

# Coming Home? Vol. 1



Coming Home? Vol. 1:  
Conflict and Return Migration in the Aftermath  
of Europe's Twentieth-Century Civil Wars

Edited by

Sharif Gemie and Scott Soo  
with Norry LaPorte

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**P U B L I S H I N G**

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of Europe's Twentieth-Century Civil Wars  
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## EDITORS' PREFACE

The complex inter-relationship of conflict, return migration and the compelling search for a sense of home is the central preoccupation of the contributors to these volumes. The chapters are by historians, literary experts, and specialists from cultural studies and sociology who participated in the international and interdisciplinary conference organised by "The Exilio Network" at the University of Southampton. The timing of the conference, in April 2009, coincided with the seventieth anniversary of fall of the Second Spanish Republic. One of the conference's aims was to recall the series of injustices that led to the violent overthrow of a democratically-elected government in 1939 and the mass displacement of hundreds of thousands of people into exile around the world.

The Spanish Civil War was one of a series of twentieth-century conflicts that erupted because of the inability of national authorities to successfully manage much-needed structural reforms, and which resulted in the mass displacement of people from their homes. The conference explored issues of conflict, return and home. Whether in relation to Spanish Civil War, the aftermath of the Second World War or the violence surrounding decolonisation, population displacement has demanded solutions that have habitually raised the question of return migration. In this respect, the contributors have tackled a series of overlapping questions: what were the motivations for returning? How did institutions and other political or social groups influence return? How was it organised? What strategies were created by migrants to deal with the impossibility of return? How were refugees received, perceived and represented by the authorities and communities upon their return? In what ways, if at all, did migrants re-construct a sense of home and homeland back in their countries of origin? To what extent did return signify the end of exile, diaspora, and the closure of the migration cycle? How has return been remembered at an individual and group level? How has return been represented through architecture, literature and film?

A selection of papers from the conference were revised, expanded and edited for these two volumes. The first two parts, contained in this volume, consider the Spanish Civil War, and the aftermath of the Second World War in Central and Eastern Europe. What soon becomes clear in reading these chapters is the considerable dissonance between the agendas of

migrants and those of national authorities. The chapters in *Coming Home? Vol. 2: Conflict and Postcolonial Return Migration in the Context of France and North Africa, 1962–2009* consider similar tensions in the aftermath of French colonial rule in North Africa.

The two books are a collective venture and accordingly we would like to thank the authors for the time, effort and patience in preparing and revising their contributions, as well as Carol and Emily from Cambridge Scholars Press. Nick James also deserves a special mention for the excellent and efficient work in formatting the texts for publication. We are most indebted to Norry LaPorte for his specialist advice on the chapters which appear in Part II of this book. Our deep gratitude is also directed at our close colleagues and friends from the steering committee of the Exilio Network for the enriching and enjoyable series of meetings which led up to the conference: Alicia Mira Abad, Laure Humbert, Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez, Fiona Reid, Mónica Moreno Seco, Laure Teulière, Bruno Vargas, and Alicia Alted Vigil. For ensuring the 2009 conference was seamlessly run and a manifest success we thank Natacha Borrel, Padmini Broomfield, Marie-Pierre Gibert, Chris Letteriello, Vanessa Mar-Molinero, Nicky Robbins, and Deborah Worton. Neither the Exilio Network nor the conference would have seen the light of day without the generous seed funding provided by the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Southampton and the subsequent grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council for which we are grateful. Our thanks go also to the Centre of Transnational Studies for hosting the conference and to the University of Southampton for financing the formatting of the two volumes.

Both editors were fortunate to have received the support of family and friends who contributed more than they know. Many have been acknowledged in other publications that have appeared in tandem with these volumes. However, Scott would especially like to thank his sister Kate and her partner Dan, as well as the adorable Paris and Ava for their generous hospitality and kindness in ensuring a homecoming for every visit. Sharif would like to record his memories of the wonderful years he shared with Patricia Clark (1957–2010), and of the friendship and support he found in the Exilio network.

