Sites of Violence and Memory in Modern Spain employs a spatial lens to argue that sites pertaining to the Spanish Civil War and Franco dictatorship have intentionally been forgotten during the regime. “Intertwining historical facts with memorial phenomena,” Míguez Macho divides this collection into three parts: the Spanish Civil War, the postwar period through the end of Franco’s regime, and the Transición and beyond (p. 16). Selected scholars engage with sites of violence from this repressive era and explore how reading the space—the walls, ceilings, indelible markings, memorials—informs the general public about a more complete past that does not hide the Francoist state and its consequences on Spanish society. Uniquely, the contributors include younger scholars who focus on spaces outside those of national and international prominence, namely the Valley of Cuelgamuros, implying that local sites and places demand more attention.

“The physical violence deployed by the Francoist state] left a traumatic mark not only on the lives of those who experienced it and the lives of
their families, but also on specific locations,” argues Claudio Hernández Burgos in his chapter on the lives of the imprisoned during the Franco regime. Public spaces illustrate how Franco’s societal reorientation toward a new nationalization replaced all Republican markers to emphasize the neo-Christian, neo-generated state. Individuals were forced into confined, controlled spaces and surveilled through curfews and penal ramifications that negatively affected their everyday lives. Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco’s chapter on civil government buildings similarly highlights how the evolution of these spaces under the new regime traumatized the daily lives of particular Spaniards. Franco intentionally held military trials against deemed leftists in public and large spaces to create a larger culture of fear, shame, and exclusion. The transformation of public offices of leaders of the Second Republic into spaces of guilty verdicts showcases the weaponization of place and space for political, societal, and militaristic ends. These works build up to an idea posited by Xabier Buxiero Alonso and Rafael García Ferrera, among others, that sites of violence and memory also require interrogations of the perpetrators (pp. 79 and 99, respectively). The full contextualization of these types of sites demands information on those who perpetrated the inhumane, unhygienic confinement of prisoners in around three hundred concentration camps (p. 88).

Other scholars focus on the role of victims and memory activists in contributing to the resignificance of place and space. In arguably the most captivating chapter, Iria Morgade Valcárcel examines the etchings on the walls of two concentration camp settings, Oia and Camposancos, as sites of memory. Arguing that “space can become even more crucial when it contains primary historical sources,” Morgade Valcárcel amplifies the uncovering of names inscribed and drawings done by prisoners at Oia as an archival record of those confined to these prisons (p. 161). Morgade Valcárcel asserts that the resistance of those imprisoned served as a moment of “rehumanization in the face of dehumanization” (p. 154). These sites of memory support bringing the voices of the repressed into a more common understanding of the horrors of Franco’s regime. In a contemporary framework, these artistic markings have been featured as a part of an exhibition at this former concentration camp to reframe the narrative toward resilience and rebellion by the victims. By literally reading the walls, Morgade Valcárcel explains the memories still reverberating around Spain, if one chooses to look.

These nuanced, contemporary reckonings with the intertwined relationship of history and memory in Spain fall short in bringing Spain into the global conversation. With valiant efforts to situate Spain in a twentieth- and twenty-first-century dialogue surrounding reckoning with its past, including Marina Montoto Ugarte’s chapter on the transnational relationship of memories between Spanish-speaking countries, the edited volume ultimately fails to bring enough connections from transnational communities of reconciliation. Montoto Ugarte produces a compelling argument that the querella argentina, or Argentine Lawsuit, a practice of universal jurisdiction to bring the crimes of Spain to the courts of Argentina, served as a “social space” of memory by engaging with the circulation of people, ideologies, and documents between these two nations (p. 188). Her examination of sites of protest such as the Ronda de la Dignidad en la Puerta del Sol highlights the diffusion of memories from Spain to Argentina and back. Even with this relationship, and the precedence of Nazi and other European sites of violence and memories during the World Wars era, this work does not incorporate enough of non-Western memory practices to fully situate Spain in this global reckoning. Most glaringly missing, discussion of South Africa’s and Rwanda’s reconciliation and reckoning efforts, especially their reconceptualization of sites of violence in the twenty-first
century, would have strengthened Míguez Macho's argument.

Overall, this work encourages further study of place and space as primary sources in Spain's complicated processes of historical memory and reconciliation. These scholars present new and exciting methodologies to engage with the pain of Spain's past in the present. They further the importance of local landscapes in telling national and transnational narratives of how Spanish sites of violence relate to other regions and nations recovering from human rights atrocities. With the recently passed Democratic Memory Law, this edited volume becomes even more significant in its interrogation of how Spain's memories of the past haunt the present.

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