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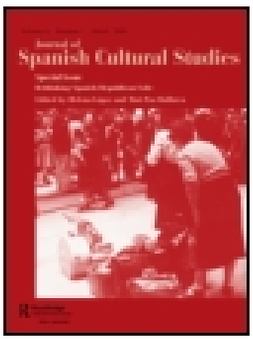

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INTRODUCTION

Feeling humanitarianism during the Spanish Civil War and Republican exile

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Until two decades ago, a mere "handful of historians" were concerned with the study of humanitarianism (Taithe and Borton 2016, 210). The reason is that humanitarianism has traditionally been presented as a moral imperative "located out of history" (Taithe 2017a), rather than as a movement whose long-term evolution needs to be understood in political (Arendt [1963] 1990; Boltanski [1993] 1999), economic (Haskell 1985; Roddy, Strange, and Taithe 2018), social (Brodiez and Dumons 2009) and cultural terms (Festa 2010). However, today we can acknowledge "a whole emerging community of scholars working on humanitarian history" (Hilton et al. 2018) that embraces a wide range of subjects: the antislavery movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Abruzzo 2011), twentieth-century emergency relief operations aimed at alleviating the consequences of famine and warfare (Arrizabalaga 2014; Davey 2015; Desgrandchamps 2018; Farré et al. 2015), development programs launched by religious missions (Lachenal and Taithe 2009) or colonial and postcolonial states (Martínez Antonio 2014), as well as responses orchestrated by international organizations in collaboration with public health agencies in order to combat epidemics such as HIV (Nguyen 2010) and Ebola (Le Marcis et al. 2019).

The increasing interest in reconstructing the past of the humanitarian movement undoubtedly echoes the challenges of our present, which are marked by an unprecedented wave of displaced persons whose right to be considered as human beings is contested daily by Western political representatives. In June 2019, the UN Refugee Agency estimated that 70.8 million people around the world were subjected to this dramatic situation (UNHCR 2019). Even if we usually call all of them *refugees*, only a few are asylum seekers while the great majority are persons forced to flee within the borders of their own country or who risk their lives trying to cross geographical or political frontiers, such as the Mediterranean Sea or the USA border.[1] Despite the fact that we are witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record, historians remind us that the refugee situation constitutes a "forty years' crisis" (Frank and Reinisch 2017; Gatrell 2014a). In this sense, World War I (1914–1918) and its aftermath represented a turning point, because prisoners of war (POWs), who were both combatants and civilians subjected to "resettlement, evacuation, deportation, expulsion, transfer, exchange and ethnic cleansing", started to be regarded not only as a political and economic problem, but also as victims who were in need of humanitarian assistance (Gatrell 2014b). Although the Great War is a crucial episode in "the making of the modern refugee", the articles

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gathered in this dossier argue that we cannot fully understand the transformation of this phenomenon into a humanitarian cause without looking back to the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and the Republican exile unleashed by this conflict (Gatrell 2013). References by contemporary political scientists such as Jean-Pierre Filiu (2013) to the ongoing Syrian conflict "as our own Spanish Civil War" show to what extent we associate this war-stricken period with present-day humanitarian crises, which are fed by the absence of a political response from the international community.[2]

Historians have already stressed the relevance of moving beyond a military, warfare-based perspective, to shed light instead on the Spanish conflict and the Republican exile from the point of view of both the humanitarian volunteers, who worked in Spain and later on in the internment camps based in the South of France, and the displaced populations who suffered political repression, constant bombardments, malnutrition and the spread of contagious diseases (Alted 2019; Arrizabalaga and Martínez-Vidal 2020; Dreyfus-Armand and Duroux 2015; Farré 2014; García Ferrandis and Martínez-Vidal 2019; Keren 2018; Martínez-Vidal 2010; Palfreeman 2012; Schmöller 2018; Soo 2013; Tuban 2018). This transnational focus has radically changed our vision of the Spanish Civil War, enabling us to examine the experiences of these agents on the move whose lives straddled borders, as well as to establish "new entangled histories" entwining national and international politics inspired by a collective feeling of solidarity (Ghosh 2018, 194). The main external cause explaining the large-scale mobilization of humanitarian aid in Spain was the non-intervention pact signed by the main Western democracies in August 1936, which forbade sending munitions or military units to support belligerent parties in order to avoid a global escalation of hostilities (Thomas 1989, 350).