We can see now that the papers presented at the “Coming Home” conference unwittingly provided a type of forecast of the tensions produced in the Syrian conflict, which continues unabated as this book goes to press, and of the challenges of mass displacement accompanying climate change. Therefore, this book is dedicated to all refugees of the twenty-first century.



## INTRODUCTION

# ON DISPLACEMENT: NARRATIVES OF HOME, CONFLICT AND RETURN IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY EUROPE

SHARIF GEMIE AND SCOTT SOO\*

The essays in these two volumes of *Coming Home?* study apparently varied groups: people classified as migrants, refugees, deportees, evacuees and displaced persons. Irrespective of classification, these people all share a common dilemma: they are often unable to unpack their suitcases. Or, in more articulate terms: they face multiple challenges to returning home; they suffer a loss of agency, and in some cases even risk the loss of self. In this introduction, we wish to suggest that such people are not so much tragic exceptions to a European norm of stability and permanence but—on the contrary—they are people at the heart of the modern European experience. Their predicament can be seen in a larger context, suggested by Zygmunt Bauman’s provocative observation that “Being modern came to mean... being unable to stop and even unable to stand still”.<sup>1</sup> Bauman’s comments link the nature of modernity with the quality of movement: in studying these restless people, we examine the key tensions within modern European history.

### **Suitcase Politics**

Suitcases figure prominently in these migrants’ experiences: they mark their lives, encapsulate their aspirations and symbolise their trajectories; they enclose different meanings, from hope, through concern to outright fear. When Valeriano Espiga, an anarchist exile from the Spanish Civil War, discussed the optimism that he and his fellow refugees felt in south-western France during the Liberation—the moment when they believed they really might return to a post-Francoist Spain—he summed up his

memories in a simple phrase: “we lived with our suitcases packed”.<sup>2</sup> Other peoples lived with a similar sense that their lives and residences were merely provisional, but did not share the same sense of hope. The expectation that one was going to move on was often a sign of despair and defeat. At the same time that Spanish Republican refugees dreamed of their return journey, other Europeans feared theirs.<sup>3</sup> In the Berlin of autumn 1944, a constantly packed suitcase was a sign that one no longer accepted the propaganda of the Nazi state, and had realised that the defeat of the Reich was drawing close.<sup>4</sup> In Soviet Russia, similar anticipations of travel were actively criticised. Some fifteen million people were evacuated eastwards in the latter half of 1941 as the German armies invaded. They were urgently needed as workers in the hastily re-constituted industrial centres, and were criticised for their failure to integrate into their new settlements: it was said they had a “suitcase mood”.<sup>5</sup> For Magda Denes, a young Hungarian Jew who survived Nazi persecution, the Jews’ suitcases were also the symbols of their humiliation: “A backpack was an important accessory. It implied status and privilege; it made the person who wore it look sportive and Aryan. Very unlike the frightened, fugitive Jews with their hasty suitcases, among whom I belonged.”<sup>6</sup> As it became clear that the French state was losing its struggle to retain control of Algeria, the European settlers in Algeria disliked what their suitcases represented (emigration), but were far more afraid of the alternative of staying: their dilemma was commonly summed up as a choice between “the suitcase or the coffin”.

A last suitcase, however, suggests a different experience and a different attitude. This was the suitcase mentioned by another Spanish exile, Miguel Oviedo, a communist who evoked it when discussing his past. The old battered case can still be found on a shelf in his garage. Is it another referent to exile, home and return? The answer is both yes and no. This suitcase accompanied Miguel throughout his exile in France, but it did not originate in Spain: he bought it with his first French wages on 22 February 1940.<sup>7</sup> It does not so much signify the sense of loss that exile can frequently engender but rather the life that Miguel had reconstructed in France.<sup>8</sup>

