



## "La Desbandá has a woman's name"

Paqui Maqueda, Pura Sánchez, Sofía Rodríguez and Silvia Delgado, four brilliant talks serving to RESCUE THE HISTORICAL MEMORY of women at this 1st Meeting of the La Desbandá Memorial Association, with a shared objective:

**FOR THEIR NAME NOT TO BE EXPUNGED FROM HISTORY.**

### **PAQUI MAQUEDA**

She began her presentation by showing us the various mass graves of women that have been found in Andalusia.

*"Our brave legionnaires and regulars have shown the cowardly Reds what a real man is and, along the way, their women too. This is totally justified because these Communists and Anarchists practice free love. Now, at least, they will know what men are, and not faggots. They're not going to get off the hook, no matter how they kick and scream". - Gonzalo Queipo de Llano*

Days after the coup, as a general of the Army of the South, Queipo de Llano made these insulting statements on the Unión Radio Sevilla, inciting the uprising's troops to rape and mistreat "red" women.

According to the data currently available, the five main burial sites are located in Seville (La Puebla de Guzmán and Fuentes de Andalucía) and Cádiz (Grazalema). The events took place between August '36 and late '37.

The victims found in them ranged from 16 to 60 years of age. Franco's repression targeted these women because they were the daughters, mothers, or wives of fugitives, or for refusing to provide information. In terms of gender, women were treated very differently: humiliated, tortured and having their dignity stripped from them.

### **PURA SANCHEZ**

Through the scenes photographed by Hazen Sise, a collaborator helping with the rescue and health care tasks undertaken by Canadian doctor Norman Bethune along the more than 200 km of the "highway of death", PURA SANCHEZ told us about the largest fascist genocide carried out by Franco's troops after their military coup.

Here we learn about the humanitarian tragedy between Málaga, on the brink of collapse, and the defiant republican Almería, during the week of February 7 to 13, 1937.

She related it as if it were a work of literature, a fiction, but the existing documentation and data attest to the tragic veracity of the events described, and their cruelty.

According to witnesses' accounts, it was often women who encouraged men to undertake the journey. Along the highway, the majority were women, alone with children and the elderly, constituting the core resistance to death. When they set out on the road, many of them were oblivious to the fact that their arrival in Almería would not be the end of their journey, but rather just the close of a first stage that would continue to cruel concentration camps.

### **SOFIA RODRÍGUEZ**

*Women Who Flee, Women Who Take Others In*, shows us a historical document revealing an exhaustive investigation of what happened on the Malaga-Almería highway in February of 1937.

With violet eyes, the document answers several questions, taking us on a journey through history: "despite the magnitude of the tragedy, this Andalusian Guernica never had its painter".

The different investigations have yielded data estimating the exodus between 50,000 and 300,000 people. Of those who fled along the N-340 highway, around 100,00 reached Almería. Of these, more than half were, apparently, adult women, elderly women, and children.

Who they were, why they fled, why to Almería, what their journey was like, how long it took, how they survived, what happened upon their arrival, how many took in refugees, who the women who took them in were, where they sheltered them, why they did it, what they thought, how they related to each other, how long they lived together, what happened when they departed ... all these are historical questions that only the witnesses, in acts of Historical Memory, can answer.

### **SILVIA DELGADO**

A female poet who writes militant, rebellious, and defiant poetry.

Through her wandering poetry she draws on words to engage in historical memory, to understand the present and the past, to put words to all the amnesia.

She declares herself the humble granddaughter of those clandestine, sick, ragged, hungry, forgotten, murdered women and men, from Mexico, Spain and Cuba, who left thousands of verses written on the injustice of that time.

In her hands she upholds the legacy of those who were silenced, with them thinking that this would be enough to tame them, settling for the pain throbbing in each verse.

Silvia Delgado speaks to us of a committed poetry, armed to the teeth with dignity, bolstering an anti-fascist conscience. She owes this to Neruda, Gabriel Mistral, Miguel Hernández, Antonio Machado, Angela Figuera, Carmen Conde.... and everyone who, name by name, verse by verse, spoke of a betrayed Spain.

As she says: "We must stand up and leave enough verses to explain to future generations the truth of our time...."

"I would not only like to dust off our tragic memory, but I would also like, here and now, to write history, to leave handfuls of verses scattered like seeds throughout this country that betrayed the Republic".

Silvia Delgado speaks of us women, of this half that is not taken into account, that history silences by disguising us as witches or religious devotees. She speaks of what we were, of what we are, of what we seek, of what we want to be, and demands that our place in history "also be written, like that of heroic and anti-fascist men".

Under the premises of these remarks, we come to a REFLECTION on the role of women on the path of La Desbandá:

Among those thousands of people were a great number of females: girls, adults and elderly women. They were mothers and guides, sustaining their family unions under those circumstances, and protecting their children and parents until they managed, to varying extents, to deliver them safely to our province. Many testimonies and documents attest to this. Arriving in Almería, women's role was that of protectors and pillars underpinning their families; morally, physically and nutritionally.

They confronted the civil authorities to secure conditions that were habitable, even if just barely, not for themselves, but for their families. Many were widows not knowing where their husbands, parents or siblings could be found.

They were victims and protagonists of the atrocities of the War. But they were also everyday heroines, fighters against resignation and the imposition of a corseted model on women.

Many of those women who fled from the horror would never return to their homes or see their children and husbands again; they lost everything. And yet, they went their own way, one according with their thoughts, ideas and wills.

It is now a commonplace that history is written by the victors. In this case, History is guilty of a dual crime: not only was a civil massacre, a fascist genocide, covered up, but its true protagonists and victims were rendered invisible.

For all these reasons, our REFLECTION becomes a DEMAND:

***TO STAKE A CLAIM TO THE PLACE IN HISTORY TO WHICH WE ARE ENTITLED.***

To conclude, we would like to wind up this act by reciting some of the poems that honour the subject at hand, works by Marcos G. Sedano, an apprentice poet and anti-fascist activist who belonged to the LA DESBANDÁ Memorial Association, leaving us a great legacy. As the slogan that immortalizes him goes: STEP BY STEP, NAME BY NAME, we will rescue from oblivion all those people whose lives were snuffed out by this cruel FASCIST GENOCIDE.

### **LA DESBANDÁ**

*The steps break dispel the oblivion...  
Here we were missing something,  
It was a piece of the past  
Snatched from memory.  
We walk along...  
Peeking out from the earth,  
The rag doll  
Has a bullet in its hand  
As if it sought  
To stop death.  
Behind the stone  
A girl is sleeping...  
However, that skull  
On the branch,  
Of the blossomed almond tree,  
Bears the mark  
Of an incendiary bomb.  
We keep trodding...  
In each trough,  
shadows come out.  
War planes,  
warships,  
and they're all shooting.  
The refugee's blood runs down to the sea,  
Staining the waves red  
Painting the rocks.  
We follow the path ...  
What happened on the way,  
Every time we sow grain,  
The ears of barley  
Don golden faces  
They want to keep going!  
What kind of tyrant could slay  
Disarmed people,  
Weary from walking  
From morning to night!  
N340, the site of La Desbandá ...  
That was our path  
Those who seek redemption,  
Let them choose this destination.  
Let them not wait for a forgiveness ...  
That is not given by the path.*

*Let them ask for Justice and Reparation.*

*May the dead rest in peace.*

*Far from the ditches*

*Where others sleep.*

Marcos G. Sedano