

The Unquiet Dead

Anarchism, Fascism,
and Mythology

3. The Spanish Revolutionists and Their Betrayal

Helen Graham tells us of post-war Spain:

The defeated cast no reflection. No public space was theirs. ...The Republican dead could never be publically mourned. The defeated were obliged to be complicit in this denial. Women concealed the violent deaths of husbands and fathers from their children in order to protect them physically and psychologically. In villages all over Spain, many kept secret lists of the dead. Sisters mentally mapped the location of their murdered brothers, but never spoke of these things. The silent knowledge of unquiet graves necessarily produced a devastating schism between public and private memory in Spain. It was a schism that would outlive even the Franco regime itself.

I write here in solidarity with these unquiet dead.

General Francisco Franco led a military coup against the newly formed Spanish Republic in July of 1936. While Franco won the war, he met with more concerted resistance from a wider swath of the Spanish population than fascists encountered anywhere else. That resistance was strong insofar as its inhabitants were already radicalized by the Left and accustomed to struggle. It failed insofar as some of its most radical participants made compromises with and were betrayed by the larger Left; as it did not reach out to the international Left and to colonized Morocco; and as England, France, and the United States refused to directly aid the Spanish anti-fascist struggle, a calculated decision made on the basis of the balance of power in Europe and those governments' fear of Left revolution.

There have been many exhaustive studies of the Spanish Civil War; I will not here attempt to offer a thorough explanation of most of the primary actors, or present more than a sketch of prewar and wartime events. Instead, I will briefly explore the cultural makeup of prewar Spain, particularly among anarchists and their opponents; the origins of Spanish fascism, and its international supporters; the causes and forms of resistance and resistance mythology in Spain; the collaboration of anti-authoritarian revolutionaries with the statist Left against fascism; the betrayal of anarchists by that Left; and the consequences of these successes and failures.

An abbreviated schematic of the players in the war

On the right were Franco and the majority of the military, supported by the explicitly fascist Falange and CEDA parties, and many landowners, bosses, members of the aristocracy, and the Spanish Catholic Church. They are sometimes called rebels, nationalists, or fascists in this piece. Franco and many of his forces were not explicitly fascist, but were materially and ideologically supported by many, including Mussolini and Hitler. Military forces included the *Africanistas*, Spanish troops who became experienced in combat and colonial occupation in Northern Africa; troops conscripted from Spanish Morocco; air operations largely conducted by Germany; and maritime attacks from Italy and Germany, supported by intelligence from U.S. corporations.

The Second Spanish Republic controlled the center from 1931-1939. It was repressive and conservative in its early days, then moved towards the socialist left with the Popular Front election in early 1936; the Civil War began in July of that year. Those who specifically supported the idea of the Republic were “Republicans”; however, all forces operating in resistance to Franco were frequently called Republican, over-simplifying the conflict into a two-sided war.

The Leftist and antipolitical forces included the CNT-FAI: by 1936, one organization with two wings, the FAI tending to be more anarchist, and the CNT more communist. At heart a labor union, it became a home for many affinity groups who carried out attacks before the war, including *Solidarios* and *Nosotros*. The CNT-FAI was a major participant in the Civil War: it gave birth to the Durruti Column and the Iron Column, among other fighting and supporting forces. Other anarchist forces of the time before and after the Civil War included *Mujeres Libres*, an anarchy-feminist organization; various egoists, freethinkers, and early eco-anarchists; the Modern School movement; *pueblos* and communes; many other organizations, social centers, and non-affiliated people.

There were also Communists, who became increasingly affiliated with the USSR and Stalinists over the course of the war, and POUM, a dissident-Communist union and fighting force, eventually targeted by other Communists as Trotskyist. However, Trotsky himself had public disagreements with the group, and by the time it was being attacked as Trotskyist POUM included people of many different political affiliations. The UGT was the most prominent socialist union. “Internationals”, finally, were a mixture of anarchists, communists, socialists, and un-affiliated people who came from abroad to fight against Franco in the Civil War, both independently and as part of the International Brigades.

I. Spain before the war

The tradition of resistance to oppression in Spain long predates the Civil War, and even Spain's encounter with European Leftism. Outside observers have consistently found it remarkable: "Napoleon, who regarded Spain as an 'inanimate corpse,' was astonished to find 'that when the Spanish State was dead, Spanish society was full of life, and every part of it overflowing with powers of resistance.'" Emma Goldman asserted, "The Spanish are a race apart and their anarchism is not the result of books. They have received it with their mother's milk. It is now in their very blood." Though I cannot support claims about politics and blood, the cultural transmission of rebellion in Spain is at least as real as the cultural transmission of Christianity, tradition, and resistance to modernity that were manifested in Franco.

The *pueblos* of Spain bore a resemblance to the *soviets* of Russia: self-sustaining, internally focused communities that shared most things. This completeness of human relations "involved not only a deep sense of moral unity, common purpose, and mutual aid, but also a body of rights, or *fueros*, which defined the community's autonomy in local affairs and protected it from the encroachment of outside authority." As the Narodniks, and later the Bolsheviks, were inspired by the indigenous Russian form of self-governance, so the *pueblo* had a reciprocal relationship with Spanish anarchism, exemplified in the case of the 1933 tragedy of Casas Viejas. The anarchist community members of this Andalusian village knew how they related and wanted to relate to each other, and took up the power they needed to do that; out of the blue, Casa Viejas declared itself a liberated town. Their revolution lasted one day before they were slaughtered by the police; in one house, people were burned alive with their children. There were few survivors. Anarchists outside the village were inspired by their revolutionary example and outraged by their treatment; many of them came from similar small villages where they wished to see similar transitions, and feared similar results. The event "crystallized all the frustrations, resentments, and barbarities that finally caused the [Azaña] government to resign nine months later"; the middle class moved Right, afraid of the Left, and the working class moved further Left, outraged by the depravities of the Right.

The cultural and class makeup of Spain varied intensely by region during the period we are discussing. To the north, Catalonia had, and continues to have, a strong separatist tendency; it became autonomous shortly before the Civil War. The region includes Barcelona, a center of both government and revolutionary activity for many decades. Frequently, the north would be

in revolt while the south lay quiet, or vice-versa; this regional autonomy of action was a great strength of the revolutionary movement. As for culture, by Bookchin's quite condensed and stereotyped characterization, north of the Sierra Morena lay classical Spain: "stern, morally rigid, obsessed by an unyielding sense of responsibility and duty. To the south lies Andalusia: easy-going, pleasure-loving, and delightfully impulsive." Bookchin says the latter was due to successive colonizations, and particularly cites the Moorish occupation of the south as leaving behind a "hedonistic tradition."

Even earlier, the Romans installed the *latifundium* in the region, a plantation system of agriculture. Bookchin: "The *latifundium* could well be described as the agrarian ulcer of the Mediterranean world and in many respects bears comparison with the plantation economy of the American South." As in the American South, these sites of intense exploitation generated revolt. While Kern depicts the Spanish South as neglected by anarchists and more readily controlled by Communists by the time of the Civil War, Bookchin describes its earlier days as centers of anarchist activity. Economic disparity was brutal: a tiny fraction of the population held 33% of the land in the mid-1800s, while the 10 million smallest landowners owned less than 15%. The plight of the southern landless was even more desperate; the project of surviving by gaining their own private land therefore kept the landless politically engaged no matter how much repression they faced. Collectivized agriculture finally took hold in the South during the Civil War, at last addressing this economic injustice—but the peasant dream was realized for only a couple of years before Franco smashed it.

As the Catholic Church was particularly strong in Spain, and served as one of the dominant oppressors of the poor (especially the Leftist poor), Spanish anarchism has a long history of anti-Church struggle.^a This is based not only in the mainstream^b anarchist philosophical rejection of religion, but in a response to material conditions. While, on the one hand, the Church served as a social support and place of comfort for the poor, it was also one of their primary exploiters. Once the Church was dispossessed of its lands by the state (enclosure occurs on all fronts, after all), Bookchin says, "The higher clergy began to neglect its pastoral duties for the more lucrative realms of industry, commerce, urban real estate, and, according to the

a Orwell observes that a certain "hearts and minds" competition also plays into this dynamic. "To the Spanish people, at any rate in Catalonia and Aragon, the Church was a racket pure and simple. And possibly Christian belief was replaced to some extent by Anarchism, whose influence is widely spread and which undoubtedly has a religious tinge."

b Some anarchists are religious, even Christian—Tolstoy, most famously—but most classical anarchists have been strictly atheist.

gossip of the day, brothels. The new investments transformed the Catholic Church from the largest landowner in Spain into the largest capitalist; its ideology, the most medieval and atavistic in Western Europe, transformed it from the social conscience of the ruling class into the most reactionary force in social life.” While it maintained a hold in center-north Spain, the Church became unpopular among urban workers, even more so with southern laborers, who “viewed the Church as a pillar and perpetuator of a landed order that oppressed them.” When the Second Republic took hold in 1931, secularization was one of its immediate reforms, and met with strong Church reaction. Graham: “...Catholic mobilization in 1930s Spain was predominantly that of lay people who, well before the Civil War itself, came to see themselves as engaged in a crusade to defend an endangered way of life.” Graham considers the argument that secularization was anti-religious repression, but finds it ahistorical. “Conservative Catholics in 1930s Spain,” she points out, “were outraged that their beliefs and practices were being constrained, but they themselves entertained no concept of civil and cultural rights within the Spanish state for those professing other religions, still less for freethinkers or atheists.” This is the Spanish Catholic Church, after all, that conducted pogroms against Jews, decreed Jewish expulsion from Spain, and held the Spanish Inquisition a few centuries prior. However long ago that may seem, the Jewish expulsion law was not repealed until 1968.

The way of life for Church autocrats was indeed endangered by the Left, as it was for all those who benefited from the structure of oppression in pre-Franco Spain. The sixty years between anarchism’s arrival in Spain and the outbreak of the war in 1936 were marked by many uprisings, insurrections, and intense labor struggles. I will not detail these; they are thoroughly described by Murray Bookchin in his work *The Spanish Anarchists: The Heroic Years*. However, it is important to understand that they provided those who went on to fight fascism in Spain with tactical knowledge, personal experience in combat, and an imbricated *belonging* within revolutionary tissue. When not only your friends and comrades, but also the elders in your family, your neighbors, and people within your entire region have fought for freedom along various lines for decades, there is a sense of rightness of purpose and community in struggle that is hard to find within only one’s own experiences and lifetime. The context of their ongoing revolutionary struggle in the face of death, torture, and imprisonment made the Spanish anarchists more willing and able to enter into struggle against those who promised to bring more of it.

the anarchists

“I believe, as I have always believed, in liberty. Liberty understood in the sense of responsibility. I consider discipline indispensable, but it must be self-discipline moved by a common ideal and a strong feeling of comradeship.”

—Buenaventura Durruti, to Emma Goldman

Giuseppe Fanelli, an Italian disciple of Mikhail Bakunin, arrived in Spain in October 1868. Despite a nearly absolute language barrier, he was able to communicate “the Beautiful Idea”^c to a small number of workers, including Anselmo Lorenzo, who later became known as “the grandfather of Spanish Anarchism.” Anarchism spread outwards from those few workers remarkably quickly. For this reason, Bakunin was the dominant foreign anarchist influence in Spain for many years, although Peter Kropotkin and Nestor Mahkno became popular there as well in their time. Bakunin’s conception of anarchy described “human reason as the only criterion of truth, human conscience as the basis of justice, individual and collective freedom as the only source of order in society.”

There was both a strong trajectory of anarchist attack in Spain and also its false specter, raised by the Right and used as an excuse for repression. For example, the *Desheredados* (Disinherited) were a real group that performed assassinations and arsons in Andalusia in the 1870s-80s; the *Mano Negra* (Black Hand), a secret Andalusian society that supposedly planned to kill all landlords, was most likely invented by the police and newspapers. Regardless of particular truths and lies, “propaganda of the deed” became popular among many revolutionaries internationally after the nihilist group The People’s Will assassinated Czar Alexander II in 1879, as discussed later in this text. Spain was no exception, especially once Kropotkin’s writings on the issue entered the country in the 1880s. For those tired of the slow workings of labor organizing, propaganda of the deed provided a way to perform revolutionary acts individually or in small numbers. As labor organizing and the repression it faced were no less violent in those days, this was therefore not a choice between violence and nonviolence, or safety and risk, but primarily a matter of tactical preference.

The model of the affinity group, developed in response to the central logistical issue faced by anarchists—how to act together, but with autonomy—was a major contribution of Spanish anarchism to the international movement. Bookchin tells us the group structure comes from “the *tertulia*: the small,

^c As anarchism was called by Voltairine de Cleyre, among many others of her time.

traditionally Hispanic [sic] group of male intimates who gather daily at a favorite café to socialize and discuss ideas.” The Spanish anarchists did the same, but sometimes also planned actions, *attentados*, designed either as attacks against those responsible for ongoing oppression or as revenge for the repression, executions, tortures, and imprisonments of anarchists. While some have argued that practicing “propaganda of the deed” isolated Spanish anarchists from the working class, I take quite the opposite lesson from my evaluation of this history: those who refused to take dramatic action were the ones outside of the general current of class antagonism shaping the Spanish lower classes.

Bookchin makes the important point that these attacks, which are often contrasted with the “generous humanism” of anarchist ideals, are in no way actually separate from them: that Francisco Ferrer or Fermín Salvochea,^d exalted as gentle saints, were no less anarchist than the assassins, arsonists, *pistoleros* and bank robbers with whom they kept company—and vice versa. Nor were they treated differently by the state; Ferrer was executed as a scapegoat for the Tragic Week uprising (which, it seems, in fact began spontaneously), and Salvochea was incarcerated for many years. Many anarchists have staged explanations of the right to use violence in self-defense, and of the necessity of expropriation to the process of revolutionary resistance. Regardless of one’s feelings on those issues, it is necessary to keep in mind that the brutality and destructiveness of the State always far exceeded that of the anarchists. The guerrilla war between anarchists on one side, and bosses, landowners, and the government on the other, claimed—just between 1918 and 1923—900 lives in Barcelona alone, 1,500 in all of Spain. The vast majority of those deaths were the executions and murders of workers and revolutionists.