These examples show that suitcases can be quintessential referents for displacement and the aspiration for return, and yet, as the cases of Valeriano and Miguel reveal, we must be wary of accepting any single narrative as the norm for the experiences of exiled peoples. There was no single, inevitable response to exile: displaced peoples could form “diasporas of hope, diasporas of terror, and diasporas of despair”.<sup>9</sup> They were not even fated to be victims of history. The Spanish Republican

refugees frequently used the term “Reconquista” in 1939–1940, and again in 1944–1945 in reference to their anticipated return to a Spain liberated from the Francoist dictatorship. The word was originally devised to interpret the centuries-long campaign to defeat Muslim power in Spain and to impose a centralised, Catholic monarchy. It was used in 1808 as a call to expel French rule, and returned to common usage in the months before the outbreak of the conflict in 1936, as a rallying-cry for those who opposed the democratic and secular values of the Second Republic. The fact that it was picked up by exiled Spanish Republicans is indicative of other aspects of the exile experience: the wish to return to a position of lost power but also, and more importantly, the desire for revenge. A more powerful example of a similar impulse can be seen in the Zionist experience. In 1948, dozens of thousands of still-traumatised survivors of the Holocaust arrived in the new state of Israel. The horrific memories of the Holocaust did not teach them the values of *convivencia*, of living together, but rather served to justify ruthlessness to the Palestinian Arabs in the name of statehood.<sup>10</sup>

These simple but evocative examples, which each blend elements of experience, memory and identity, suggest the breadth and complexity of the histories of refugees and other displaced peoples of twentieth-century Europe. Their overarching aim was to return to the country from which they had been forced to leave. When it became clear that this aim would be frustrated—whether permanently or provisionally—displaced persons turned to different strategies. For some, a conscious postponement or rejection of return could facilitate processes of acceptance, acculturation, and the reconstruction of self in a new context. There are some stunning success stories which can be told concerning people in such situations. For example, Elizabeth Taylor obtained her first acting role in the USA when she was a child evacuee from Britain.<sup>11</sup> Equally the careers of Carla Bruni, Nikolaus Pevsner (the celebrated German-born historian of British architecture), Manuel Tuñón de Lara (the grandfather of modern Spanish history) and Edward Said (well-known for his highly influential work *Orientalism* but also as a Palestinian activist, literary critic, and musician) all demonstrate that exile can be told as a narrative of achievement.<sup>12</sup>

Choosing between the search for home and return or the renunciation of return for a (new) home, created opportunities but frequently involved constraints and posed countless challenges. The saddest cases of all are those who finally returned, only to find that their “home”, while physically present, could no longer be a home. The biographies of the Spanish Republicans who “returned” during and after the dictatorship provide many examples of the role of space, time, political inertia and social

change in transforming a former home from something to be re-discovered into something which is permanently lost.<sup>13</sup> Thus the arrival of post-Holocaust Jews in the new state of Israel was not an immediately joyful experience. “For many, their first impression of Israel was that of a deprived country in which life was depressing and difficult.”<sup>14</sup> “Returning home”, they suffered all the classic signs of anomie, finding no clear norms, structure and certainties to guide their new lives. Some sense of closure was often lacking.

The millions of migrants and displaced people who journeyed to and from twentieth-century Europe shared crucial commonalities but differed in their myriad individual experiences. Displacement could take the form of expulsion or willed self-exclusion, it could simply be an accident, unforeseen by winners or losers, it could also be motivated by self-improvement. Plurality of interpretation there must be, and the essays in these volumes collectively address the opportunities, constraints and challenges faced by migrants in creating a sense of belonging often in very difficult circumstances.

## The Politics of Return

Thoughts about return and home seem a universal experiential trait of twentieth-century forced migration. To be sure, there is nothing new about them: the history of return migration stretches back to the time of Ulysses, and the story of exile from home is perhaps the oldest story in Judeo-Christian narratives, and is also present in the *Koran*. But what differentiates the twentieth century from earlier periods is that the cycles of displacement and return were shaped by the massive conflicts associated with the development of the nation state. Furthermore, they occurred on a previously unimaginable scale.

