

MARTA HAS NOT BEEN HEARD FROM AGAIN

“I would like to make it very clear, there is no cost to Spanish taxpayers,” the minister had said after negotiating the bailout of the country’s banks. Later, it was known that a huge amount of public money had been injected for this purpose.

Neither Maria nor Marta attached any importance to these words, it was one of many comments heard in those days when the party in power was changing course and forgetting every promise made during the election campaign. Maria was only a year away from retirement and Marta was on her “honeymoon”. They had never met, so they never knew that chance would whimsically bring their destinies together.

As time went by, the situation changed. Maria was 68 years old, she had been living for almost six years in a small flat owned by a new bank that had been formed by the merger of several savings banks. She used to go down to the nearby café from time to time to have a cup of tea in winter and a soft drink in summer and to talk for a while to the waiters. Marta was divorced with two children in her care. She worked almost “from sun up to sun down” cleaning houses to get some money to survive.

A report by the Central Bank stated that the banks had earned a third more than the money they had been lent in recent years. However, it was stated that the state would only recover 20 per cent of this amount. To end up, it was recommended that, in order to be competitive (a euphemism used as a synonym for a geometric increase in profits), banks would have to drastically reduce the number of branches. It wasn’t said, though, that this would lead to the dismissal of thousands and thousands of workers.

Marta came home from work to find a security lockout at the flat she was occupying. She had been there for a few days, acquaintances had told her that an old woman had been evicted and that the flat was unlocked. She knocked at the door, called her children by name. The children began to cry. She broke down, totally dejected. Her bitter cry could be heard through the building, it was a raging wail that demanded explanations from all of humanity, that hated disregard and invisibility, that cashed against lust and vanity, that burst into a thousand pieces.

Maria had been in a deep depression for several months. She was alone in front of an insatiable world. She felt helpless, without self-esteem, defeated. The bank had raised the monthly rent for the flat by more than two hundred percent. Practically all of her pension was going towards this. She never thought that she could report her situation to the social services. Despite the fact that evictions were frequent in the neighbourhood, she considered her case to be an existentialist wound at the core of her being. A newspaper reported in brief lines: "An elderly woman who was going to be evicted on Monday has passed away after throwing herself from her home on the sixth floor of a block of flats, according to sources from the Municipal Police"

Once he had calmed down, Marta called the fire fighters who, after bursting the security door, released the children. The residents' association lodged a complaint against the competent authority with the juvenile prosecutor's office for attempted kidnapping and homicide. The few neighbours who still lived in the building decided to take care of her children for some days, until school started, while she went to work

There was pressure. The complaint was not passed on to the juvenile prosecutor's office but to the economic crimes prosecutor's office. There was an agreement between the parties: what happened with the locking up of the children had been a one-off event, without continuity over time and no crime could be inferred from it; Marta, for her part, would not be denounced for illegal occupation. The bank sold the block of flats to a vulture fund. Marta was never heard from again.

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