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Review of Isabel Alonso Dávila (coord.), Plaza de los Lobos 1968-1977 Memorias de estudiantes antifranquistas de la Universidad de Granada

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Alonso Dávila, Isabel (coord.) ***Plaza de los Lobos 1968-1977 Memorias de estudiantes antifranquistas de la Universidad de Granada.*** **EUG: Granada, 2024, 265 pp.**

Plaza de los Lobos is an outstanding collection of first-person memoirs told by members of the university student movement who suffered reprisals during the final years of Franco's dictatorship and the beginning of the transition period in the city of Granada. This record of collective memory, coordinated by Alonso-Dávila, adds to a growing list of works which contribute to the understanding of the process of transition to democracy after Francisco Franco's death in 1975. The thirteen testimonies were all taken from students at the University of Granada who were arrested, interrogated and on occasion tortured by the Brigada Político Social (BPS) at the main headquarters of Franco's General Directorate of Security—the police station in Plaza de los Lobos, Granada. Arranged in chronological order (1968-1977), these first-hand accounts reflect the evolution of what has been called late Francoism through individual memory and oral history.

The transition to democracy after General Francisco Franco's death in 1975 was a period of modern Spanish history encompassing the change from the Francoist regime to the consolidation of a parliamentary system, a process that has historically been upheld as one of the great success stories in the construction of new and stable post-dictatorial democratic regimes. Indeed, it has often been presented as a model for other transitions from authoritarianism. However, the transition process faced several challenges, and increasingly scholars have recognized that authoritarian traditions did not fully disappear in post-Francoist Spain, despite the emergence of new democratic norms and political institutions.

University activism offers an excellent window into this historical moment: under late Francoism, such activism had generated a cultural and political tide that flowed out from university campuses, student movements sowing democratizing seeds within Spanish society that later helped drive political democratization. However, police repression was a reality with which these activists had contended, and that reality remained relevant even after the transition began, as change was far from complete. The 1977 Amnesty Law legally absolved police officers of any responsibilities incurred in the repression of anti-Francoist activities, and in-depth reform of police bodies took some time. For the task of shedding new light on this history of repression that the amnesty law set aside, and which at least partly survived through the democratic transition, the testimonies included in this book represent a unique and exceptional tool. First-hand accounts of events, places, and individual experiences, provide a newly vivid sense of the tense atmosphere that prevailed in the years when reading the magazine *Mundo Obrero* or belonging to a University Film Club could be reason for one’s arrest for subversive activities. Moreover, the way this book compiles these particular testimonies offers an excellent example of the methodologies available for producing works of

historical memory. Concretely, the volume models a focus on bearing witness to what happened, as opposed to revisiting the past specifically in order to reconstruct and justify subsequent chains of events, as has often been the case.

The book's structure, which follows the chronology of the arrests, interrogations and use of torture carried out by the Brigada Político Social (BPS) against the activists of the anti-Franco student movement in Granada, is one of its main strengths, showcasing the evolution of repression under late Francoism. This progression begins in February 1968 with Bernabé López García's 'Chronicle of a politicised prank', set in the same year as the memoir of José María Alfaya, 'A journey between Ceuta and the world.' Arturo González Arcas was arrested in his own house on January 27, 1969, as he describes in his 'Choreography of a memory: the epicentre of late-Francoist repression in Granada', which includes a detailed description of the city's police headquarters. Six testimonies by women follow, moving readers forward in time to 1970, among them Socorro Robles Vizcaíno's account of fleeing to Granada in 'Memory (intrahistory) of the flight: the state of emergency of 1970,' Juana García Ruiz's recollection of her arrest, transfer to Albaicín police station, and subsequent prison stay in Granada, and Lola Parras Chica's description of her own detention in Granada prison.

Half the members of the University of Granada's Faculty of Philosophy and Letters left for Paris at the end of the academic year in the summer of 1973, as Javier López Gijón observes in 'To the bird, flight.' This destination made sense: Paris, Isabel Alonso Dávila notes while recounting a 1975 police search of her home, was the model of freedom for young Spaniards. Finally, the book concludes with several accounts of the authors' arrests and incarceration that same year, as the Franco dictatorship entered its final chapter. Altogether, the witness accounts make this book a valuable addition to anyone interested in the politics of repression under the Spanish fascist regime.

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