However, by Kropotkin’s assessment in 1891: “...the development of the revolutionary spirit gains enormously from heroic individual acts... it is not by these heroic acts that revolutions are made.” Though intrinsically entwined with *attentado*, syndicalism became the dominant form of anarchist organization and struggle in Spain with the creation of the CNT in 1910. Frequent strikes became a principal tactic: “[a]lthough many of these strikes would raise specific demands... others were strictly revolutionary. The strikers would pose no demands. Their purpose was to achieve *comunismo libertario*. When at last it was clear that this was not to come, the strikes would end as

d Bookchin describes Salvochea: “...a man of rare generosity and sympathy... [who] would often be found by his friends without a cap or a topcoat because he had given his own to the needy... a serene man, he was rarely austere or somber. His demeanor towards his friends was affectionate, and towards his enemies he displayed an equanimity that verged on irony.”

suddenly as they had begun, and everyone would quietly return to work. Then the town would wait for the next opportunity. The swollen groups would shrivel back to a small nucleus of dedicated revolutionaries until another upsurge swept across the land.”

Syndicalism in general refers to any form of unionization; anarcho-syndicalism is labor organization for the ultimate purpose of anarchist social revolution. Bookchin describes anarcho-syndicalism so:

At the same time that syndicalism exerts... unrelenting pressure on capitalism, it tries to build the new social order within the old. The unions and the ‘labor councils’ are not merely means of struggle and instruments of social revolution; they are also the very structure around which to build a free society. The workers are to be educated in the job of destroying the old propertied order and in the task of reconstructing a stateless, libertarian society. The two go together. When all conditions have ripened to a point where social revolution is possible, the workers go on a general strike with the avowed aim of toppling capitalist society. All means of production and transportation cease to operate. The capitalist economy is brought to a standstill.

This model is more realistic and material than the nihilist tendency within anarchism would prefer; it is also, therefore, more susceptible to co-optation, reformist tendencies, and recuperation.^e While the CNT, at first the most prominent of anarchist-populated unions in Spain (possessing also Communist and socialist members^f), had its day of revolutionary strife, dissatisfaction with these probably inevitable tendencies led to the creation of the FAI in 1927. Because many prominent anarchists were in exile at the time, the founders of the FAI were largely unknown anarchists from small villages with fewer pre-conceived notions and foreign ideas. This meant

e Bookchin: “...German fascism was to annihilate two huge Marxian political parties with scarcely a flicker of resistance by their leaders and following. The German proletariat, in fact, was to become so completely divested of revolutionary initiative by its well-disciplined Social Democratic and Communist parties that Hitler marveled at the ease with which it was shackled to the totalitarian state.”

f The CNT at first maintained ties with several international Communist, Socialist, and anarchist organizations, but broke with the Soviets entirely upon hearing about the Soviet suppression of the 1921 Kronstadt sailor’s uprising. The repression at Kronstadt, in which several thousand workers were murdered for rebelling against the Taylorization of their work, marked a turning point in Soviet persecution of anarchists and other workers who did not toe the party line, and is considered by anarchists to have been one of the most serious Communist betrayals of revolutionary ideals. Lenin is reported to have ordered: “Shoot them down like pheasants.”

the organization seriously discussed issues of all kinds, including seemingly trivial lifestyle matters, that had been left behind by the more formally labor-oriented CNT. The group was organized along the affinity group model, with expanding “groups of groups” composing a federation; this allowed pre-existing communities to continue to operate within it as such. From its basis within worker society, the FAI developed a deeply conflictual approach, and many affinity groups of *ilegales* given to robbery and *attentado* existed within it. The combination of the two unions (CNT-FAI) went on to be the best known source of anarchist fighters in the Civil War.

All of this militancy was necessary in Spain; by Kern’s assessment, “Until 1931, anarchism survived as the only radical philosophy in Spain because it alone was sufficiently decentralized, militant, and violent to cope with governmental abuses.” In the 1870s, barely years after anarchism arrived in Spain, hundreds were jailed and sixty-six were put into weighted sacks and thrown into the sea following a labor uprising; in the face of such intense repression, anarchism survived only by virtue of its remarkable plasticity. This plasticity was the result of community support. Anarchist values and practices were not limited to the militant young men who claimed actions, but were sustained across an entire population. In his book *Seven Red Sundays*, a novelization of the 1935 Madrid uprising, Ramón Sender (who came up entirely within this context, and knew his subject) describes an anarchist’s elderly mother and community:

When a comrade arrived at three in the morning, seeking a shakedown [place to sleep], he got it, and before he left next day, shared Germinal’s hearty breakfast. ...The mother served them distrustfully until she saw in Germinal’s eye his sympathy with them. When that happened she came and went at her ease and called the stranger ‘son’. Afterwards, if the police came nosing, the old lady received them suitably and had some unsavory language for them about their dirty job. Some of the police feared her more than their own chiefs, because out of that gentle gray head poured bitter insults and searching words. ...In the district a police agent was always spoken of as a dog. They knew it well, and when it happened that the neighbors heard the old lady speaking, they aided her with a chorus. Other women appeared at the windows and the balconies adding to the trouble.

The anarchists and the police, the Civil Guards or *Guardia*, were at war from the beginning. The Civil Guards were deliberately selected from outside the communities they worked in to protect them from local influence; this also

had the effect of making locals entirely unsympathetic to the Guards' aims. Bookchin wryly assesses, "They walked in pairs, fully armed, and exuded a mistrust towards the community that soon enveloped them in hostility. A force apart, increasingly detested, the *Guardia* became easily unnerved and trigger-happy, escalating minor protests into riots and riots into insurrections. Whatever support the revolutionary groups could not mobilize with their literature and oratory, the *Guardia* eventually gained for them with its carbines."

In 1912, hundreds of CNT militants were arrested, and the CNT was forced underground; the entire labor movement was under attack. The premier drafted 12,000 workers into the army to break a railway strike—and was promptly assassinated by a young anarchist. The next year, his successor declared a general amnesty for many imprisoned strikers. In 1924, during another time of intense repression, over 5,000 anarchists were exiled from Spain; they went to their comrades in Germany, France, and Belgium, and waited until it was safe to return, exchanging and refreshing their ideas and tactics in the meantime. (It was in this way that the ideas of the Ukrainian anarchist Nestor Makhno, who argued for the creation of revolutionary armies, gained currency in Spain. He made a particular impact on Buenaventura Durruti, the famed illegalist anarchist who led just such an army in the war, though its primary target was the fascists rather than the State itself.) Again and again, the movement was decimated, only to rebound elsewhere with renewed ferocity.

This is in part because Spanish anarchists were fighting *for* something. They were not yet disillusioned by the horrors of Soviet repression, as anarchists outside the USSR became after reports from Emma Goldman and others on the situation there, and as the international Left became following Krushchev's denouncement of Stalin in 1956. Before the Civil War, Spanish anarchists fully believed they could realize revolutionary utopia in their lifetimes. This gave them an edge over not just the fascists, but also the "realistic" views of the Communists, who advocated a gradual transition of society, who saw even fascism as a possibly necessary stage of late (!) capitalism on the way towards communism. The power of their beliefs caused anarchists to not only engage in armed conflict with the state, capitalists, and landowners, but also to fight for the liberation of women and against the bourgeois morality that oppressed them. Anarchists pushed, for example, for the adoption of CNT bylaws that admitted women to membership and recognized the principle of sexual equality, called for secular education and the eight-hour workday, and demanded the abolition of child labor.

The role of Spanish anarchists in education among the severely disenfranchised lower classes cannot be overstated. In 1900, nearly 70% of the Spanish population was illiterate; anarchists saw education as a way towards personal, economic, and political empowerment for the working-class. Bookchin: “...during the late nineteenth century in Spain, the village Anarchists were virtually the sole voices of science and modernism in the sierra... Always ready to expound upon their views, they formed the center of all discussions on religion, politics, science, morality, and education. Many children in the *pueblos* acquired the rudiments of reading and writing from these conscientious ‘apostles of the Idea.’” In more formal terms, Spanish anarchist Francisco Ferrer founded the Modern School; his model of free education has been internationally adopted and adapted since.^g Alas, he was executed by a firing squad.

Again, none of these examples of Spanish anarchist social projects should be seen as excuses for anarchist violence, or contrasted with it; all of these elements went together, as the authorities well knew. They prepared anarchists for their upcoming conflict with the fascists: the only separation between the anarchist war *against* the Church, the State, and capitalism—which was also their war *for* freedom, equality, education, and material sufficiency—and their antagonism towards fascists is the separation forced upon them by their betrayers.

^g Notably, Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, Voltairine de Cleyre, and others founded one of these Modern Schools in Ferrer’s memory in New York City.

fascists

“Without Africa I cannot explain myself to myself or to my comrades in arms.”

—General Franco

“I will save Spain from Marxism, whatever the cost.”

“And if that means shooting half of Spain?”

“As I said, whatever the cost.”

—General Franco, in an interview with Jay Allen

Franco himself did not necessarily identify as a fascist; nor did many of his forces. The Falange party appears to have been the only explicitly fascist organization in the mix. However, Franco’s rebellion was heavily supported by Mussolini and Hitler; his ideology was founded in reaction to the same material conditions as fascism ever is; and his values are generally shared by all fascist movements, although he did not in turn share all of their practices or points of ideology. The dictatorship he led for decades after the war differs in no particular way from other fascist governments, besides its longevity. We should not let our observations of history (or indeed the present) be dictated by the particular words our enemies choose to describe themselves; we must call a pig a pig, whatever its lipstick.

The Spanish fascists did not^h come from the Left, as they largely did in Italy. Instead, fascism was generated in Spain by those who were, justly, scared of the insurgent Left: the Church, the landowners, and other beneficiaries of the status quo. I believe this is because the Left was engaged in fiercer struggle than it was elsewhere—there was not the sense, as there was in Italy, that Leftist struggles were not militant enough or making enough headway. Tactical diversity within the Left allowed people to be as militant as they wanted to be; it was only the reaction to this militancy, therefore, that generated fascism. This is not to blame these revolutionists for the rise of fascism, but rather to absolve them of it. While in Italy and Argentina, as I have illustrated elsewhere in this text, the Left hesitated and left a vacuum filled by fascism, one cannot really blame the far Left in Spain for the same; they seldom hesitated at all. If anyone is to blame besides the fascists themselves, it is the progressive Republican administration of 1931-3, who

^h There were a couple of Catalanian independence groups described as “para-fascist” on the Left, but they were put down by the Republic. As a nationalist group, they used language about the invasion of “foreign dung” that would lead to “de-Catalanization.” This is a common and concerning theme within nationalist groups not displaced from their “homeland”, no matter their seemingly positive orientation.

failed to fully demilitarize public order, or institute enough economic shifts to fully upset traditional power. Instead, their ineffectual attempts opened the gate for a more conservative and repressive government to follow; an answering swerve towards socialism; and the final fascist reaction. This is perhaps paralleled in our current moment.

General Franco led a military coup, and so it is the military that most merits close examination in the rise of Spanish fascism. According to Helen Graham's research, the loss of Spanish empire reduced the need for the large officer corps of the Spanish military. These officers, feeling their positions threatened, "came to see themselves as the defenders of Spain's unity and hierarchy and of its cultural and political homogeneity, as consubstantial with the country's historic greatness. Indeed, many in the military elite took this one step further, interpreting their defence of this idea of 'Spain' as a new *imperial duty*." Franco installed *Africanistas*—Spanish colonial officers—as the teaching staff of the Spanish military academy at Zaragoza. "The academy became the forcing ground for ideas of imperial rebirth, of the military as the guardian and savior of Spain, and was thus an integral part of an emergent politics of an ultra-nationalist right." This is reminiscent of both Mussolini's ideas around the re-invention of the Roman Empire, and the dashed imperial ambitions of transitional Germany. And, "in France in June 1848, it was the veteran generals of Algerian colonization who led the repression of the uprising in Paris. Arguably, the French proletariat was doomed to another generation of repression by their failure to concern themselves with the plight of those across the Mediterranean."

The experiences of the Spanish military in African colonies became the foundation under their approach to the Civil War. Graham: "In villages across the rebel [fascist]-held south there was systematic brutality, torture, shaving and rape of women, and mass public killings of both men and women in the aftermath of conquest. Sometimes villages were literally wiped off the map by repression. The war was being fought as if it were a colonial campaign against insubordinate indigenous peoples. Spain's landed aristocracy, often the fathers and elder brothers of *Africanista* army officers, viewed the landless poor of the south as virtual slaves without humanity or rights." As described in section eight of this text, Hannah Arendt foregrounds the rise of fascism in Germany in the colonization of Africa; others have found that the exploitation of African natural resources and the enslavement of African people by Europeans and Americans is fundamental to capitalism;ⁱ and still others find *the plantation* to be the dominant, ongoing form of

i Frank Wilderson, Saidiya Hartman, others within the Afropessimism discourse.

primitive accumulation by capitalism, wherever and whenever it takes place.^j As Southern Spain both retained the Roman *latifundium* plantation structure and had been shaped by a long-term, multicultural, “Moorish” colonization, it is a bitterly significant reoccurrence that both Moroccan troops and those experienced in dominating them were at the forefront of overthrowing the Republic by such brutally familiar tactics.^k Class never left the conversation, either: landowners rode alongside the fascists to reclaim the land the Republic had redistributed. “Rural laborers were killed where they stood, the ‘joke’ being they had got their ‘land reform’ at last—in the form of a burial plot.”

It was not, however, the Republic that formed the primary enemy of the fascists. Nor was it a racialized enemy—while there was little anti-racist analysis to be had in 1930s Spain, there was also little racist ideology. (The Jews, after all, had been expelled long ago; perhaps anti-Semitism would have played a larger role in this era if it had not already in the past.) In this case, the Other was the Left: its tactics, its participants, and its entire imaginary. “The conspirators and their cronies were not rising up against the republican government, but rather against the revolutionary process that had been maturing in Spain since 1931. The pretexts used by the rebels and their allies, particularly the church—such as the persecution of the clergy and the existence of a Marxist threat—were false.” As the Left in Spain had such indigenous roots in the *pueblo*, to attack the Left meant to attack the entire proletariat and those beneath—particularly the rural landless. The reason for the breadth of anti-fascist resistance in Spain was the same as the reason for these scorched-earth tactics—to be Spanish, unless you were a member of the upper class, deeply religiously conservative, or a military officer, was with very little exception to be an anti-fascist. And many of these fascists-by-class called for such purges, purifications, and blood sacrifices in the days after the coup, an example of the Manichaean mindset so typical of fascists everywhere (and from which their opposition, it must be said, was far from exempt.) The consequences were extreme. Graham:

People of all ages and conditions fell victim to this ‘cleansing’. What they had in common was that they were perceived as representing the changes brought by the Republic. This did not just mean the politically active — although Republican members of parliament or village mayors were primary targets for liquidation if caught. Nor did it only mean

j A critique leveled by many, but most intriguing to me in Donna Haraway’s “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin.”

k In another horrible symmetry, Spanish occupiers—who went on to be fascist—used poisonous gas against its colonial population in Morocco, foreshadowing its use by German fascists in their concentration camps.

those who benefited materially from the Republic's redistributive reforms—though urban workers, tenant farmers, and agricultural laborers were killed in their thousands. It also meant 'cleansing' people who symbolized cultural change and thus posed a threat to old ways of being and thinking: progressive teachers, intellectuals, self-educated workers, 'new' women. Rebel violence was targeted against the socially, culturally, and sexually different.