However, this agreement was violated by Benito Mussolini's Italy and Adolf Hitler's Germany, both of which provided the Nationalist side with ground troops and aerial support, such as the Nazi Luftwaffe's Condor Legion and the Fascist Italian Aviazione Legionaria which perpetrated the widely reported bombing of Guernica on 26 April 1936, a civilian massacre that came to represent the birth of a new kind of warfare (Preston 2017). The non-intervention pact was not respected by the USSR either, which facilitated the supply of weapons to Republican Spain. This international agreement also played a pivotal role in the formation of the International Brigades, made up of anti-fascist volunteers who defied the non-intervention policy of their home countries. Strained international relations shaped the war in Spain as the "prelude of WWII" (Van der Esch 1951). This diplomatic situation prompted the proliferation of humanitarian initiatives because they were more readily tolerated as a depoliticized response, even though in reality they were a means of doing international politics.

The ideologically oriented nature of humanitarian aid during the Civil War is made evident by the plethora of organizations acting in Spain that did not channel relief efforts according to the principle of neutrality, in contrast to the International Committee of the Red Cross (hereafter ICRC), the Save the Children Fund, the International Save the Children Union (SCIU), the Schweizerische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Spanienkinder (SAK), the British National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief (hereafter NJC), the British Quakers who organized themselves as the Friends Service Committee and their peers in the United States who gathered under the name American Friends Service Committee (Marqués 2000; Pretus 2013). Partisan groups launched fundraising campaigns openly aimed at expressing their sympathy for the Republican cause, such as the North American

Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy, the Swedish Relief Committee, Le Comité International de Coordination et d'Information pour l'Aide à l'Espagne Republicaine, the pro-Communist International Red Aid and the anarchist-oriented organization known as International Antifascist Solidarity. The rebel side also received aid from many European fascist, conservative Catholic and monarchical groups, such as the Belgian Action et Civilisation and the British Committee for the Relief of Distress in Spain (Keene 2007).

In addition to these international agencies, we must consider a multitude of social assistance programs launched by local organizations, such as the Spanish Red Cross, which split into two central offices that were officially recognized by the ICRC at its headquarters in Geneva (Martín-Moruno and Ordóñez Rodríguez 2009). The Nationalist side was far from a homogenous faction, as revealed by the rivalries existing between Mercedes Sanz-Bachiller's Auxilio de Invierno and Pilar Primo de Rivera's Sección Femenina (Preston 2002). Other groups formed by trade unions belonging to the Popular Front, such as the Communist Agrupación de Mujeres Antifascistas and Mujeres Libres, which was closer to anarchist circles, also proposed traineeships for nursing and health-care issues related to women's sexuality (Nash 1995). This wide ideological spectrum sheds light on the precarious meaning of humanitarian neutrality in the resolution of the dilemmas arising in the context of a civil war, as for instance when aid contributes to prolonging the violence of the conflict (Terry 2002; Maul 2016, 82). The Spanish Civil War demonstrates that humanitarianism had been in crisis long before the involvement of non-governmental organizations in conflicts such as those in Bosnia or Rwanda, due to the politicization of relief operations, which were paradoxically used as a pretext to justify the non-intervention of international powers (Rieff 2002, 66).

