

Foreword

By Jo Labanyi

I write with a complicated mix of feelings: sorrow at Aurora's tragic loss but gratitude to her husband Charles Bleiker—who has finalized the preparation of Aurora's manuscript for publication—for inviting me to write this foreword. This project was very dear to Aurora's heart. She talked about it when we met in her hometown of Granada during several summers, and she gave a wonderful paper on it at the panel I organized on “Alternative Histories” for the 2014 MLA Convention in Chicago. In that memorable paper, she declared that her aim was to condense each life story of the various women she had interviewed in a haiku—she offered a few examples. The point of the haiku was to appreciate the silence around the words.

The most original feature of Aurora's book is her intercalation of poems in her analysis of the life stories that comprise each chapter. One poem comes near to the brevity of the haiku—an evocation of the hunger that marked her mother's postwar childhood, which Aurora read at the 2014 MLA convention. In addition to the poetic chapter titles, each interview is prefaced by one or more poems, taken from an impressively international range of authors, with several by Aurora herself. The manuscript was to have ended with a concluding poem by Aurora, which sadly we do not have. Aurora talks of “the poetics of oral history,” for oral history is a medium, like poetry, that conveys its meaning through what lies in between, behind, and beneath the words. And all poetry, even when it is considerably wordier than a haiku, makes us aware of the blank space around the text, just as oral histories—especially when recalling lives that have not been given their due, as is the case here—are also a mesh of what is said and what was not or could not be said before, and may remain unsaid even now because of the difficulty of acknowledging it (something that Aurora is particularly sensitive to). Hence the book's title, *(In)visible Acts of Resistance*.

Above all, poetry conveys emotions whereas prose is, for the most part, a vehicle of information. Aurora acknowledges her debt to Spanish Republican exile philosopher María Zambrano's concept of “poetic reason.” There is a noticeable difference between the interviews analyzed in Part I—conducted in 1989 with former anti-Franco student activists, subsequently professors at the University of

Granada—when Aurora was a history student about to take up a doctoral fellowship at the University of New Mexico, and those analyzed in Part II—conducted after the year 2000, by which time the history of the emotions had become a burgeoning field of inquiry, emerging out of memory studies in which oral history has been so important. Interest in the emotional textures revealed by oral history is what inspired Aurora to return to those early interviews and to conduct further interviews with working-class women in Granada, several from her own family. By the time of the second batch of interviews, Aurora's interest had shifted to lives that are marked not by overt political activism but by everyday acts of resilience which, Aurora argues, should also be seen as acts of defiance. While the interviews in Part I are important for their information content, reminding us of the risks involved in being a student activist under the late Franco dictatorship, it is the emotional content of the working-class life stories in Part II that clearly engages Aurora's poetic imagination.

The majority—but not all—of the life stories presented here are of women. Aurora's career as a scholar, as everyone familiar with her work knows, was devoted to documenting the ways in which the Franco dictatorship constrained the lives of Spanish women. This volume is an important complement to her earlier books in that it does not focus on what the regime did to women, but on how women resisted the imposition of power through daily acts of micro-resistance—by refusing to play the role of victim, by surviving and fighting for their loved ones. It is also an exploration of Aurora's own subjectivity via the emotions and memories that the interviews awoke in Aurora herself. The book is an explicit homage to women—her professors in Part I, family members and acquaintances in Part II—who shaped her life and made her the feminist historian that she became. The final chapter was to have analyzed the interview that Aurora conducted with her parents, Aurora and Manuel; sadly, this chapter remains unwritten. However, her tribute to her family is present in the Intermezzo “Aurora's Trinity” that narrates the story of the three Auroras in her family—her grandmother, her mother, herself—as the basis of a theorization of experience as becoming.

This book is an account not only of the becoming of the individuals interviewed by Aurora, but also of the becoming of Aurora herself as a creative and caring historian.

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