Not only did these attacks focus practically against those likely to oppose them, they "annihilated 'home' as a safe space." This was the very beginning of the now-familiar, then less-articulated, state of exception that was to characterize Franco's rule.¹

If the fascists found few allies among their own people, they had plenty abroad. Hitler and Mussolini began contributing to Franco's efforts within a week of the beginning of the war. "[A]bove all things, Hitler and Mussolini intervened in Spain because they saw it as the most effective way of changing the balance of power in Europe." By claiming the anti-communist discourse, the fascists were able to "neutralize British opposition to their escalating involvement." This rather neatly demonstrates the problem with claiming to not be fascist, yet holding common interests with them. Furthermore, it left the Spanish Republic with no choice but to seek the USSR as an ally, though it was not necessarily its first choice: it foresaw the internal political disharmony that would come with such an ally. The USSR, meanwhile, was motivated less by either impulses of solidarity or plots to take over the world, but more by the cynical observation that Nazi tanks which had conquered Spain could then roll over Soviet borders.

The U.S., British, and French governments, all of whom the Republicans hoped would aid them, refused to intervene. This is largely because of these countries' cynical considerations around the balance of power in Europe, but is also partly a failure of the Left within those countries to push their leadership (or indeed their constituency) to aid the Republic; Graham chalks this up, in part, to the history of pacifism within the European labor movement, left over from the First World War. In fact, England, France, Germany, and Italy all signed a pact of noninterference, though Italy and Germany straightaway ignored it. England actually hoped for Franco to win quickly, which it thought would prevent the war from turning into a

¹ While Agamben, following Arendt, finds this phenomenon most fully articulated in the Nazi concentration camps, the process is not linear or bound by location, having existed within colonies, slave plantations, and anti-Jewish pogroms for many years before.

generalized European conflict; protect British interests in Spain from Leftists; and prevent a Leftist revolution that would aid the USSR, and possibly agitate Leftists within England. Franco, Paz asserts, “was a product made in France and England, for he guaranteed the protection of the global empire (including Spain) maintained by those two countries.” While Britain was actively hostile to the Republicans, France merely followed suit, seeing its interests as bound up with those of England more than with Spain; many French citizens, inside and outside the government, covertly sent aid to Spain, and allowed people going to join the International Brigades through French borders. As for the United States, perhaps 2,800 American volunteers came to fight with the Republic—but most had to sneak their way across, and faced harassment and blacklisting when they returned home. Unsurprisingly, most U.S. volunteers were first or second-generation immigrants. Graham characterizes their participation as an aspect of ongoing European diaspora:

In fighting fascism in Spain these exiles and migrants were, then, taking up unfinished business that went back at least as far as the 1914-18 war. Its dislocations had brutalized politics, inducing the birth of the anti-democratic nationalisms that had physically displaced them. For exiles and migrants too, left internationalism was a form of politics quite naturally reinforced by their own diasporic condition. It also signified a powerful antidote to the other, literally murderous, forms of politics inhabiting their own countries. The stakes were raised further by the economic depression of the 1930s. Mass unemployment and deprivation—particularly in urban areas—accelerate political polarization by seeming to announce the collapse of an untenable capitalist economy that was still being defended by the forces of the Right. The brigaders felt that by going to fight the military rebels and their fascist backers in Spain, they were also striking a blow against economic and political oppression across the whole continent. They were thus quite conscious of themselves as political soldiers in an ongoing European civil war.

The international nature of this engagement manifested on both sides; according to an interview with Adam Hochschild, author of *Spain in Our Hearts*, Franco’s fascists found support among corporate America. The CEO of Texaco, Torkild Rieber, provided Franco with a “steady and guaranteed supply of oil”, violating US law by shipping the oil on Texaco tankers and extending credit to Franco. Moreover, Rieber used his relationship with various ports to monitor the movement of oil destined for the Republicans, and passed this information along to Franco. Twenty-nine such tankers were destroyed, damaged or captured by Spanish fascists before they could refuel

the Republican forces. Since the Republicans could not get oil from England or France, and therefore only acquired it in dribs and drabs, this was a major blow—while Franco went fully supplied, courtesy of Rieber.^m And U.S. complicity with Franco ran deep; Texaco was not alone. Gerassi:

The United States was neutral only on paper. In fact, while all U.S. and Canadian government agencies, and after a while those of other countries (except the Soviet Union and Mexico) as well, stopped shipments of food, arms, ammunition, drugs and fuel to the established, freely-elected Spanish Republican Government, no such agency tried to stop aid to the fascists. Rockefeller's Standard Oil (Exxon today), the Vacuum Oil Co., and Texaco provided Franco with all the oil he needed, and on credit. Charles Foltz, the Associated Press correspondent in Madrid in 1945, reported that Franco told him: "Without American petrol, American trucks and American credits, we would never have won the war."

To return to Graham's point, the Republican American volunteers, a vast number of whom had been engaged in labor struggle in the United States before volunteering in Spain, were continuing their class struggle against some of the same bosses, just in an attenuated form. The international civil war between rich and poor, "tradition and modernity, fixed social hierarchy against fluid, more egalitarian modes of politics" was real. By Arendt's analysis, governments across Europe were frightened by the International Brigades because they demonstrated that people were willing to participate in ideological struggle beyond the boundaries of their own countries, but retained a sense of their own nationality; they did not assimilate, and so had "infiltrated, as refugees and stateless persons, the older nation-states of the West." This threatened the nation-state's conception of itself as a valid, contiguous, and fundamental mythology.

^m This aid went largely under the radar, but Hochschild reports a scandal over Rieber's collaboration with the Nazis: "In 1940, Rieber's propensity for hiring Nazis to work at Texaco meant that there were German Nazis in Texaco's office in New York and Texaco's office in Berlin who were using the company's internal communication system to send intelligence data about American industry to the Nazis. This was discovered by British intelligence, which I suspect must have been eavesdropping on the transatlantic cable. They leaked the story to the *New York Herald Tribune*. There was a big to-do. Rieber lost his job. But he landed on his feet because General Franco, who was grateful for all the help Rieber had given during the Spanish Civil War, made him chief buyer in the United States for Nationalist Spain's oil monopoly."

resistance and its mythology: no pasaran

“Better Vienna than Berlin!”

—a 1934 Spanish Socialist slogan, in reference to
Austrian Leftist resistance to fascism vis-à-vis German acquiescence

“There are no other people so worthy of living and dying with.”

—Emma Goldman on Durruti and the FAI

In 1931, as the Second Republic was declared, the Spanish economy seemed upon the brink of failure. The poor of Spain, often the same as the workers of Spain, saw anarchism as not only desirable on a political level, but in an economic sense—it might actually materially provide what capitalism had not. The explicitly anarchist FAI saw a huge swell in membership over the CNT, which had anarchist influences but was largely socialist at this point. As the Republic’s efforts towards land reform, which “rais[ed] expectations without delivering land to the peasants” proved inadequate, the FAI’s more radical stance on land redistribution began to appeal; meanwhile, the Republic’s half-hearted pursuit of its secularization goal angered the Church without greatly lessening its material power. Unfortunately for the Republic, expectations for its reforms were so high that even its actual progress on these fronts were seen as disappointments rather than success. “[F]earful of alienating the very classes it was obliged to oppose”, it simply did not go hard enough to succeed in its goals. Those who had voted in the Republic became quickly disillusioned by it; simultaneously, Spanish anarchist goals broadened along popular lines. Kropotkin’s economic mutualism began to make inroads into Spanish anarchist philosophy: “‘excessive generosity to workers’, not vengeance upon the rich, would be the watchword of the revolution” in this new light.ⁿ Between all of these factors, revolution seemed on the horizon.

There was conflict between the FAI and CNT and the tendencies each represented, though they were never really discrete entities. The *treintistas*, 30 CNT members concerned with the trajectory of the FAI, published a statement that “denounced the ‘simplistic’ concept of the organization’s concept of revolution, warning that it would lead to a ‘Republican fascism’”; while the critique was framed as tactical disagreement, it mostly spoke to CNT

ⁿ While Bakunin thought the amount workers received should be proportionate to the work they performed, Kropotkin called for the prioritization of need: “Need will be put above service... it will be recognized that everyone who cooperates in production to a certain extent has in the first place the right to live comfortably.” This is, however scanty on the face of it, a turn towards recognizing that humans are not equally provided with ability, but ought to be equally provided with access to resources.

concerns about reaction against FAI attacks that might crush the movement. By Bookchin's analysis, the *treintistas* misjudged the general mood, and the statement served to isolate these moderates from the general population of workers, who were much more willing to engage in or support attacks than to plot a "reasonable" course that might end in government collaboration. In contrast, the FAI spoke to people's emotions, their revolutionary spirit. Furthermore, its activity meant that anarchists and their fellow travelers of the moment were far more ready to oppose the fascist reaction when it finally came than was the divided and struggling government. While the union has long been a useful means of organization for revolt, it is also a means of recuperation for that revolt, and the CNT was no exception. Dauvé: "...the integration of Spanish anarchism in the state in 1936 is only surprising if one forgets its nature: the CNT was a union, an original union undoubtedly but a union all the same, and there is no such thing as an anti-union union. Function transforms the organ. ...Anarchist union though it may have been, the CNT was a union before it was anarchist."

In 1931, the Republic gave the police shoot-on-sight orders for the FAI. This was part of a divide-and-conquer strategy by the state: the CNT was treated permissively, and the FAI punished. Rather presciently, Juan García Oliver (Durruti's comrade, who would later join the Republican government) observed that the laws passed against the FAI "gave the government extraordinary powers similar to those claimed by dictatorship. What was to prevent a new fascist group from seizing control of the Republic and making use of those powers after [Prime Minister] Azaña destroyed the anarchists?" While this precise event did not occur, this observation is a crystallized moment of history folding upon itself, even shimmering slightly: displaying the repression then, the coming betrayal, and the eventual fascist dictatorship. In this story, the anarchists were doomed to die—it was just a question of when, and by the hands of which particular form of state power. This sort of recursive tragedy is a common thread in most stories of resistance.

As the CNT dealt with attacks and disruptions from the fascist Falange, the FAI engaged in a "cycle of insurrections" from 1932-33. Many were deported or imprisoned during this cycle. In 1933, the Casas Viejas tragedy disillusioned those who still had faith in the possibility or worth of engaging with the government; the end of the Republic was nigh for the Left as well as the Right. There were massive strikes and rallies calling for the release of prisoners, including a 60,000-person CNT rally in Barcelona's largest bullring. The CNT and FAI launched a massive no-voting campaign to signal popular disengagement with the government, which had acted in bad faith by

imprisoning so many workers. In response to those calling for engagement with the government to prevent fascism, people reasoned that “fascism would at least compel the proletariat to rise in revolution, whereas a reformist victory would simply lead to a piecemeal but ultimately more debilitating repression.” Sadly, in the course of the next six years, the anarchists partially engaged with the government, met with diffuse repression from the center left, rose in revolution against fascism—and were brutally crushed by both the government and the fascists. They tried some of everything, and were therefore destroyed from all angles.

The Socialist and Communist parties, though on the rise in the early 1930s, had historically received less support from the people than anarchists did. In Barcelona, Bookchin notes, “where employer and police violence turned every major strike into a near-insurrection, the [Socialist] party was simply irrelevant and its isolation from the workers complete. That the Socialist Party and the UGT [the largest socialist union] did not succeed in remaining consistently reformist is due more to the mounting crisis in Spanish society than to any latent militancy in the Socialist leadership.” Spanish Leftism was always drawn to conflict. However, from the opening days of the Republic, “the UGT was rapidly becoming an organ of the state itself and using its new powers to reduce its rival. The Anarcho-syndicalists could have no illusions as to what would happen to them if a purely Socialist government should come into power.” Still, they voted one in anyway. Communist unions such as the UGT and PSUC, the Communist Party itself, and the POUM (a Trotskyist group formed around this time that played a significant role in both the Civil War and the civil war behind Republican lines), formed the Popular Front and ran for office in early 1936. The Popular Front in Spain, by Bookchin’s assessment, was an imported, international formation sponsored by the USSR, which claimed to be a tactical maneuver that realistically faced the necessity of preventing the spread of fascism across Europe—but functioned actually as a) a way for the Communist Party to consolidate power, and b) an incentive for Western democracies to sign pacts with the USSR against Germany. Despite this function, anarchists chose to partially support this government; they were offered a concession they could not refuse.

1933 ended with a brutally suppressed uprising in the region of Aragon, most vigorously fought and most devastatingly defeated in Saragossa. (13,000 children of Aragonese revolutionaries were brought to Catalonia by comrades to be cared for in relative safety—a touching exodus horribly mocked in Franco’s future redistribution of his enemies’ children to institutions and fascist families.) In October 1934, an attempted revolutionary general strike

became an armed rebellion in the region of Asturias. General Franco—still within his role as an officer of the Republican army—“deployed both Moroccan troops and the Foreign Legion [to suppress the uprising], fearing that Spanish conscripts were not to be trusted politically.” Reprisals for these uprisings were quite severe: 30,000 people were imprisoned, and often tortured by the police. The goal of gaining the release of those prisoners, and regaining other political freedoms suspended in response to the rebellions, motivated anarchists to participate in the next election as they never had before.