Adopting a critical outlook, the articles in this dossier seek to move beyond an institutional account like Marcel Junod's *Warrior without Weapons*, the memoir in which this ICRC delegate evoked his mission in Spain, casting himself as an impartial actor, neither a *caballero* nor a *camarada* (Junod [1947] 1989, 369). Although Junod's narrative is considered to be an example of ICRC values, the following case studies aim to deconstruct the "conventional version of events" according to which humanitarian aid has been predominantly conceived as being completely "apolitical, disinterested and independent" (Barnett 2011, 5; Salvatici 2019, 6).[3] To critically engage with the concept of humanitarianism, the authors in this dossier turn to interdisciplinary research fields such as visual and material culture studies, gender history, memory studies, as well as the history of emotions. In particular, they consider that humanitarian history can benefit greatly from the emotional turn in cultural studies in order to explain why some international agents publicly claimed to be acting under the principle of neutrality, while in private they acknowledged that they were supporters of Republican Spain. As Rob Boddice has pointed out, historicizing our feelings can help us not only to understand how communities organized themselves around emotional norms and prescriptions, but also to explain why actors revealed political resistances toward hegemonic regimes "under the uncomfortable yoke of power" (2019a, 191). Emotions, thus, appear as key features for renewing a transnational history of the Spanish Civil War and the Republican exile, because they allow for a study of the subjectivities of those humanitarian agents who camouflaged their political sympathies with the strategic use of an official discourse oriented by principles such as neutrality.

To illustrate this idea, the contributors consider humanitarianism more as a way of feeling that appeals to a moral duty based on a shared sense of humanity, than as a matter exclusively concerning the history of NGOs and the development of international law. In so doing, they recognize the historical affiliations of this movement with "a revolution in moral sentiments and the emergence of a culture of compassion", which would organize public affairs around "an ethics of care" aimed at alleviating the suffering of others (Barnett 2011, 49). The affective affinities of humanitarianism can be traced back to before the emergence of the Red Cross movement, when French men of letters, such as Honoré de Balzac used the adjective *humanitaire* in his novel *Les employés* (1838) to refer to an exaggerated sentimentality inspired by the philanthropic belief in "a stupid collective love" for humanity, which had come to replace old religious tenets such as charity (Seeber 1934, 52; Taithe 2017b, 364). Going a step further, Romantic writers such as François René Chateaubriand (1850, 719–720) would turn humanitarianism into a visionary project that sought the spiritual progress of mankind during the French Restoration. This Romantic humanitarian aspiration was rooted in the philosophical idea that the self should be progressively transfigured by a shared feeling of brotherhood, represented by the abstract concept of humanity (Iotti 2013). Not surprisingly, one of Chateaubriand's fervent advocates, the poet Alphonse de Lamartine, called for this sort of love for the whole of humankind as a humanitarian argument for the abolition of slavery in the French colonies (Brauman 1994; Croisille 1994, 208). One of the first times that humanitarianism was associated with the distress inflicted by war was probably after Swiss General Henri Dufour read a manuscript of Henri Dunant's *Un souvenir de Solferino* (1862a). In a letter, Dufour remarked on "the importance of the humanitarian question" raised by Dunant, by contrast with the usual tendency "to see only the brilliant side of war and overlook its sad consequences" (Dunant 1862b). In saying this, Dufour was revealing a major shift in the history of pain, as he considered that suffering should be alleviated in the context of warfare, as opposed to the heroic vision of the battlefield in which physical violence had been highlighted as noble and glorious.

Taking the emotional roots of humanitarianism as a point of departure, the authors here focus their studies on the cultural analysis of narratives and images produced by both humanitarian workers and photojournalists in order to express their affective bond with Republican Spain. The decision to include case studies dealing with the support provided to one side of the conflict is historically justified by the systematic execution of around two hundred thousand Spanish Republicans, the aerial bombardment of an unknown number of civilians, as well as their persecution, repression and forced exile once Francisco Franco declared that the war was over. This is what the British historian Paul Preston (2011) has referred to as "the Spanish Holocaust". Humanitarian narratives and images are appropriate sources for studying the expansion of humanitarianism during this conflict because they constituted key advocacy strategies for representing "distant suffering" (Boltanski 1999) and awakening compassion "as a moral imperative to ameliorate action" (Laqueur 1989, 176–177). These cultural objects can therefore be regarded as "emotional objects" (Downes, Holloway, and Randles 2018, 12) that are capable of "doing things" (Labanyi 2011, 223), such as forming communities of feeling connecting people around causes. Thus, the performative effects of these literary and visual materials enable the authors to explain the formation of transnational movements of solidarity with Republican Spain as "a complex web of relations …

between victims, caregivers, international agencies, political powers and the general public" (Martín-Moruno and Pichel 2019, 195).

