The Spanish Civil War and Its Memory

Molly Goodkind, Marcella Hayes
and Amanda Mitchell

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Martha Gellhorn in Spain during the war,
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FOREWORD

By the fall, 1936, in New York or Oklahoma, worker and communist organizations arduously and fervently debated events in Spain. Soon the Lincoln, and later the Washington, brigades were organized—hundreds of young, idealist, men and women left their country to fight in Madrid, in Guadalajara, on the Ebro River. Among them, there were, to be sure, many communists, but also many first-generation American Jews, young progressive workers and students, and also a solid representation of African-American communists from Chicago and Oklahoma who, inspired by the Ethiopian fight against Mussolini's imperialism, joined forces with their fellow Americans, Spaniards, Romanians, French, etc. Of course these Black idealists found that the color line divided as much the Spanish Republic's barricades as their own Lincoln brigade or country. Upon their return, those who survived had to struggle for another three decades before they could achieve their full civil rights. And yet, they shared with many progressive people of the world that epochal epic, that mark of a generation: Spain.

They all had been there, fighting for what was seen as the indisputable right thing to do. *"Tengo una alegría inmensa,"* wrote Mexican painter David Alfaro Siqueiros in 1936 Madrid, *"de saber que puedo ser útil en esta inmensa lucha por la libertad de todos los pueblos del mundo."* But the memories of so many about that anti-fascist moment varied; what a Black com-

munist from Oklahoma remembered was not the same as a young first-generation Jewish New Yorker brigadier; what Ernest Hemingway or Octavio Paz saw and remembered, sitting in Madrid's cafes without ever joining any fighting, was different from what young American women journalists and nurses, who joined the lines of fire, experienced and recalled. For brigadiers, workers, communists, Jews, African-Americans, men and women, were there to fight, not to tell stories. Many of them died. But over time specific memories paled vis-à-vis the larger fact of having been then and there. So momentous was the import of the Spanish Civil War in the world, and most especially in the United States, that in the 1970s, when once more another kind of fascism was unbounded in Chile, the prestigious poet and human-rights activist Rose Styron wrote "Chile: The Spain of our Generation." The mark of Spain was so undeletable that any new struggle had to return to that archetype.

And the story continues. Every year a new cohort of US students come to Barcelona, still captured by the moral, historical and memory power of the Spanish Civil War. They cannot help but remember their reading of Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* when at the Plaça de Catalunya, to feel the weight of a history that somehow they already know. No wonder two of the three papers included here are young American voices, with new preoccupations, but still touched by the waves of memories, ethical concerns and epic struggles of the Spanish Civil War. Moreover, exploring history and memory of the Spanish Civil War has become, as it could have not been otherwise, a form of self-exploration for US students.

Thus, Molly Goodkind examines the war and women through the analysis of four important radical women who participated in the war (Mary Low, Lois Orr, Martha Gellhorn and Josephine Herbst). She deals with three American and one English women, all very important for the anti-fascist world struggle in the 1930s and for the way it came to be remembered in the English-speaking world. All of them were not only part of that struggle in Spain but then also in Cuba, Mexico and the US. And there were many like them. Molly Goodkind could have dealt with pho-

tographer Gerda Tardo (the extraordinary German Jewish photographer, R. Capra's partner, who was killed during the war) or with Anita Brenner (the Texan radical who came to Spain after her fascination with the Mexican Revolution) or with the Austrian journalist Ilse Kulcsar (Pollak, Barea), who became a great translator of her husband's book (Arturo Barea, *La forja de un rebelde)* and of many Spanish and German books into English. For indeed the role of women, the historiography has shown in the last three decades, was fundamental in the Civil War. But Molly Goodkind's treatment is not only about women, the Civil War and Spain, but about women, progressive struggles and the US.

Amanda Mitchell's paper on historical memory and mass grave excavation in contemporary Spain studies the relevant recent debates on history and memory as a result of the *Ley de la Memoria Histórica* (2007). Once more, the epochal moral and political power of the Spanish Civil War surfaces, but the discussion is not only about Spain. It is about the issue of memory in history, seen through the most emblematic of the 20th-century examples for the US—other than the Holocaust—the Spanish Civil War. So, as it were, Amanda Mitchell discusses the Spanish debates testing three decades of US deliberations on the relevance of testimony, memory and justice in history.

In turn, Marcella Hayes examines the role of seven anarchist *maquis* in Barcelona. She follows their survival over the Franco years in Barcelona, showing the many dangers faced by these men who left traces of their quiet but enduring resistance. Hayes's paper may be seen merely as a paper of a US college student who, taking advantage of her study abroad program, learned Spanish and Catalan and thus found this interesting topic to pursue. And yet, I believe Marcella, and Amanda and Molly, all, consciously or unconsciously, partook of a very long and novel American tradition.