The Popular Front was intended not only as a productive truce among the Left, but as a reforming mechanism; Prieto, a prominent Socialist, said in his May Day speech of 1936 that the Republic would serve as a framework for the ‘internal conquest’ of Spain. An end to the *latifundium*, a redistribution of economic power—all of this was supposedly on the table for the Popular Front-governed Republic, although disillusionment from the inadequate reforms of 1932 worked against the possibility of popular faith in governmental success. But workers took matters into their own hands, opening the jails or taking over the prisons from within, organizing huge strikes and demonstrations—Spain was on the brink of revolutionary change, no matter whether it had begun with an election. And, despite the ensuing betrayal of anarchists and POUM by the rest of the Popular Front, it was not necessarily the wrong choice for them to participate in this election; CEDA and the Falange, both fascist parties, were on the rise. Bookchin rather understates the case: “In such ominous situations, who controls the state, with its arms and monopoly of violence, is not a matter of complete indifference.”

Unfortunately, fascists do not win strictly by election. Upon seeing the results of the 1936 election, the Falange party agreed to support Franco’s planned military coup. The Falange had been harassing the CNT for some time, and the CNT-FAI held a one-day general strike in April to protest their activities. Well aware of the dangers of fascism, the CNT-FAI spoke urgently about the possibility of a military coup, but their warnings fell on deaf ears. According to Graham, Marxist historical determinism is a bit to blame; many non-anarchist Leftists felt that fascism must be another step in the progress of capitalism towards socialism, and, however unlikely they believed a coup to be, “in the final confrontation the victory of the latter [socialism] was assured.” In the face of this complacency, the FAI pivoted from petitioning the state to beginning its own anti-fascist preparations. In Barcelona, workers guarded their headquarters, patrolled the streets, and lay in wait with weapons.

The coup began on July 17th of 1936. 60% of the army went over to Franco on the first day, though the navy remained loyal to the Republic. Franco also brought over 100,000 Moroccan troops to fight for him on the front lines, received 200,000 Italian troops, 60,000 Portuguese troops, and received serious air support from Italy and Germany, as well as ground and financial support. Meanwhile, the Republican forces over the course of the entire war consisted of 100,000 socialist militiamen, 100,000 anarchists, 100,000 loyal regulars, 50,000 internationals of varying political tendencies, 40,000 Communists, and 8,000 Trotskyists. By Gerassi's assessment, "in armaments the Republicans were out-rifled ten to one, out-cannoned 20 to one, and out-airplaned and out-tanked 100 to one" ...leaving aside the question of their lack of fuel.^o

Yet, the Republican forces held the upper hand at first because of the anarchist material readiness against the coup—and something more ethereal. Orwell considers that the initial repulsion of the coup was made possible only by "people who were fighting with a revolutionary intention—i.e. believed that they were fighting for something better than the status quo. In the various centres of revolt it is thought that three thousand people died in the streets in a single day. Men and women armed only with sticks of dynamite rushed across the open squares and stormed stone buildings held by trained soldiers with machine-guns. ...Even if one had heard nothing of the seizures of the land by the peasants, the setting up of local soviets, etc., it would be hard to believe that the Anarchists and Socialists who were the backbone of the resistance were doing this kind of thing for the preservation of capitalist democracy, which especially in the Anarchist view was no more than a centralized swindling machine." He adds later, "During the first two months of the war it was the Anarchists more than anyone else who had saved the situation, and much later than this the Anarchist militia, in spite of their indiscipline, were notoriously the best fighters among the purely Spanish forces." They had, after all, been preparing for this moment for sixty years.

This response was not without concerning aspects. 7,000 clergy were killed during the initial anti-fascist uprising—by workers of various political identities, but certainly including anarchists. Given what we know of the longstanding feud between the Church and the far Left of Spain, and the Church's material backing of Franco's coup, this is not surprising; there was

^o Gerassi demonstrates his political bias by rather outrageously claiming in the next sentence: "But after the various militia were welded into one disciplined army (by communists), only the superior material could defeat the Republicans." The question of militarization will be discussed in detail later.

no incongruence between the ideals of the Spanish anti-fascists and this violence. It seemed necessary to them to desecrate the sacred representations of the traditions they sought to destroy, and to kill their personal oppressors. However, it damaged Republican Spain's reputation abroad in the early days, when it most needed support, and delegitimized the government for its failure to prevent such extra-judicial killings. When considering this event, it is worth bearing in mind what Graham terms a "fundamental asymmetry of violence" between what occurred in fascist and Republican zones. The Republicans killed those they saw as directly responsible for the evils in their world, and so did the fascists—it is just that, for the fascists, that meant essentially everyone.

the comrades

Durruti?

Buenaventura Durruti, both during the Civil War and before it, stood out in the anarchist imagination as an exemplary revolutionary. He died when he was 40, only a few months into the war, from an accidental shot by a soldier in his unit. Before then, he carried out many attacks, assassinations, and bank robberies; visited France, Chile, Argentina, and Cuba while on the run; escaped from prison several times; engaged in open labor organizing; and was one of the first to respond against Franco's uprising. Kern suggests that Durruti "possessed Bakunin's 'revolutionary instinct' for seizing every possible opportunity to revolt." Emma Goldman, who met him during the war, wrote after his death:

If then I consider our comrade Durruti the very soul of the Spanish Revolution it is because he was Spain. He represented her strength, her gentleness as well as her rugged harshness so little understood by people outside of Spain. ...when I met him at the Front he and his gallant comrades were defending with their bare hands, but with a spirit that burned at red-white heat. There I found Buenaventura Durruti on the eve of an offensive surrounded by scores of people coming to him with their problems and needs. To each one he gave sympathetic understanding, comradely direction and advice. Not once did he raise his voice or show impatience or chagrin. Buenaventura had the capacity to put himself in the place of another, and to meet everyone on his own ground, yet retaining his own personality. I believe it was this which helped to create the inner discipline so extraordinary among the brave militias who were the pioneers of the anti-Fascist struggle. And not only

p For a deep reading of Durruti's life and actions, see Abel Paz.

discipline, but confidence in the man and deep affection for him.

Durruti's first affinity group, *Solidarios* (which included his best friend Francisco Ascaso, who died in the early days of the war, and Juan García Oliver, who later joined the government) killed both a former governor and the Archbishop of Saragossa in retaliation for the murder of anarchist moderate Seguí—who, ironically, opposed their violent tactics in life. They hunted others, performed several bank robberies, and trafficked in weapons. The group were arrested by French police in 1924, and accused of planning to kidnap the Spanish king during a state visit to Paris; proudly, the *Solidarios* agreed that “they planned to hold Alfonso in return for the dissolution of the dictatorship.” Shockingly, at least from a modern perspective, romantic publicity and solidarity protests made it impossible for any government to hold the *Solidarios* captive for long—even on the charge of planning to kidnap their king!—and after a year in prison, they returned to revolutionary activity in various countries. They came back to Spain and became active in the CNT and FAI in the early 1930s.

As Franco began his coup attempt, a group of anarchists including Durruti and Ascaso fought the fascists back from Barcelona on July 19th and 20th. “As bad news poured in from the rest of the country, it became apparent that anarchists had managed to win the most spectacular victory of the loyalist Republican side.” However, Ascaso died in the final moments of the battle, a great blow to Durruti both practically and emotionally. As Oliver joined the government, Durruti had to continue in the war without either of his best friends, comrades, and co-conspirators. After Ascaso's massively-attended funeral, Durruti entered the field as the commander of a militia army: the Durruti Column. The Column became famous among the anarchist militias, though its fate was tragic, misled by bad military advice. They, along with the Iron Column and other militia armies, marched towards the front, pausing frequently to execute priests, landowners, and police, and to support the formation of communes along the way. For them, the revolution and anti-fascist activity remained inseparable.

Stories about Durruti's revolutionary virtue proliferated. “One combatant, caught in a firefight west of Bujaraloz, looked up to see Durruti at the head of the patrol throwing grenades; another remembers him accepting rejection of his advice on a particular strategy without pulling rank.” Even before the war, he took his principles seriously to the point of unnerving others. “One evening Durruti brought a shocked silence to the *La Tranquilidad* bar^q when

q “described by one anarchist habitué as ‘the least tranquil cafe’ in the neighborhood”

he responded to the plea of a beggar for money by reaching inside his jacket pocket to fill the hand of the appellant with a huge pistol, offering the advice: “Take it! Go to a bank if you want money!” As Gilles Dauvé puts it, “Durruti and his comrades embodied an energy which had not waited for 1936 to storm the existing world.” Even two months into the war, he considered robbing the Bank of Spain for the money his militia needed; his plans formed and ready to execute, he at last conceded to asking the government for the money first. Luckily for the bank, the Republic came through.

There is a monument to Durruti in his hometown; over half a million people attended his funeral—the last large anarchist demonstration in pre-Franco Spain. It is quite difficult to imagine such a criminal receiving similarly large, long-standing, and public support today... but Durruti came up not only within violent and criminalized labor struggle, but also within the preceding Spanish tradition of the “permanent guerilla.” During his young adulthood, there was a rise in labor repression and *attentados* in response; assassinations of labor leaders and corresponding assassinations of politicians and bosses increasingly meant that everyone went armed; the bosses hired goons, agent provocateurs were underfoot, and a general atmosphere of illegality prevailed. “So convinced were they of the righteousness of their cause that a few individualists attempted to convert policemen to anarchism”, presumably as they were being arrested. Bookchin quotes José Peirats on the underground culture of the times:

...extreme tendencies flourished in the anarchism of those times—stormy for some and times of hibernation for the majority. Secret meetings in the mountains were disguised as the excursions of ingenuous nudists, devotees of pure air, and sunbathers. All of this forms a picturesque contrast if one bears in mind that a sincere return to nature was perfectly compatible with conspiratorial planning, the chemistry of explosives, pistol practice, the interchange of periodicals and underground leaflets, and campaigns against tobacco and alcohol.

In 1927, one such excursion to the Valencia beach was the founding meeting of the FAI, formed amongst sunbathers and laughing children.

All of this serves as an important background for both Durruti’s character and the war he and his comrades fought. For one, Bookchin argues, “The Anarchist *pistoleros* showed the more militant workers in Barcelona that in a period when the employers seemed to have a completely free hand, a force on their behalf was still alive, effectively answering blow for blow.” They

kept hope alive in dark times; without their retaliation, the bosses and the government may have succeeded in crushing the labor movement. And, had the anarchists not been well-armed, accustomed to fighting battles, and risking death, it is unlikely they would have been able to form the militias. This history also explains the reactionary fears of the government, which tried nearly from the beginning to disarm the anarchists, even as they were fighting and dying against its enemy. The government was perfectly aware that the end of the war for the anarchists was the end of the Republic; they fought not for it, but for an egalitarian, collectivized, libertarian^r society. By the people, Durruti was seen not as a terrorist, but as one of their own revolutionaries, and his engagement in traditional forms of crime as no indictment of his revolutionary fervor, but rather as proof positive.

Barcelona: the city and the city

The city of Barcelona is the other most mythologized hero of the Spanish Civil War, and it has a similarly outrageous history. It was possessed of a double identity: one, the center of government, home to “citizens of good will” and “lovers of order”; the other, the center of rebellion, the “dangerous”, “other” city. A center of resistance during the war—and also the site of the street battles between Communists and anarchists during the “May Days” of 1937—Barcelona had a long and profound revolutionary tradition. As far back as 1854, workers marched under the banner “Association or Death”, demanding the right to form trade unions. In 1919, while Barcelona was experiencing a major strike and its repression, the newspaper union informed their publishers that they would not publish anything that might work against the strikers. When the government tried to draft the workers as a means of breaking the strike, the newspapers simply did not print the draft notice. In a city in which even the most fundamental means of messaging was controlled by revolutionary workers, the presence of law, order, government, and business was always contingent and troubled. Barcelona fits Manuel Castells’ model of the “wild city”: uncontrollable, with visible social tensions and violence, dystopian... if only to the eyes of the elite.

Ealham cites Ignasi Terrades in describing Spain as an “absentee state” in Barcelona, its center of government: “an authority structurally incapable of ameliorating the social problems engendered by the urbanisation/industrialisation couplet through the provision of a social wage of collective educational, medical, and welfare services.” Moral panics about the uncontrollable poor youth, Ealham says, stemmed from the bosses’

^r The word libertarian is used here, and throughout, in the European sense of “partisans of liberty”; it does not refer to American Randians unless so specified.

fear that “future generations of workers would not accept their place in the industrial order.” The Church was expected to do something about this, but relied only on the older methods of violence and fear to manage the poor, especially among the children it “educated.” Shantytowns, *barracas*, were very common in Barcelona, and were sites of social disorder; as the government became more sophisticated, it tried to replace them with projects, *casas barates*, in an early form of biopolitical management. These were not popular. For the most part, however, the State did not practice the kinds of soft control masquerading as social welfare to which we are now accustomed in poor areas. This fed revolutionary rather than reformist struggle: “...because the experience of the repressive state was undiluted by social welfare initiatives, most workers had little desire for a political campaign to conquer the state—rather, the state was seen as a mortal enemy that had to be crushed.”

Barcelona figured prominently in the pre-war era of uprisings, insurrections, labor struggle, and *attentado*—and it developed a generally rebellious culture to go along with these. During the “Tragic Week” of 1909, a time of Catalanian insurrection against troop conscription, Barcelonan workers, *Murcianos* (migrant workers), sex workers, and other *déclassés* threw up barricades and fought the police. Nor was this an exceptional situation; Barcelona’s *normative* condition was of generalized proletarian illegality. This included theft and shoplifting, the “small arms fire in the class war.” This petty illegality was politicized: “Shopkeepers and shop workers regularly reported that those who seized groceries from shops justified their actions in terms of the recession, that they were unemployed and, through no fault of their own, lacked the economic resources to purchase victuals. Similarly, those who ate without paying in bars and restaurants justified their actions in terms of their ‘right to life’.”

Unsurprisingly, conflicts between the police and workers, the unemployed, and other marginalized people were common. This, too, was politicized: “The struggle of the unemployed with the police was inseparable from popular traditions of resistance to authority. So great were these traditions that detainees frequently appealed to passers-by to intercede on their behalf. Crowds were often more than happy to oblige, attacking the police and attempting to free detainees whether they knew the arrested person or not.” The police of Barcelona were particularly ineffective against collective female resistance to eviction; families’ belief that they had a right to live in their homes superseded petty issues like unpaid rent. State violence tended to deepen rather than suppress social rebellion. “Street practices... sealed the working class from the state and its laws and from those entrusted with their

enforcement. ...Anti-police feelings flowed ineluctably from the institutional role of the police as the regulators of social space.”