Furthermore, the cultural analysis of humanitarian narratives and images allows contributors to explore how compassion, as well as other affective responses related to the pain of others, such as sympathy and empathy, operated in relation to wider economic and political systems (Haskell 1985; Wilson and Brown 2008). Regardless of their altruistic facade, humanitarian emotions have been produced to fuel charitable businesses by "selling the distant other" and raising funds from Western audiences (Kennedy 2009). In this sense, humanitarianism is embedded in "a politics of emotion" that leads us to question how, when and why organizations make the pain affecting certain communities visible, while neglecting that experienced by other distressed populations (Suski 2012; Ure and Frost 2014). As explained in the articles brought together in "Feeling Humanitarianism during the Spanish Civil War and Republican Exile", representing human suffering is never an apolitical choice because it always involves the decision to distinguish the unfortunate, who suffer, from the fortunate, who contemplate the spectacle of suffering. This is what Hannah Arendt termed "a politics of pity", which is based on the power exerted through the act of observation, rather than on human action (Arendt [1963] 1990, 59–114; Boltanski 1999, 3). Unlike empathy or sympathy, pity has been associated with an affective reaction "deeply rooted in the idea that a hierarchy of sensitivity existed among" human beings (Martín-Moruno 2016b, 146).

To challenge commonly held notions about humanitarianism as apolitical engagement, the authors have chosen to consider emotions as practices (Ahmed 2004; Davison et al. 2018; Meier and Saxer 2007; Scheer 2012). These include not only relief practices, such as providing milk to mothers, nursing children or distributing clothes amongst refugees, but also other sorts of practices such as writing letters and taking photographs, which played a key role in the transformation of the Spanish Civil War and the Republican exile into a humanitarian crisis. Thus, considering emotions "as things that people do" (Scheer 2012, 209) is an approach well suited to scrutinizing the lived experiences of international agents during the war and its aftermath, and the ways in which they frequently came into conflict with the principles held by humanitarian organizations.

In "The Things They Carried: A Gendered Rereading of Photographs of Displacement during the Spanish Civil War", Lee Douglas and María Rosón show the extent to which the work of photojournalists was essential for turning the evacuations suffered by Republicans during the war, and the retreat of Republicans across the Pyrenees after the fall of Barcelona, into a visual drama. The commercialization of portable cameras, such as the Leica or the Kodak Brownie, facilitated the mass circulation of shocking images in the world press, produced by famous image-makers, such as Robert Capa (1913–1954), Gerda Taro (1910–1937), Kati Horna (1912–2000) or Agustí Centelles (1909–1985), who openly sympathized with the Popular Front. For Douglas and Rosón, images did not necessarily need to be produced by humanitarian organizations to be considered as part of the corpus of what has been recently called "humanitarian photography" (Holmes 2019; Paulmann 2019, 3; Rodogno and Fehrenbach 2015). To reconstruct this visual genre fairly, these authors suggest enriching the concept of humanitarianism with gender studies and the history of emotions, since this multidisciplinary approach enables them to uncover the economies of care mobilized by the corpus of photographs which provide the focus of their study: photographs that represent mothers on the move,

carrying their children and their few belongings, during the many evacuations that took place in Republican Spain during the war. Although the mother–child visual trope has been widely reproduced within the history of humanitarianism (Brothers 1997, 143; Fehrenbach 2015, 175), Douglas and Rosón propose an alternative interpretation of these images in order to contest the characterization of Spanish Republican female refugees, and their children, as powerless victims. In contrast to images of the *milicianas* who were depicted fighting on the front during the first months of the conflict, these photographs document the emergence of a new vision of femininity, that of the combative mother, which was encouraged by Republican propaganda from October 1936 onward. As Douglas and Rosón demonstrate, the iconic image of the mother who resists does not simply reproduce the patriarchal order by situating women in an apolitical private sphere. The affective force of these photographs representing female refugees and their children lies in their embodying of a politics of care, which was in no case neutral, since it put at its heart a visual politics that highlighted life as its core value. Thus, a feminist rereading of these visual materials allows the authors to claim that the mise-en-scène of those mothers on the move who carried out their family duties throughout the conflict still moves us because they identify human vulnerability with political resistance (Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay 2016).