Mauricio Tenorio Trillo
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OFF TO SEE SOMETHING REAL: FOUR WOMEN OBSERVER-PARTICIPANTS IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

Molly Goodkind

In 1936 and 1937, four women traveled to Spain to support the Spanish Republic in its civil war against fascist forces. While civil wars have occurred since ancient times, the voluntary participation of thousands of foreigners—especially women—was groundbreaking. The set of circumstances which allowed and motivated these women to make their journey, and established that journey's larger significance, included a global political atmosphere newly charged with impassioned radicalism on both the right and left, infusing the moment with a sense of critical significance. What these women found in Spain would alter their lives forever, just as it was altering the trajectory of the modern world.

Generally understood as a conflict between the Republican government and the Nationalist army led by Francisco Franco, the Spanish Civil War was in fact a far more complicated struggle. The progressive Republican government had originated in 1936 with the narrow electoral victory of the Popular Front over the Rightist Bloc. However, on the heels of the election, the rightist leaders of the Spanish military, including Francisco Franco, attempted a coup d'état. Although the coup failed, it left the country divided politically and militarily, as right-wing forces initiated what would become a civil war to oust the Republican

government and return to a pre-democratic culture of extreme social and religious conservatism.[1]

This extremism prompted a backlash of radical leftism and social revolution. Not simply a two-sided conflict, the Spanish Civil War was intricately intertwined with a social revolution, centered in Barcelona and the surrounding area of Catalonia (also with a strong presence in the autonomous communities of Aragon and Andalusia). Anarchists, socialists, communists and others used the outbreak of civil war to promote revolution and assert radical leftist measures as the only means to combat fascism. The revolution—at least in theory—sought to give control of the land, factories and government to the workers and peasants, while simultaneously defeating fascism. Divisions arose not only between the Republicans who supported the revolution and those who did not but also among the revolutionaries themselves, and these divisions led to significant fracturing within the anti-fascist front, contributing to its eventual collapse. The Republican government and many communists increasingly rejected revolutionary socialist and anarchist models in favor of concentrating on battling the Fascists, hoping that if they leaned toward social democracy other Western democracies would come to their aid. More radical revolutionaries—often anarchists—became increasingly frustrated with what they saw as the capitulation of the leftist government, insisting that even if Franco were defeated, without social revolution fascism could never be fully vanquished. Further-

[1] While the government Franco and other right-wing military leaders hoped to—and eventually would—install was fascist, this Spanish strain differed from the fascist ideologies of Hitler and Mussolini, which strove for new forms of culture which, while equally oppressive, were not based in traditional conservatism. Franco was heavily allied with the Catholic Church in Spain, and hoped to return the country to the "glory" of extreme domestic conservatism and widespread foreign imperialism. For more information see Juan J. Linz, *Fascism, Breakdown of Democracy, Authoritarian and Totalitarian Regimes: coincidences and distinctions* (Madrid: Instituto Juan March de Estudios e Investigaciones, 2002).

more, even within these basic divisions, smaller parties proliferated—often quarreling over tactics and goals. Much of this dissonance came to a head in May 1937 in Barcelona, when fighting between the government and the POUM (the *Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista*—a smaller revolutionary party) along with the CNT (the *Confedración Nacional del Trabajo*—the anarchist union) broke out in the streets—coinciding with the arrest and murder of many *poumistas* and anarchists.

As the civil war became a site of open conflict between left-wing revolution and fascism, it also became a focus internationally for people committed to the right or left. The Fascists drew support from Germany and Italy, while the Republicans received support from the Soviet Union—although the relationship between the Stalin regime and other revolutionaries in Spain was a complex and fragile one. In addition to the machinations of the great powers of the day, the war drew intense international solidarity—mostly on behalf of the Republican cause. As many as 35,000 volunteers were suddenly streaming into Spain, signing up to risk their lives to support the Republicans. Foreigners volunteered to fight in the militia with the International Brigades (dubbed the "Lincoln Brigades" in the US), to work in political offices, as nurses, and as partisan journalists. The war rallied most factions of the international left preparing for the developing battle against international fascism.

The Spanish Civil War also reverberated among women and altered the course of their history. Spanish women had long suffered extreme repression, largely based on the intimate relationship of Spain's political institutions with a conservative form of Catholicism which dictated women's subservience to men and their confinement to the domestic sphere. However, with the election of the Republican government, and particularly with the outbreak of war and revolution, suddenly women were being educated, participating in politics, and even fighting in battle.[2] Intense

[2] For further information see Mary Nash, *Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War* (Denver: Arden Press, 1995).