When imprisonment did occur, it was hardly less tolerated. “Soon after the proclamation of the Republic, *cenetistas* [CNT members] marched on the Model Jail to release their comrades; prison records were also destroyed in a very orderly two-hour operation.” However, in a foreshadowing of repression to come, the Civil Guard prevented crowds from destroying the records of the political police (*Brigada Policia especializada en Anarquismo y Sindicalismo*.) The women’s jail of Barcelona was liberated on the very first day of the anarchist defense of the city against Franco; people hung a red and black flag above it, and posted a sign saying “This torture house was closed by the people, July 1936.” The jail was demolished within a month by the decision of *Mujeres Libres*.

In light of all this struggle and anger, it is not surprising that Barcelona anarchists fought the Civil Guard—putatively their allies against Franco—during the “May Days” there in 1937; even George Orwell was able to make the connection. “Once I had heard how things stood I felt easier in my mind. The issue was clear enough. On one side the C.N.T., on the other side the police. I have no particular love for the idealized ‘worker’ as he appears in the bourgeois Communist’s mind, but when I see an actual flesh-and-blood worker in conflict with his natural enemy, the policeman, I do not have to ask myself which side I am on.”^s

On the rare occasion that Barcelona anarchists were somehow not the group directly under attack, they formed a collaborative relationship of solidarity with those who were. “While the CNT had always recruited workers irrespective of their place of origin, and indeed continued to do so, the radicals channelled the hostility of migrant ‘outsiders’ to the authorities, and militant *cenetistas* and anarchists defined themselves as ‘Murcian’ in solidarity with a community under attack... These migrant workers joined CNT protests not because they were alienated or isolated individuals, as was suggested by the authorities. Instead, their protest was firmly located within a supportive network of organized social relations that provided mobilization resources and protection from external threats.” While this contrasts with the experiences of some modern migrants who are systematically atomized and isolated by repeated forced dislocations, the rationale backing government

s On the other hand, the Barcelona anarchist militia government established a police force of their own—with patrollers supplied by the CNT, and judges by the FAI! Some mistakes do not need to be repeated.

repression of migrants was the same then as today: “[b]y drawing on racist, social-Darwinist and colonialist discourse, migrants—and occasionally also indigenous workers—were presented as morally inadequate, living in a state of nature or primitive barbarism, the criminal heart of darkness in the city.” Especially during the ERC era—when Catalan nationalists were in the government—Murcians, largely African, were depicted as subhuman and illiterate by the press, responsible for all social problems, especially the impoverishment of Barcelona. The ERC also started issuing an “unemployed worker’s card” with one’s work history; anyone who did not carry it with them faced the workhouse or repatriation. We continue to be familiar with these attempts to monitor and control the movements of the poor, and to direct their animosity along racial lines, rather than against their common foe; we, the poor, continue to defy them.

The state knew it was necessary to destroy the streets of Barcelona, in which migrants and anarchists mingled every day, in order to control them. Plans were drawn up to “kill the street” by demolishing the Raval (an immigrant neighborhood and center of revolt) and building roads through historic/symbolic plazas, which would be “replaced with major roads, places without history, around which new solidarities would not be possible. In this way the authorities would redefine space and the way it was used and experienced...” This project continues today in many reforming urban spaces; however, Ealham situates this moment in Barcelona historically as a product of European moral panics in reaction to the formation of the working class and modernization in general. The destruction of the streets was “part of a hegemonic project, an ideological offensive through which urban elites sought to strengthen the bourgeois public sphere by limiting working-class access to the streets... this was a language of power that allowed the urban bourgeoisie to define the streets as its own; they delineated the permissible uses of public space, castigating all resistance to the expansion of the capitalist urban order.” The enemies of anarchists attempted to control the positive terms of the discussion, most chillingly obvious in the motto of a violent, bourgeois, anti-red paramilitary group, the Sometent militia: “peace, peace, forever peace.”

In contrast to the ever-more repressive imaginary of reactionaries and state forces, people report a revolutionary spirit filling the streets of Barcelona during the early days of the war: a temporary opening, a taste of freedom. Clara Thalmann, a Swiss veteran of the Civil War: “In Barcelona the ethos was different from what it had been before—I had known the city back then. Previously, it had been impossible for a woman to venture out into

the street alone... Now women could be seen... sitting in the cafes, chatting, with their rifles across their knees... Women were, all unexpectedly, free. All of a sudden it came to you—they too are showing an interest in all sorts of things.” Barcelona even looked anarchist, with hundreds of red and black flags, multi-story anarchist murals, CNT/FAI signs and banners on every flat surface. This was a direct outgrowth of decades of anarchist struggle in the city, not all of which was traditionally conflictual.

Around 75 *atenens*, social centers for anarchist cultural empowerment, existed in Barcelona between 1877 and 1914. All had libraries and organized social and leisure activities, like hiking. These *atenens* were the sole source of education in much of Barcelona, especially excluding the Church, and were a formal point of contact between the CNT and the *barris*, which had a symbiotic relationship. Ealham: “For the city’s workers, the *barris* were a total social environment: they were spaces of contestation and hope, the starting place for resistance against the bourgeois city.” This defies the false dichotomy between positive and negative action the state tried to enforce upon the revolutionaries of Barcelona; while attacks and robberies came out of those neighborhoods, they were not the work of a few bad apples. Rather, “the expropriation squads were deeply rooted in the social formation and were virtually impossible for the police to infiltrate.” Anarchists understood that when the State holds the power of veridiction^t, the violence its agents commit is laudable, and the peaceful acts those it governs commit are crimes. As it was put by the leader of the Builders’ Union(!): “In a society that legalizes usury and has robbery as its basis, it is logical that there will be some who are prepared to risk their lives and achieve through their own audacity what others manage to do with the protection of coercive state forces.”

Just as rural anarchists saw the *pueblo* as the central structure of post-revolutionary society, so urban anarchists saw the *barris*: *cenetistas* envisioned the transformation of the *barris* into collectively-run liberated zones that practiced direct democracy. They were not far from that already, expressing the anarchist value of the means of struggle mimicking the future in which one wishes to live. Collective reciprocity, what Raymond Williams calls the “mutuality of the oppressed”, was the fundamental structure of *barri* life; also, it could be withdrawn from those who defied communal norms by committing acts of interpersonal violence like domestic abuse, stealing from one’s comrades, or snitching. Even the impact of repression was softened by

t I am most familiar with the term from the section of Foucault’s Collège de France lecture series published as *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Most simply, it is the power to create truth, held by those who have the most power in any given encounter or ongoing dynamic.

the *barri*, as it was widely dispersed, which also worked against the “free rider” problem: no one was able to benefit from struggle without contributing to it, and all lived under the risk from its consequences.

Within the *barri*, by Ealham’s analysis:

Consciousness formation was very complex, molecular, and dynamic, whereby individual and collective experiences of the social and spatial orders were accumulated and refined through a process of reflexive engagement. In this way, the practical, sensuous experiences of material realities and the everyday struggle to survive within a determinate space were converted by workers into a series of collective frames of reference. The result was a communal reservoir of class-based experiential knowledge, a refraction of everyday urban practices, the product of the sharp learning curve of everyday oppression and exploitation. [This generated] ...a situated form of local consciousness: a social knowledge of power relations within a specific locale, a vision of the world embedded in a specific time and place, constructed on the ground, from below. In its most elementary form, this sense of class was more emotional than political: it represented a powerful sense of local identity, an *esprit de quartier*, stemming from the extensive bonds of affection generated by the supportive rituals, solidarities, and direct social relationships of neighborhood life. It was in essence a defensive culture, a radical celebration of the local group and the integrity of its lived environment predicated on the assumption that everyday life was constructed in favor of ‘them’ to the detriment of ‘us’.

land and freedom

When one attempts to clearly delineate the time in which a revolutionary spirit prevailed during the war, one is forced to box off small locations and timeframes, few of them congruent with each other. The ways in which social relationships and identities changed during this period were, as Graham puts it, “ultra-contingent, subjective, and fragile.” Perhaps most important in this way were the land collectivization projects and village communes far away from urban centers like Barcelona. I am hesitant to describe them here—I think it is better to leave moments of true utopian opening shrouded, so they may not be captured.

But, Dauvé tells us: “...the shock of July ‘36 gave rise, on the margins of political power, to a social movement whose real expressions, while containing communist potential, were later reabsorbed by the state they

allowed to remain intact. The first month of a revolution already ebbing, but whose extent still concealed its failure, looked like a splintering process: each region, commune, enterprise, collective and municipality escaped the central authority without actually attacking it, and set out to live differently. ...Even the ebb of 1937 did not eradicate the élan of hundreds of thousands of workers and peasants who took over land, factories, neighborhoods, villages, seizing property and socialising production with an autonomy and a solidarity in daily life that struck both observers and participants. Communism is also the re-appropriation of the conditions of existence.” This process was far more extensive and heartfelt than the land reforms attempted by the Republic in earlier years; as Dauvé notes later, “What distinguishes reform from revolution is not that revolution is violent, but that it links insurrection and communisation.”^u Whether in the *barri* or on the land project, the political emotion of the moment, as well as its material effect, is central.

In his paper “The Revolutionary Spirit: Hannah Arendt and the Anarchists of the Spanish Civil War”, Joel Olson agrees with Dauvé about the central importance of these projects. By his research, “there were up to 1850 collectives covering one-half to three-fourths of the land in Republican Spain.” Their governing structures—a melangé of committees, assemblies, and councils—were self-organized, and given real decision-making ability by their participants. Olson sees these structures as the preservation, even genesis, of the revolutionary spirit that Arendt regards with both hope and suspicion. In *On Revolution*, Arendt theorizes that the revolutionary spirit that moves people towards freedom is the same that soon forms the limit of freedom, creating totalitarian governments and repression. Olson contends that the example of these collectives, formed around the economic necessities of daily labor, shows another possibility: that directly democratic governance is possible as a permanent way of life. There were limits to this—formalized committee structure, inherited from the CNT, threatened many collectives with entrenched bureaucracy—but it was fascism that cut this grand experiment short. Until then, Olson says, “[i]t could be said that those who participated in the revolution experienced what Arendt calls ‘public happiness’, the unique feeling that comes with engagement in the public realm.”

At the front—boring, interminable, and desperate—a certain myth of communisation, bravery, and political evolution has nevertheless emerged,

^u Dauvé, an anti-statist communist, is here using the term to mean “the process of holding all things in common”, rather than an envelopment by the Communist Party.

thanks (for American audiences, at least) largely to Orwell and Hemingway.^v
Orwell:

...the prevailing mental atmosphere was that of Socialism. Many of the normal motives of civilized life—snobbishness, money-grubbing, fear of the boss, etc.—had simply ceased to exist. The ordinary class-division of society had disappeared to an extent that is almost unthinkable in the money-tainted air of England; there was no one there except the peasants and ourselves, and no one owned anyone else as his master... However much one cursed at the time, one realized afterward that one had been in contact with something strange and valuable. One had been in a community where hope was more normal than apathy or cynicism, where the word ‘comrade’ stood for comradeship and not, as in most countries, for humbug. One had breathed the air of equality... the Spanish militias, while they lasted, were a sort of microcosm of a classless society. In that community where no one was on the make, where there was a shortage of everything but no privilege and no boot-licking, one got, perhaps, a crude forecast of what the opening stages of Socialism might be like... The effect was to make my desire to see Socialism established much more actual than it had been before. Partly, perhaps, this was due to the good luck of being among Spaniards, who, with their innate decency and their ever-present Anarchist tinge, would make even the opening stages of Socialism tolerable if they had a chance.

Productive conversation sometimes occurred between the two sides. An international volunteer remembers,

...I read this text on the loudspeaker in Italian saying “What are you doing? Why you not just come over? Why are you fighting for Mussolini instead of fighting for Italy, which is on our side?” Something like that. And many of the Italian soldiers after that, they come over to our side. And the Italian artillery begin to shoot above us, aiming over our head. And then we get the order to attack. With the Dombrowski on one side and the Thaelmann on the other, we attack. And we totally put the Italian Fascists to a rout. The Italian Fascists, they keep surrendering, thousands of them. And I laugh. These are the people who are going to build a new Roman Empire.

v As Hemingway has been largely described as acting like a useless coward by other participants, I have chosen not to quote any of his work around the Civil War.

Serving with that same Thaelmann Battalion later played a role in challenging one international's perception of the confines of national identity as he later interrogated German prisoners in Canada. "I became very prejudiced against the Germans because so many of them [denied knowledge of concentration camps].... They were all anti-Semitic... I had a few jailed, put in isolation. And yet, you know, I remember the Thaelmann Battalion—the best Germans, fantastic Germans, dedicated, honorable, beautiful people who sacrificed their lives so willingly for others, which had suffered the most casualties in Spain. The contradiction was hard for me."

The assessments of Spanish anarchists offered by the foreign volunteers are almost universally positive. Said one, "The anarchists I knew were incredibly courageous. There was one in my outfit... an older man, an old Wobbly. He... was a marvelous human being. He would argue with anybody that was willing to argue with him, which I wasn't, but in his actions he was brave and wonderfully generous and very, very likable." And yet, despite all of these descriptions of laudable heroism, we must be careful to refuse glorifying the revolutionary dead. I doubt they would have wanted it, and if we are to remain true to their values, or carry on their legacy of struggle, we must remember that these arguments behind the lines about politics, the sudden ability of women to relax in Barcelona cafés, the intense amounts of caring labor, shared joy, and endless meetings were no less vital to the revolutionary struggle than their attacks or engagement in traditional warfare. Indeed, it was the deficit in such exercises of freedom, silenced by internal repression and betrayal, that doomed the Spanish anarchists as much as their lack of ammunition.

women's struggle, at the front and behind the lines

I told no one that I was going off to war. If I had, they would never have allowed me to go. The people I was living with would never have let me go without my father's permission. They would have done all in their power to stop me. And the same was true of the other women. The lorries pulled out a few minutes behind schedule and some of the women would urge the driver: Come, shake a leg! Otherwise my mother may show up and take me by the ears.

—Rosario Sánchez Mora, "the *dinamitera*?"

International female volunteers were sidelined to nursing or other care work. Spanish women, too, were largely pressured into doing war work rather than fighting (or sometimes actively organized themselves so), but a few

determinedly escaped to the front, especially in the early days of the war. Women on the front worked incredibly hard to be treated with respect and quality by those around them; as for their “special needs”, they endured them in secret. Many of the accounts I read report suffering immensely from the need to keep menstruation secret, and one woman described having a secret abortion on the front. She immediately went back to her duties, and no one knew, although she bled for forty consecutive days.