My contribution suggests the reader take a journey through "Elisabeth Eidenbenz's Humanitarian Experience during the Spanish Civil War and Republican Exile". This female volunteer and the Swiss organization that she worked for, which was widely known in Spain as Ayuda Suiza, have been at the heart of several studies (Castanier i Palau 2008; Dreyfus-Armand and Duroux 2015; Kanyar-Becker 2010; Montellà 2011; Schmöller 2019; Tuban 1998). However, these publications have mainly dealt with Eidenbenz's involvement with the maternity home at Elne where she helped pregnant women, interned in the camps of the French Roussillon during WWII, to give birth. By contrast, my article reconstructs Eidenbenz's previous mission during the war in Spain in order to better understand her earlier sympathy for the democratic cause as the result of her membership in a community of feeling, as represented by Ayuda Suiza's relief workers. To this end, I examine Eidenbenz's affective exchanges with her family and fellow workers through her personal correspondence and photographic albums, considered as cultural productions that are particularly relevant for understanding why this organization limited the scope of its relief operation within Republican Spain in spite of its alleged neutrality.

Following recent critical voices amongst historians of emotions, I approach these written and visual materials from what has recently been called "the history of experience" (Boddice 2019b; Boddice and Smith 2020; Martín-Moruno 2020; Moscoso 2012, 2016), which includes analysis of the senses – sight, smell, hearing, touch and taste – without establishing a hierarchical distinction between them and rational skills.[4] This broader perspective enables me to question Ayuda Suiza's neutrality by identifying how this organization worked according to "a moral economy of hope" (Moscoso 2014, 31) whose aim was to fight against the pain and fear afflicting the victims of fascism. This focus on experience offers fertile ground for deconstructing gender-stereotyped accounts, which have usually celebrated Eidenbenz as a compassionate mother who took care of Republican children in wartime and exile (Scott 1991; Martín-Moruno, Lynn, and Leyder 2020, 6). Far from ascribing to an essentialist vision of female gender identity, I argue that Eidenbenz challenged her subaltern role as a female aid worker,

to the point of obtaining a position of responsibility within the Ayuda Suiza organization as director of the maternity home located initially in Brouilla and subsequently in Elne. The oral history project that I am currently conducting with Guy Eckstein, one of the children born in the Elne maternity home, has allowed me to interpret Eidenbenz's letters and photographic albums as physical objects that still touch present-day audiences because they materialize forms of queer cultural expression within the humanitarian movement (Cvetkovich 2003).

Kerrie Holloway closes this dossier with her article "Empathy in Narratives of British Humanitarian Workers Assisting Spanish Republican Refugees at the Time of the *Retirada*: Esme Odgers, Audrey Russell, Richard Rees and Lilian Urmston". Holloway opts for a renewed approach to humanitarian history by including ego-documents as her principle sources because they help her to break with the idea that aid workers' actions are simply automatic responses to the orders given by humanitarian organizations. For her, humanitarianism goes well beyond providing medical assistance, food, shelter and water to vulnerable populations. It is also a matter of feelings, specifically the creation of a strong affective bond between fieldworkers and beneficiaries. To demonstrate her hypothesis, she builds on recent work in the history of emotions (Arrizabalaga 2019; Hutchison 2019; Taithe 2019) that has proposed this line of research as a promising tool for humanizing the humanitarian sector – a milieu that has been subjected to increasing bureaucratization and professionalization since the late nineteenth century.

