggled with growing desperation to reassert their masculine power and their control over the family and over intimate, domestic space. In August 1936, a group of militiaman arrived at the *Asilo de las R.R. Oblatas del Santísimo Redentor* in Madrid and excitedly told nuns that they were 'now completely free'. What this actually meant to these men, of course, was that these women were 'free' to return to the home and become the servants of men rather than the servants of God.⁵⁴

⁵² Vincent, *Splintering*, p.86.

⁵³ Lannon, *Historia Social*, p.74.

⁵⁴ ADM, PRRD, Caja 5/28, *Estado actual material y moral de la Parroquia de Ciempozuelos*

Conclusions

Anticlerical violence was a crucial component of the spontaneous revolution which unfolded on republican territory after 17-18 July 1936. As a heterogeneous collection of individuals and groups strove to reconfigure social relations within communities and to construct a new social order, one of their key goals was to make the Church and its representatives disappear forever. Of course, some women did participate in anticlerical violence and iconoclasm, and in other types of revolutionary collective action. Indeed, for many female actors, the experience of revolution and war provided an opportunity to mobilise politically and to be catapulted into public visibility. In this way, many women overcame, to some extent, the powerful social and cultural norms which governed 'appropriate' female behaviour in 1930s Spain. However, the new society which was 'under construction' in the summer of 1936 never really took women into account. Male on male anticlerical violence, grounded in a masculinised struggle to prevent a blurring of gender roles and to keep women in the domestic sphere, is one of the most striking indications of the limits of 'liberation' in 1936.

Anarchist activist Pilar Vivancos, describing revolutionary events in her home village of Beceite (Aragón), enthused about collectivisation and direct democracy, but lamented that female emancipation simply 'wasn't posed as part of the revolutionary process.' Women, left out of the local committee, still belonged 'in the kitchen or working the land'.⁵⁵ The German anarchist Augustin Souchy Bauer returned from his wartime tour of collectivised Aragonese communities with ecstatically positive impressions, especially regarding the measure which revolutionaries had taken against the Catholic Church. 'Former mysticism', he wrote, had been transformed into 'concrete wellbeing': religious practice had been abandoned and churches were being used for cultural, political and logistical ends. As he waxed lyrical about revolutionary changes in Beceite, he inadvertently expressed the revolution's fundamental contradiction: 'It is eleven o' clock in the morning. The gong sounds. Mass? It is to remind the women to prepare the midday meal.'⁵⁶

Word Count: 6,536

⁵⁵ Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain: An Oral History of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), pp.288-89.

⁵⁶ Augustin Souchy Bauer, *With the Peasants of Aragón* (Orkney Cienfuegos Press, 1982), pp.70, 97.