Mika Etchebéhère became a captain in the POUM. Women made their way to her unit, reasoning that there they stood the best chance of being treated seriously: one, Manolita, said to her, “I am told that in your column the militia women have the same rights as the men, that they need not stick to the dishes or the laundry. I did not come to the front to give it the once over with a cleaning rag in my hand. I’ve scoured enough dishes already!” Etchebéhère’s men admired her, but masculinized her to deal with the situation, proudly claiming, “[we] have a female captain with more balls than all the male captains in the world.” She reflected wryly on this: “What am I to them? Neither man nor woman, I suppose, a sort of special breed of hybrid... Their woman, an extraordinary woman, pure and strong, whose sex can be forgiven as long as she does not play on it.” All of the other women whose accounts I read report being assigned a similar not-woman, exceptional status at the front. For some, this was actually advantageous on a personal as well as practical level; “Fifi”, for example, was a gender rebel from childhood, who refused all traditional female roles and raged when her family tried to prohibit her from acting like a boy. This lifelong experience motivated her politics. She became a Communist at 13 to “invest my struggle with some meaning. I wanted to take on something concrete, the source of all these injustices.” When the war broke out, she “went home to pick up her things and say good-bye to her parents. ‘Come on, give me a kiss, for I am off to the war...’ ...She never got the kisses. At war she was free at last to fight her enemies openly and be treated equally by men—for the most part.”^w

Women’s resistance is often undercounted because of the less-obvious support roles women are socially coerced into filling. The women who worked in

^w According to her interview with Strobl, she did once have to punch a superior officer from the regular army who accused her of sleeping with the men. All present backed her up, and she was not court-martialed. Later in life, the imprisoned Fifi—who fought so bravely before, during, and after the war—was monitored by the cell of the Communist Party within her prison for suspected lesbian tendencies, and prohibited from spending too much time with any one woman. It is particularly tragic, if unsurprising, that she should be oppressed by the party on the very grounds by which she theorized her particular commitment to struggle: her gender defiance.

factories, fed fighters, did organizational work behind the lines, and later hid those who went underground were, it should go without saying, no less anti-fascist or valuable to that movement than those who fought on the front lines. Many more women worked behind the lines, whether in factories or in more revolutionary roles, than fought on the front. “The collectivization of life in anarchist Barcelona, for instance, was exclusively in the hands of the women.” *Mujeres Libres* was a particularly active group of female anarchists; their publications, in traditional anarcha-feminist fashion, attacked the institution of the family, gendered expectations for women, and the expectation that women will perform unpaid labor. While most Communists deprioritized women’s struggle until after the war was been won—an indefinite, and as it turns out, permanent deferral—anarchists demanded liberation all at once. Unfortunately, *Mujeres Libres* was also responsible for “political surveillance on behalf of control patrols” in Barcelona—an incredibly distressing role for an anarchist group to play—and became embroiled in political infighting. *Mujeres Antifascistas*, a Communist women’s group, meanwhile focused on glorifying the importance of motherhood in producing and caring for the troops—a reactionary perspective on the role of women in struggle, one often shared by fascists. When *Mujeres Antifascistas* attempted to envelop *Mujeres Libres* in an umbrella women’s popular front organization, the latter emphatically refused, able to see it as part of the general trend of Communist enclosure and defanging of anarchist struggle.

This internal strife was, of course, outmatched by the workings of the patriarchy. Lucia Sánchez Saornil, a founder and chief editor of the *Mujeres Libres journal*: “There are many male comrades who honestly desire to see women collaborating in the struggle. But this wish is not matched by a fresh outlook on woman. The comrades want her to collaborate so as to help encompass victory all that much more easily, at a strategic moment so to speak, but without sparing a single moment’s thought for the autonomy of women and without for a moment ceasing to look upon themselves as the center of the universe.” It is only possible to deprioritize these critiques if one is, or is allied with, their object; and to do so is actually counterrevolutionary as well as uncomradely. Rosario Sánchez Mora, *la dinamitera*, on the whispers that women at the front were all prostitutes: “That’s nonsense! On the front we were all militians, people of left-wing ideology and unbelievable ideals for which we were ready to die. I was sixteen when I went to the front. I went there a virgin and returned a virgin. All this is just fascist propaganda designed to insult and blacken the women! In the trenches the fascists used to call out to us: ‘Cowards! Do you have to bring your womenfolk along because, by yourselves, you just can’t hack it?’” The insecurities the fascists

spoke to, the utilitarian nature of male support for women's liberation, and the call for women to deprioritize their own liberation all went hand in hand as a force of internal repression.

*the internationals**

40-60,000 internationals came to fight in Spain; around 5,000 of these came from the US and Canada. Only 2,300 of these 5,000 survived. Those coming from the US were largely immigrants, or children of immigrants, most of whom had a radical political orientation in their countries of origin.^y They frequently came out of labor struggle. One participant said, after being arrested for labor organizing, "I realized there was an 'us' and there was a 'them' in America, as well as anywhere else. So when I heard, shortly after the big strike in Detroit, that the 'them' and 'us' were at it with guns in Spain, in what I thought would be the beginning of the final showdown, I decided to go." Another was even more explicit in his desire for conflict: "I remember telling the woman I was living with that it was finally a chance to be up against a cop on the picket line armed the way he was—you know, gun against gun." These volunteers were commonly politicized by the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti, or by seeing or experiencing racist violence.^z Many of those who went to fight in Spain were members of the Young Communist League, the only group openly organizing volunteers to go over, as the Palmer Raids and resulting deportations had decimated the American anarchist movement by this time.

Many volunteered simply because they were young, impulsive, and had nothing to lose. Said one, "I didn't really have political views, but I remember talking about what was happening in Spain and listening and the next thing I knew I wanted to volunteer. I told my mother and she told me to go talk to my father who was in the country hunting ducks. But I said 'I do not have time. The boat is leaving,' and that night I left..." Some volunteers went on to have appropriately youthful adventures in Spain; one reports going on a one-day leave, running into Hemingway and getting drunk with him, and waking up with the realization that he had overstayed his leave. Desperate to get back

x Unless otherwise noted, I only refer to the accounts of US and Canadian international volunteers here, as published by Gerassi.

y One, John Paddy McElligott, serves as a particularly intense example. He saw his father murdered by the Irish army for his participation in the IRA. McElligott promptly joined the IRA himself, at the age of 13; after escaping from prison, where he had been put for violent IRA activity, he drifted around England, sucker-punching random Englishmen. Eventually he ended up in Canada, from where he volunteered to go to Spain.

z "150 black U.S. citizens were lynched between 1929 and 1933." The Scottsboro trial also occurred around this time, and Communists were a large part of working for the eventually-successful appeal.

to his column before anyone noticed his absence, he and another volunteer simply stole the US ambassador's limousine and drove it to the front.

For others, volunteering was a gesture of commitment to fighting for a better world. "I think going to Spain was like going to the [American] South for politically conscious kids in the 1960s." For most, that gesture remained a worthwhile action. "We fought in Spain because it would benefit ordinary human beings everywhere. For all the errors, dogmas, harshness, petty or grand betrayals, the war in Spain was truly a war between right and wrong, between the exploited and the exploiters, between democrats and fascists. And while there were some terrible leaders and some cowardly individuals on our side, by and large it was certainly the most beautiful expression of the commitment to humanity by ordinary humans that I have ever read about or experienced." For many of these volunteers, internationalism was not only a closely held value, but a necessary outgrowth of their material experiences—citizenship, migration, and enfranchisement were beginning to be frequently contested things, especially for those with revolutionary politics.

Jewish volunteers formed a quarter of the international brigades that fought for the Republicans. There was an entire Jewish company, the Botwin Company, formed within the Polish battalion but with international membership; it was named after a Jewish communist killed in Poland in 1934. "[I]ts flag bore the words 'for your freedom and ours'" in Yiddish and Polish on one side and in Spanish on the other, and members of the Botwin Company would later fight in the French Resistance." However, to paraphrase Albert Prago (a Jewish veteran of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade), their Jewish identity took a sideline to their internationalism, humanism, antifascism, and communism.^{aa}

Black Americans participated in the war on terms previously unavailable to them. "The Abraham Lincoln Brigade, in which around 90 African Americans

aa "Thus, while most of the volunteers who were Jewish may well have been nonreligious and assimilationists and did not go to Spain, as ALB veteran Alvah Bessie has said, 'out of my Jewish "nature" or "personality" or "unconscious" but to fight fascism, and specifically Nazi-fascism', it is probable that being Jewish helped create that desire to fight Nazi-fascism. After all, even the most antireligious and assimilated Jew is made to feel Jewish by the anti-Semite. As Jean-Paul Sartre once said, the Jew is he who is defined as a Jew by his society. And if a society sponsors pogroms, all Jews will inevitably hate such attackers, even the Jews who only heard or read about the attacks from relative and distant safety. Repression may cause fear, even cowardice, but it also creates consciousness." (Gerassi)

fought, was the first non-segregated American military unit ever to exist – the United States Army itself continuing to operate segregation throughout the Second World War.” One black nurse from the US who served with the Republicans in Spain, Salaria Kea O’Reilly, went, of all reasons, because she was a Catholic. “I always read about nuns working in poor places, taking care of the poor, and I always wanted to help the nuns as a nurse in this kind of work. I assumed that there would be nuns helping the poor in the Spanish Civil War, on the side of those who were defending democracy.” Of course, she was disappointed in that expectation—although when she was captured by fascists and awaited execution, a nun smuggled her to freedom because of their shared faith. Later in life, she reflected that her experience in Republican Spain was the only time in her life when she was treated with respect and dignity by the white people around her. When she returned to the United States, she faced segregation in the Army, decades-long harassment by the authorities, and even, late in life, persecution from the KKK for her interracial marriage and membership in an otherwise white church. For her, even the bullets of the fascists did not compare to living under white supremacy in the United States.

When the Republic decreed that the international fighters must leave Spain,

Women threw flowers and wept, and all the Spanish people thanked them... The Internationals looked very dirty and weary and young and many of them had no country to go back to. The German and Italian anti-fascists were already refugees; the Hungarians had no home either. Leaving Spain, for most of the European volunteers, was to go into exile.

III. Collaboration: 'a fatal logic'

“When all this began the state was a phantom, to which no one paid attention.”
—the War Committee of the Iron Column

Unfortunately, according to Graham, “The Spanish Left had never developed an anticolonialist discourse... Indeed, Republican attitudes to Franco’s North African soldiers, whom they understandably feared, were scarcely less racist than those of the rebels themselves.” This fear was based not only on the immediate situation, but on a long legacy of violent animosity. Bookchin quotes Brenan on the significance of Franco’s pre-war deployment of Moroccan troops against the Asturias uprising: “For eight hundred years the crusade against the Moors has been the central theme of Spanish history: they still continued to be the hereditary enemy—the only enemy, in fact, against which the Spanish army had ever fought.” This view of Moroccans proved a direct disadvantage to the Republic’s tactics. According to Kern, “The CNT/FAI promised to abandon all Spanish territory in Morocco if Berber soldiers in General Franco’s army could somehow be lured away” —but no concrete action was ever taken.^{ab} Dauvé suggests why: “...the announcement of immediate and unconditional independence for Spanish Morocco would, at minimum, have stirred up trouble among the shock troops of reaction. The Republic obviously gave short shrift to this solution, under a combined pressure from conservative milieus and from the democracies of England and France, which had little enthusiasm for the possible break-up of their own empires.” From a tactical perspective as well as the ethical, this is too bad: if Franco had been faced with revolt from his back, things might have been different. I don’t know anything about Moroccan attitudes of the time, but I know that people generally resent being conscripted by their occupier, and several historians make the point that Franco’s troop supply might have been diminished by some expression of solidarity from Spanish radicals. I think Spanish attitudes about “the Moors” played a major role in this failure, though Orwell agrees with Dauvé that the French would not have appreciated a liberated Spanish Morocco... so “the best strategic opportunity of the war was flung away in the vain hope of placating French and British capitalism.” That analysis rings true, as it proved to be a dominant theme of events to follow.

ab Kern 165. I have not seen this promise referred to elsewhere, and Graham implies that no such effort was made, merely talked about. Kern cites “Pages in Working Class History”, *Spain and the World*, August 26, 1938, p. 3.

The initial, small, very justifiable, anarchist collaboration with the government—voting in the 1936 election, in hopes of freeing their comrades—marked the beginning of a disastrous trajectory. One might well say that an unsuccessful revolutionary gesture that leaves thousands in prison is a disastrous trajectory itself—and some have, even describing the Asturias rebellion as counterrevolutionary.^{ac} However, Asturias also caused the opposite effect: following its suppression, according to Kern, “...the socialists and communists were filled with the same kind of anger that had once motivated the CNT and the FAI. Other sections of the Spanish Left began behaving as if they too were anarchists.” There is nothing in the anarchist philosophy that marks imprisonment as a failure, after all. Collaboration with the government, on the other hand, is highly suspect—and anarchists, then and now, have argued about whether this move towards government involvement and working closely with statist Communists, socialists, and Republicans doomed the anarchist effort in Spain. “Even Buenaventura Durruti gave participation in the elections a lukewarm endorsement after the Popular Front promised to free all political prisoners. ‘We face a situation which could quickly turn into a revolution or a civil war... The worker who votes and then quietly returns home will be a counterrevolutionary; so will the worker who does not but nonetheless refuses to fight.’”

As Barcelona anarchists fought off the initial fascist assault, they met with the Catalan government to form a revolutionary committee that would participate in running the country. In a bizarre yet sensible twist, members of *Nosotros*, the militant FAI affinity group, became the informal committee running the militia; some CNT-FAI members became government employees. In November, four anarchist ministers were admitted to the national government, though this act ran contrary to the Republican desire to present an acceptable image to not only France and Britain, but even to the USSR—anarchists were *personas non grata* everywhere. The CNT incorporation into the government also outraged many anarchists, especially those at the front. The Iron Column sent out a communiqué of grave condemnation: “Over the wire comes news... that the CNT is going to join the government. Thus, it is embracing what it has always attacked, thereby destroying the basis of our ideas. From now on there will be no more talk of liberty, but rather submission to ‘our government’... History moves on, the state survives, and all in the name of an organisation that professes to be libertarian. For how much longer, comrades?”

^{ac} This was the word used by a *treintista*, one of the CNT dissenters from FAI radicalism.