With this aim in mind, Holloway explores the private writings of four relief workers belonging to the NJC who assisted Spanish Republicans who had fled their country at the end of the Civil War, in the children's colonies and internment camps scattered across the south of France. Although these agents continued to publicly claim that their action was politically neutral, their correspondence was animated by a deep anti-fascist sentiment. By carefully examining the emotions that they shared privately with their families and fellow workers, Holloway shows to what extent their humanitarian engagement was explained by an affective identification with the victims of the defeated Spanish Republic, rather than by an abstract concern for humanity. In particular, she distinguishes empathy as the central affective force inspiring NJC's volunteers in their daily field work. In contrast to emotions such as compassion or pity, which always involve hierarchical relationships, empathy led these international agents to interact with beneficiaries on a more equal basis. However, Holloway identifies not only the presence of altruistic sentiments in her written source materials, but also expressions of negative affective reactions, namely when aid workers were powerless witnesses to the poor conditions in which Republican refugees were living in French camps. For instance, the female Australian aid worker Esme Odgers wrote a letter to Audrey Russell, a fellow colleague in the NJC, in which she confessed that the only way she had found to overcome her desperation was to drink alcohol. As Holloway proves, feeling humanitarianism also had a dark side during the Republican exile, when relief workers started to suffer from compassion fatigue – a sort of emotional exhaustion that became a common disorder as a consequence of their exposure to traumatic events (Taithe 2007, 2019).

By reviewing the developments of humanitarianism during the Spanish Civil War and Republican exile from the perspective of the history of emotions, this dossier aims to contribute to what a new generation of historians of humanitarianism has identified as the future horizon of this subdiscipline: to produce more research on the "experiences of

communities who shaped and were shaped by international aid" (Davey, Borton, and Foley 2013; Hilton et al. 2018, e19). The focus on humanitarianism, as it was experienced by both humanitarian relief workers and their beneficiaries, can provide the present-day humanitarian community with some clues to enable it to better understand how it should face its future challenges. Last but not least, "Feeling Humanitarianism during the Spanish Civil War and Republican Exile" seeks to stimulate long-term reflection on what it means to be and feel human (Bourke 2011; Boddice 2017). Putting Spanish Republican refugees at the center of its analysis, the ultimate objective of this dossier is to think about those people who are not considered to be fully human today, such as those migrants abandoned to their fate who are losing their lives in the Mediterranean Sea.

On 27 August 2020, the *Guardian* issued an exclusive report announcing that the UK artist Banksy had financed a new "boat to rescue refugees attempting to reach Europe from north Africa" (Tondo and Stierl 2020). It is painted pink and features "a Banksy artwork depicting a girl in a life vest holding a heart-shaped safety buoy" as symbols of the feminist orientation of this humanitarian project. "The vessel, named *Louise Michel* after a French feminist anarchist, set off in secrecy on 18 August from the Spanish seaport of Burriana, near Valencia", added the journalists. As one of the crew members, nurse Lea Risner, declared, this project "is anarchist at its heart" and "brings together a variety of social struggles for social justice, including women's and LGBTIQ rights, racial equality, migrants' rights, environmentalism and animal rights" (as quoted in Tondo and Stierl 2020).[5]

The captain of the boat, Pia Klemp, also gave some important information about why Banksy decided to fund this mission. Klemp argues it was because she does not "see sea rescue as a humanitarian action, but as a part of an anti-fascist fight" (as quoted in Tondo and Stierl 2020). As this dossier demonstrates, Klemp is not the first activist to envisage her relief work as inspired by a humanitarianism undertaken due to political sympathies, in which neutrality is complicated by ideals such as the belief in human dignity regardless of nationality, ethnic origins, social class and religious or political orientation. Furthermore, Klemp's words unequivocally remind us of those voices represented by the humanitarian volunteers who assisted Spanish Republican refugees during the Spanish Civil War and subsequent exile in France, who understood their aid as a means of struggling against global fascism.

Notes

1. Although refugees and internally displaced people (hereafter IDP) flee their homes for similar reasons, the latter group does not have any legal status because IDP remain under the jurisdiction of their nation-state. For more information, see the UN Refugee Agency's website https://www.unhcr.org/internally-displaced-people.html.
2. Rony Brauman (2018, 29) has provided a critical view of Filiu's argument, remarking on the differences between the Spanish Civil War and the ongoing Syrian conflict.
3. Junod's book was published in 1947 as an institutional response in the face of the criticism that the ICRC received after WWII, because of the failure of its actions during the Jewish genocide. It has been reprinted in four editions and translated into various languages, showing the extent to which it has become a key referent for ICRC delegates. See Farré (2016).
4. For more on the history of experience, see Boddice (2017).
5. On Louise Michel's relief work during the Paris Commune, see Martín-Moruno (2019).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

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