Abel Paz^{ad} looks back on the moment:

Having right on one's side was not enough to stop the advance of the counterrevolution. One needed the determination to tear it up from the roots once and for all, and this was precisely what was not done. There was a desire for discussion, as if chatting with a friend who was defending the same interests. But this was not the case, because the component parts of the counterrevolutionary onslaught was cut from the same cloth as those beyond the front lines whose ideology was plainly fascist... The revolution lacked the strength needed in order to arrive at its ultimate conclusion. And because of this deficiency, everything that happened during the month of November had a fatal logic, although it would take a lot of intense pain before the serious error that had been committed was finally understood.

Some anarchists who joined the government pushed through at least incidentally helpful policies. Frederica Montseny, who previously identified as a nihilist individualist anarchist^{ae} but was now serving as the Minister of Health, managed to decriminalize abortion: an epic feat anywhere in 1936, but particularly remarkable in traditional, Catholic Spain. However, the American anarchist Emma Goldman, previously on friendly terms with her, came to distrust her over her time in Spain. In 1936, she wrote Rudolf Rocker: "I have seen and talked to Frederica Montseny. She is the 'Lenin' in skirts. She is idolized here. She is capable and brilliant but I am afraid she has something of the politician in her." In a letter to Rocker six months later, Goldman is harsher: "...Only blind zealotry will deny that [Montseny] is the most willing to compromise. I hope you understand, dear Rudolf, that I have no personal reason to say that Frederica has gone further to the Right than any of the leading CNT-FAI members. Not only that but she is as dogmatic against any critical expression on the part of comrades in the FAI as anyone else." As she became aware of Montseny's role in trying to get anarchists to disarm in the midst of the 1937 May clashes in Barcelona, Goldman drove the final nail into her assessment:

I hold Frederica Montseny, Garcíá Oliver [Durruti's former comrade] and several other of the leading comrades responsible for the gains made by the Communists and for the danger now threatening the Spanish

ad Paz was a 15-year-old anarchist at the time of the war. After living in exile for a time, he returned to fight Franco from the underground; he served 11 years in prison for this effort. He later became one of the primary historians of the Spanish Civil War.

ae Montseny wrote largely as an essentialist feminist, and argued that women could find liberation through Nietzschean "overcoming" and engagement in the arts.

Revolution and the CNT-FAI. My very first interview with these new comrades has shown me that they are on the ‘border-line’ of reformism. I had never met Oliver before, but I had met Frederica in 1929. The change, since the Revolution swept her forward to the highest topnotch as leader, was only too apparent. I was strengthened in that impression every time I talked to her about the compromise she and the others had made. It was too obvious to me that these comrades are working into the hands of the Soviet government. That in showing their gratitude to Stalin and his regime... dire results were sure to follow. Incidentally, it also meant the betrayal of our comrades in the concentration camps and prisons of Russia. I never saw a greater breach of faith with Anarchist principles than the joint ‘love-fest’ of the CNT-FAI with the Russian satraps in Barcelona... I have not written about this to anyone, dear comrade, although I felt indignation and could have cried out my contempt of the so-called leaders of the CNT-FAI.

Montseny, for her part, proudly claimed her political compromise, saying: “Although it had been our aim, to attempt a total conquest would have meant a broken front, and consequently, failure. The fact is that we [anarchists] were the first to modify our aspirations, the first to understand that the struggle against international fascism was in itself great enough.” Goldman could not disagree enough with how Montseny viewed the ethical and tactical aspects of her decision to collaborate. In a letter she sent to Rocker a few days later, Goldman despairingly wrote: “You will see that the murderous Stalin gang have killed Berneri and another comrade and that they were back of the attempt to disarm the comrades of the CNT-FAI. Still more terrible to me is that Oliver and Montseny have called a retreat and have denounced the militant Anarchists, to whom the revolution still means something, as counter-revolutionists. In other words, it is a repetition of Russia with the identical method of Lenin against the Anarchists and S.R.s [Socialist Revolutionaries] who refused to barter the revolution for the Brest-Litovsk Peace.” Goldman withheld these criticisms from the public to avoid undermining the war, which later caused her to be unfairly understood as a “collaborationist with the collaborationists” by other anarchists. In fact, she was among the best-equipped to understand the mistake the Spanish anarchists were making, having previously written *My Disillusionment in Russia* in an attempt to explain to the international anarchist population that the Soviet revolution had taken a dark turn. Unfortunately, the things she described were still not widely known outside the USSR for many years, and her warnings were not taken seriously by more than a few anarchists who had also experienced Communist betrayal—such as, later, the survivors of the Spanish Civil War.

In May 1937, the Republican government moved to suppress POUM, which it labeled a Trotskyist organization,^{af} and the anarchists. The USSR viewed both political tendencies as its enemies, and the government, primarily Communist at this point, was bent on a path of permanent appeasement of this cantankerous ally. It therefore accused POUM of being not just Trotskyists... but fascist agents. And, on April 25th, the Republicans seized control of an anarchist-held outpost, killing four. People on both sides began caching weapons in preparation for greater conflict; contrariwise, all agreed to hold no events on May Day, a traditional day of anarchist, socialist, and Communist demonstration, for fear of serious fighting breaking out. It did anyway, a few days later in Barcelona, in the ironically termed “May Days.”

George Orwell happened to be in Barcelona at the time, on holiday from the front, and wrote a vivid description of the fighting, in which he participated—a sort of horrible, interminable standoff. Despite the fear-mongering government claims that anarchists had stockpiled massive quantities of weapons away from the front, it was the government police who were the better-equipped for this battle. Somehow, *their* weapons had not all been sent up to the desperately under-provisioned front. Orwell says, “The Civil Guards and Carabineros, who were not intended for the front at all, were better armed and far better clad than ourselves. I suspect it is the same in all wars—always the same contrast between the sleek police in the rear and the ragged soldiers in the front.” This is for exactly the reason demonstrated by the “May Days” themselves—to police one’s own population is of greater interest to those in power than to protect it. The head of a Socialist party, the PSUC, is even reported to have said: “Before taking Zaragoza [a city under fascist control], we have to take Barcelona.” The police had their own tradition of fighting Leftists, and could hardly be expected to do other than to fulfill their role; Orwell notes, “on several occasions later in the war, e.g. at Santander, the local Civil Guards went over to the Fascists in a body.” A column marching on Teruel that was composed of one-fourth militians and three-fourths Civil Guards, as also betrayed to the fascists by the police within their own militia—they went to sleep as comrades, but the workers awoke to guns pointed in their faces.

^{af} As Orwell trenchantly observes, “This implied that scores of thousands of working-class people, including eight or ten thousand soldiers who were freezing in the front-line trenches and hundreds of foreigners who had come to Spain to fight against Fascism, often sacrificing their livelihood and their nationality to do so, were simply traitors in the pay of the enemy.” (Orwell 64) Both Orwell and his comrades from the front were included in this accusation, though Orwell never actually joined the POUM—for which afterward, when the POUM was suppressed, I was rather sorry”, he says, in a tender display of solidarity.

By Orwell's analysis, the workers who fought the Republican police in the "May Days" were right to do so. "A year after the outbreak of war the Catalan workers had lost much of their power, but their position was still comparatively favorable. It might have been much less so if they had made it clear that they would lie down under no matter what provocation. There are occasions when it pays better to fight and be beaten than not to fight at all." And, in fact, the attacks of the government during that time affected the urban poor as a whole, not simply those shooting back—by disassembling the CNT food supply committees and reintroducing the free market, they effectively starved anyone short on money, as inflation skyrocketed.

Orwell's book, though it covers all of his experiences in Spain, from his time at the front to escaping further Republican repression, is centered around the betrayal of the anarchists and POUM by the Communist government. Orwell, himself a Socialist, was shocked, disgusted, and horrified by the "May Days", the events that followed them, and what he came to understand their motives to have been; he developed a lifelong hatred of Communists.^{ag} *Homage to Catalonia*, written only five months after he left Spain, was a desperate attempt at producing embattled mythology in the face of near-certain defeat. Orwell was attempting to tell the truth he had seen in as an act of solidarity, in a way that might be materially beneficial for the comrades he left behind. Unfortunately for him, the book sold only 1,500 copies during the first, most relevant years; people were not interested in hearing his critique.

The "May Days" were very nearly the end. On June 15th the POUM was declared illegal; its leadership were jailed, followed by thousands more in short order. Orwell, who faced possible imprisonment or death for his service in POUM—even though he was a wounded international vet—escaped with his wife across the border; many were not so lucky. Just before he left, he went to visit a friend from the front who had been thrown in jail; even there, in a moment I find heartbreaking, he saw "*¡Viva la Revolución!*" painted on the cell wall.

Militarization was another step in the destruction of the revolution, although it was justified by the government as a way to "free anarchist energies for the war in Aragon." Perhaps it is most useful to think through militarization—the process by which the militias were regularized into army units, with their

^{ag} This hatred, common among Spanish Civil War vets, metastasized in Orwell; years later, he gave information on British citizens he suspected of being Communists to the British government. Though he did not do this with the purpose of calling repression down on them, it was a wholly irresponsible act in that era of Red-baiting. (See various essays on "Orwell's List.")

most radical elements sieved out—via the perspective of those who had been incarcerated by the Republic, but had been fighting alongside it since nonetheless.

The Iron Column was one of the most famous of anarchist militias; as their opening move on the way to the front, they liberated the San Miguel de los Reyes prison and incorporated a large number of the freed prisoners into their ranks, as many as wished to join. A participant describes the action:

The opening of the gates and the releasing of all the inmates was the doing of a small group of comrades. They arrived at the prison and demanded that the gates be thrown open. There was no resistance, so they set everybody free. Most of the inmates were in San Miguel de los Reyes for criminal offences but there was also the odd comrade convicted for bank robbery or something like that. The opening up of the prison was prompted by principle and nothing more. It was an attempt to do away with something we regarded as a product of bourgeois rule: the inmates were victims of society and they had to be given a chance, at which point most of them joined the Iron Column, fighting and conducting themselves in an extraordinarily brave and intrepid fashion.

This prison liberation is a rather beautiful example^{ah} of how the revolutionary spirit of the militias both acted beyond the necessities of war—and, incidentally, supported them in conducting that war. In contrast to the Column's view and treatment of these prisoners, the police in the town in which the Column massed who did not want to join the Column were disarmed and left under close supervision. The Column had learned from its lesson in Teruel that police do not transform easily into revolutionaries, unlike criminals.

The government announced that the Iron Column would be militarized on April 1st; at its general assembly in mid-March, the Iron Column debated whether it would comply. Paz quotes this debate at length, and it is certainly worth reading in its entirety. I will quote a few highlights:

“We cannot isolate ourselves by dealing only with the war. We must also spare a thought for the revolution. They want to blind us with cries of ‘Everything for Madrid! Everything for the children!’ There are two ah The essay “‘Testimony of an ‘Uncontrollable’ from the Iron Column”, reprinted by Paz, and reprinted by others as “A Day Mournful and Overcast”, is a poetic firsthand account by one of those liberated from prison who joined the Column. Although I do not quote it here, it is well worth reading.

capitalisms that intend to crush the revolutionary moment: a domestic capitalism represented by the power of the Generalitat, and a foreign capitalism represented by England, America, in France...”

“I will speak not as an antifascist but as an anarchist. I oppose all authority, especially military authority.”

“I am not a *miliciano*, but I have been to Russia, where I experienced the revolution and was able to observe the way in which the anarchists were liquidated (at this point the comrade summarised the Makhnovist movement.) ...What counts is to maintain the spirit of anarchism and, equally, to try to find the resources that will give us strength.”

Even these few excerpts demonstrate the depth of political understanding, the tactical orientation, and the knowledge of those participating on the front lines of the war. The concerns voiced by Goldman, Orwell, and many other famous outsiders were not limited to that privileged few, but were generally understood. Despite this, the bulk of anarchists at the assembly agreed that greater discipline and reorganization was needed. By the end of the assembly, the Column consented to militarization.

Earlier, Durruti spoke on the issue of militarization in a speech he delivered just two weeks before his death, on November 4th of 1936:

The militarisation of the militias has been decreed. If this has been done to frighten us, to impose on us an iron discipline, this is a mistaken policy. We challenge those who have issued this decree to come to the front and see for themselves our moral [sic] and our discipline and compare it with the moral and the discipline in the rear. We will not accept dictated discipline. We are doing our duty. Come to the front to see our organisation! Later we shall come to Barcelona to examine your discipline, your organisation and your control!

Orwell had a similar assessment of the militias:

The essential point of the system was social equality between officers and men. Everyone from general to private drew the same pay, ate the same food, wore the same clothes, and mingled on terms of complete equality. If you wanted to slap the general commanding the division on the back and ask him for a cigarette, you could do so, and no one thought it curious... Later it became the fashion to decry the militias, and

therefore to pretend that the faults which were due to lack of training and weapons were the result of the equalitarian system. Actually, a newly raised draft of militia was an undisciplined mob not because the officers called the privates ‘Comrade’ but because raw troops are always an undisciplined mob. In practice the democratic ‘revolutionary’ type of discipline is more reliable than might be expected. In a workers’ army discipline is theoretically voluntary. It is based on class-loyalty, whereas the discipline of a bourgeois conscript army is based ultimately on fear... When a man refused to obey an order you did not immediately get him punished; you first appealed to him in the name of comradeship. Cynical people with no experience of handling men will say instantly that this would never ‘work’, but as a matter of fact it does ‘work’ in the long run.

Militarization included a decree prohibiting women from serving in the front lines. “Female militia members were fetched from the trenches, many of them weeping with anger as they were forced to board the buses that would carry them back into the rearguard.” But, Strobl tells us, anarchist units somewhat ignored the ban. Paz gives us closer insight into this particular with an excerpt from the minutes of the Iron Column assembly on militarization:

Falomir asks that women not be admitted to the newly organised Column, on the grounds that they are a source of disturbance and only there to look for a man.

After unanimous objection from the assembly, these remarks are retracted.

Comrade Pellicer clears up the situation of the female comrades by saying that any woman who wants to can come along as a *militiana*, as long as she brings her rifle.

The true meaning of this dismissive response is highlighted by a personal account: “I was present at the assembly that was eventually held, at which militarisation was agreed to. I saw opposition come from many comrades, even from some female comrades who had earlier—according to some comrades—shown such bravery by leading the way into battle. I saw women who wept from anger and fury upon being told that they would no longer be able to continue fighting with the Brigade, nor on any other front.” Women fighters understood that they had lost their personal battle, that provisional tolerance was not the same as support.

Dauvé: “From the battle for Madrid (March ‘37) to the final fall of Catalonia (February ‘39), the cadaver of the aborted revolution decomposed on the battlefield. One can speak of war in Spain, not of revolution.” Only a few more betrayals and bad decisions remained before the end. Negrín withdrew the internationals from the front in 1938 to prove that the Spanish military was not controlled by Soviet Communists, in hopes of persuading the Allies to aid Spain. After the departure of their comrades from abroad, there was no hope for the remaining revolutionaries—nor for their betrayers. Franco formally defeated the Republic on April 1st, 1939.

One could trace a path from anarchist voting—recognition of the government, however cynically motivated—to the collaboration between the anarchist militias and the government in the war; from that to the dissolution of the militias/militarization; to the depiction of POUM as a force of fascist provocateurs, and the suppression of the anarchists and POUM in the Barcelona “May Days”; to the following imprisonment of countless anarchists and other Leftists who did not meet with the approval of the USSR, who had by then become the government’s only hope; to the mass incarceration, torture, and persecution of any suspected of disloyalty under Franco. I have no desire, however, to locate an original sin for the Spanish anarchists, or indeed to blame these brave people at all for the way in which they were betrayed. Perhaps it would have been a betrayal of common sense, if more politically pure, to refuse to vote in a government that might release your comrades. And supporting the state, recognizing its authority in your life, is far larger and more diffuse than voting or holding office. Dauvé:

No less than Marxism, anarchism fetishizes the state and imagines it as being incarnated in a place. ...the CNT declared the Spanish state to be a phantom relative to the tangible reality of the “social organizations” (i.e. militias, unions.) But the existence of the state, its *raison d’être*, is to paper over the shortcomings of ‘civil’ society by a system of relations, of links, of a concentration of forces, an administrative, police, judicial, and military network which goes ‘on hold’ as a backup in times of crisis, awaiting the moment when a police investigator can go sniffing in the files of the social worker. The revolution has no Bastille, police station or governor’s mansion to ‘take’: its task is to render harmless or destroy everything from which such places draw their substances.

In this perceptive and important essay, “When Insurrections Die”^{ai}, Dauvé argues that the basic problem of anti-fascism is that it forces the revolutionary to fight *for* the capitalist state, *against* a projected worst version of the same capitalist state. “[A]s fascism is capital in its most reactionary forms, such a vision means trying to promote capital in its most modern, non-feudal, non-militarist, non-racist, non-repressive, non-reactionary forms, i.e. a more liberal capitalism, in other words a more capitalist capitalism.” From this perspective, the Spanish anarchists had almost failed from the moment they began fighting Franco instead of the Republic, as “an undeniable class war was transformed into a capitalist civil war... We won’t invite ridicule by accusing the left and far left of having discarded a communist perspective which they knew in reality only when opposing it. It is all too obvious that anti-fascism renounces revolution. But anti-fascism fails exactly where its realism claims to be effective: in preventing a possible dictatorial mutation of society. ...Fascism is the adulation of the statist monster, while anti-fascism is its more subtle apology. The fight for a democratic state is inevitably a fight to consolidate the state, and far from crippling totalitarianism, such a fight increases totalitarianism’s stranglehold on society.”

Dauvé approvingly cites the ways in which the Durruti Column paused to encourage collectivization of land and people’s tribunals on their way to the front. When the radicals traded some of their autonomy for government support, he says, they believed they would be able to control the situation by virtue of being armed; but “[t]his was a fatal error. The question is not: who has the guns? But rather: what do the people with guns do? 10,000 or 100,000 proletarians armed to the teeth are nothing if they place their trust in anything besides their own power to change the world. Otherwise, the next day, the next month or the next year, the power whose authority they recognize will take away the guns which they failed to use against it.” The power of the proletariat is not strictly one of firepower, either:

The question is not whether the proles finally decide to break into the armories, but whether they unleash what they are: commodified beings who no longer can and who no longer want to exist as commodities, and whose revolt explodes capitalist logic. Barricades and machine guns flow from this “weapon.” The greater the change in social life, the less guns will be needed, and the less casualties there will be. A communist

ai I read this essay as it was reprinted in *Endnotes* Vol. 1, where it serves as a basis for debate between Dauvé and *Theorie Communiste* about the relative importance of interrogating past history in terms of what could have been done differently, in contrast to a historically determinist reading: what was done is what was necessarily done because of material and theoretical constraints. Without seriously taking up that argument, I will say that my sympathies on this matter lie with Dauvé.

revolution will never resemble a slaughter: not from any nonviolent principle, but because revolution subverts more (soldiers included) than it actually destroys.

Helen Graham argues that, from the perspective of the Socialists running the Republic, both the “May Days” in Barcelona 1937 and the Socialist Largo Caballero’s fall from Republican power must be seen as “the liquidations of the vestiges of revolutionary power by the political representatives of the central state... Largo had performed a crucial task in the supremely difficult initial phase of the war. He had salvaged the structure of the bourgeois Republic and it was this, significantly strengthened, which swept him away.” Similarly, the Munich Pact of 1938 (in which the major powers of Europe allowed Hitler to annex portions of Czechoslovakia) marked a point, she argues, in which “not only Czechoslovakia but the Spanish Republic was sacrificed on the altar of appeasement.” As revolutionary elements within Spain were sacrificed to please the USSR, so revolutionary Spain itself was abandoned by the USSR in hopes of placating Hitler; the betrayer was betrayed. The final moments of the Republic, ended by one last military coup, signifies to Graham “the convergence of diametrically-opposed political and social interests against a Communist Party which, while it had alienated anarchists and some socialists by its protagonism in the destruction of popular revolution in the interests of Popular Front, had equally alienated its middle-class power base by ‘failing’ to deliver the military victory on which the political commitment of the bourgeoisie had ultimately always depended.”

Some, like George Orwell, have argued that letting go of revolutionary goals undermined not just anarchist struggle but the war effort in general, pointing out that a call to the international working class to join Spain in rising up against capitalism, the state, and the particular form of it called fascism might have generated a far more enthusiastic and widespread response than the prevailing idea of setting aside revolutionary goals in favor of prioritizing the war against the fascists.^{aj} However, this may also have been unsuccessful.

aj Orwell: “...once the war had been narrowed down to a ‘war for democracy’ it became impossible to make any large-scale appeal for working-class aid abroad. If we face facts we must admit that the working class of the world has regarded the Spanish war with detachment. Tens of thousands of individuals came to fight, but the tens of millions behind them remained apathetic....For years past the Communists themselves had been teaching the militant workers in all countries that ‘democracy’ was a polite name for capitalism. To say first ‘Democracy is a swindle,’ and then ‘Fight for democracy!’ is not good tactics. If, with the huge prestige of Soviet Russia behind them, they had appealed to the workers of the world in the name not of ‘democratic Spain’, but of ‘revolutionary Spain’, it is hard to believe that they would not have got a response.”

The International Brigades were organized primarily by Communists; the Socialists and anarchists of Europe and the U.S. had largely opposed participation in WWI, and for some this anti-militarism had turned into a sort of undefined pacifism, which inclined them against participating in the Spanish struggle. Others who might have come had already been decimated by repression. Although things would certainly have been different with a wider outreach effort, especially one that framed the struggle in terms of solidarity along class lines, the inertia of much of the international Left may have prevented the outcome Orwell envisions.

In a best-case scenario—if no anarchist had ever worked with the Spanish government, if more workers had come from around the world, if Franco had been defeated—could a revolution have been sustained in Spain? This is doubtful, partly for reasons of internal unreadiness, but more largely because of international issues. The United States, England, and France were all afraid of the USSR, and of the implications of its Communist revolution. They feared similar uprisings within their own borders, and they emphatically did not want a revolutionary Spain, no matter what its exact political alignment. The revolution was possibly doomed as the anarchists who fought for it were—from all sides. I find their struggle of no less value for its tragic denouement.

consequences

We are not in the least afraid of ruins. We are going to inherit the earth; there is not the slightest doubt about it. The bourgeoisie might blast and ruin its own world before it leaves the stage of history. We carry a new world here in our hearts. That world is growing this minute.

—Buenaventura Durruti

The Spanish Civil War was a testing ground for World War II. As Hochschild observed, many of the German weapons deployed in the war were first used in Spain, by Franco's Nazi allies. And, Graham tells us, Spanish resistance to fascism—the putting-down of which partially occupied Hitler and Mussolini, and prevented Franco from possible participation in other conflicts or acts of imperialism—gave England time to re-arm, to prepare for WWII. Had the people of Spain not risen up against fascism, in such numbers and with such vigor, the oncoming world war might have had a different outcome. Without the radicalizing struggle of anarchists and other Leftists for the preceding sixty years in Spain, there would not have been such resistance, as there was not in other countries in which fascism reared its head.

People fight fascism to the extent to which they understand their own lives and freedom to be threatened by it. In the case of its immediate victims, the need for struggle is clear—which in no way diminishes the valor of their resistance. For those whose politics tell them that a threat to the freedom of any is a threat to the freedom of all, fighting fascism and its allies is a permanent necessity.

For the survivors of the war, this necessity brought a huge amount of suffering. Thousands of adults were also incarcerated, often tortured; about 10,000 were interned in Nazi concentration camps, most in Mauthausen, where they bore the red triangle of active anti-fascist resisters.^{ak} Many who endured this dread fate nevertheless entered the underground resistance upon their release or escape.^{al} As well as from within Spain, some fought from exile in the USSR, or from within northern Africa; many fought with the fascinating MOI and the Maquis in France. A Spanish Republican unit was even given the dangerous honor of vanguard position in the liberation of Paris... but still did not receive the Allied support which they earnestly hoped would help them retake their country. A few returning Spanish Civil War vets who enlisted in the U.S. Army were sent behind enemy lines to do dangerous sabotage—“the only kind of active service for which the American government did not actively discriminate against those of its citizens who had fought for the Spanish Republic”, Graham notes with pain.

Within Spain, a dense atmosphere of enforced denunciation and fearful silence descended, and is only now, many years after Franco’s death, beginning to fully lift. Graham describes the “penal universe” Franco imposed, both upon the hundreds of thousands he formally incarcerated, and those who lived in the permanent state of exception “outside” of prison walls. 50,000 Republican children were taken from their families and institutionalized, or placed with fascist families. By virtue of being defeated, the Republic had

ak Poetically, Hitler called his program against these “*nacht und nebel*”—usually translated as “under cover of night”, but, literally, “Night and Fog”, into which the anti-fascists had disappeared. It is a Wagner reference.

al Strobl: “In most instances, those of [the Republican women fighters] who were taken prisoner by the enemy during battle were brutally raped and then murdered. Some of them were lucky and were hauled off to prison; those who were even luckier regained their freedom after six, seven, or ten years. After which, it was not unusual for them to carry on with their work underground, and perhaps to endure further arrests.” One woman Strobl interviewed, Julia “Chico” Manzanal, fought on the front; returned home and was imprisoned; her child died in prison with her; her boyfriend died in prison; and she herself became temporarily paralyzed from prison conditions. She still, unbelievably, entered the underground resistance after her release. Even this depth of suffering could not cage her bravery; perhaps, instead, it made any other form of life seem impossible.

been found guilty, and Republicans were punished for that crime every day. Franco's victory itself was his legitimacy and virtue, and he asserted it daily through projects of sovereign veridiction like the *Causa General*, a "fact-finding" tribunal about "war crimes." In a horrible, intensified echo of the role for which anarchists executed them, Catholic priests monitored and denounced their congregations. The war itself was referred to by the regime only as the "crusade" or "war of national liberation." And, as Spain slowly democratized in the 70s and 80s, a "pact of silence" remained: no one from the fascist side was ever brought to task for their crimes in the Civil War.

Spain was excluded from the Marshall Plan of post-WWII reconstruction, thus guaranteeing its poverty... for a time.^{am} The United States did nothing to censure this totalitarian government, preferring to keep Franco as an ally against Communist governments. Indeed, the United States employed lighter shades of the same tactics at home. A vast majority of American volunteers in the war faced decades of FBI and HUAC harassment upon their return to the States; despite losing jobs and housing because of this harassment, almost none these volunteers cooperated with the government against their former comrades.^{an} Having faced the guns of the fascists abroad, down-home repression was no match for the valor and commitment of these veterans. Many left the Communist Party out of disgust with the USSR, especially after the 1956 revelations about the murderous exploits of Stalinism, but few left in acquiescence to repression. Quite a few jumped right back into labor organizing; one began the publishing house that published *Negroes With Guns*, Robert F. Williams' famous memoir of struggle, and another provided the headquarters space for the SDS when it began.

am Graham: "...it was the labor mobility generated in the 1950s, once Spain's economy had been kickstarted by trade and aid agreements with the USA—effectively Spain's very own Marshall Plan—that provided a way out from the rigid hierarchies and unforgiving memories of villages and provincial towns for 'red'/defeated constituencies, most frequently in the shape of their sons and daughters. They headed as migrants to the growing cities to become the new workforce of a burgeoning industrial sector. The exodus of the poor from the rural south during these years finally 'solved' the structural problem of mass landlessness that had been at the heart of Spain's social conflict in the 1930s when the Republic attempted to address it in a more explicitly egalitarian manner." This is bitter.

an By way of comparison, "During the McCarthy period, 60% of those accused of being communists or fellow travelers in Hollywood immediately cooperated with the government. In the labor world, 40% of fingered unionists turned against their comrades. But of the 2,300 U.S. and Canadian survivors of the Spanish Civil War, all of whom were accused of disloyalty and over 2,000 of whom were harassed by the FBI or Royal Mounted Police, exactly and only 11 cooperated with the witch-hunters." (Gerassi)

The impact of the experience resonated for these participants for the rest of their lives. Evelyn Hutchins, the only female international who managed to get a role close to combat (as a driver), held on to her animosities for years. She recalls how certain undercover fascist doctors were caught doing sabotage behind Republican lines—including unnecessary amputations. “There was [a] Spaniard who got away with it, just disappeared at that point. When I spotted him and he spotted me in New York long after the Spanish Civil War, he just started running and I lost him.”

Said another veteran,

Somebody had showed me a document which revealed that all the bombs that had been used by the fascists against us were manufactured in the United States by DuPont and that the tanks that rolled over our bodies did so on Texaco fuel. So I came back to the United States exhilarated by my experience in Spain, by what I understood camaraderie and deep commitment meant on the one hand, and bitter, frustrated and angry at my government on the other... To this day, I’m proud of the fact that I was, as I have been known, a ‘premature antifascist.’

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We are not
in the least
afraid
of ruins

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