New and totalising forms of warfare, along with the precarious but precious quality of citizenship based on nationality rather than older forms of non-national identities, irrevocably changed the nature of international migration. Nation states devised new institutions and procedures to deal with the emerging category of the stateless person. If the Bolshevik regime invented the category of the stateless person at the start of the 1920s, the responsibility for finding a solution for returning refugees fell to the League of Nations and in particular Fritjoff Nansen. It was during the following decade, however, when the spectre of civil war began to haunt countries across Europe, that the idea of “exile” lost its romantic aura as alarmingly large numbers of people attempted, sometimes unsuccessfully, to cross borders in search of refuge. In response, the League of Nations

finally proposed an international refugee statute in 1933 (a forerunner to the 1951 Convention) but its impact was extremely limited. This was due to the reticence of national governments who were concerned that any legally binding refugee status might discourage the return of refugees to their countries of origin. Thus asylum was not a condition granted, in a self-evident manner, to whoever requested it, but rather an ideal which could be applied or dismissed according to the interests of the nation state in question.

The interests of nation states equally determined the conditions within which return could or could not occur. At times the aspirations of migrants and nation-state governments have not always matched with the latter both instigating and inhibiting return journeys irrespective of migrants' wishes. It is for this reason that some of the authors in these two volumes argue for a distinction between return migration and the state-organised *repatriation* of migrants. At times, notably in the aftermath of the Second World War, state authorities invested considerable effort in elaborating propaganda to encourage return migration. In this way, refugees and displaced persons became entangled in the politics of the Cold War.

The refugees and other migrants who feature in these volumes are not passive social actors without agency. Creativity and innovation emerge as central factors in their lives, whether in relation to migrants' "preparedness"<sup>15</sup> and strategies of returning or to the reproduction and rituals of home in foreign contexts. These volumes consequently explore the motivations for returning within a broad perspective comparing individuals with social and political networks, and with national and international institutions, to answer why, how and when return was organised or indeed stymied.

It would be difficult if not impossible to understand the history of return migration without reference to the questions of home and homeland. Even if scholars have, with very good reason, questioned the usefulness of these concepts,<sup>16</sup> our contributors demonstrate how home and homeland nevertheless existed as frames of reference for migrants. The essays are also suggestive of how definitions are largely dependent on context. Even the distinction between home and homeland trips on the threshold separating the theoretical from the empirical. The two terms have often been conflated, by scholars and migrants alike, but have also varied in precise meaning between different languages and cultures. The assumption that homes are located within homelands quickly runs aground on the complexities of migration and the representations which have emanated from these experiences: firstly, for people who, after being forced out of their "homelands", begin reconstructing "homes" in new and unfamiliar

surroundings; and secondly, for returnees who are unable to re-discover “home” after returning to their “homelands”.<sup>17</sup> At the very least there is, though, a sense that homeland encompasses a larger territorial or spatial area than home. What emerges from the *Coming Home?* volumes is that as ambiguous and sometimes ambivalent as home often appeared—whether as a place, space, activity (ritual or otherwise), imagined, symbol, metaphor, memory, identity, or as a singular or multi-sited phenomenon, or as a static or processual construction (and the list could continue)—it was nonetheless at the centre of migrants’ preoccupations about returning.

## **Frameworks of Returning**

All of the following essays address migration within the context of conflict. Some consider the experiences of the many people who were forced into exile and who lost their nationality and citizenship as a result of conflict within, rather than between, nations. Others investigate the nature and effects of conflict produced within individuals as a result of displacement. This volume begins with a conflict which set the scene for a wider European civil war. It began in July 1936 as a group of rebel generals set out to destroy the Second Spanish Republic. The generals could well have been stopped had it not been for the decisive military intervention of the Nazi German and Fascist Italian states. In this way, the theatre of war in Spain not only gripped the world’s attention: it rapidly became an arena where European anxieties were fought out.

“Part 1: During and After the War in Spain” begins with two chapters that explore the return and non-return of refugees to Spain over the long duration. The defeat of the Republic in instalments produced waves of forced displacement that immediately raised questions by contemporaries about when, how and under what conditions refugees would be able to return to their cities, towns and villages. Some people were displaced from one area of Spain to another, but many sought refuge in neighbouring France whilst child evacuees were sent to a wide range of host countries. Alicia Alted Vigil discusses the polemic which surrounded the Spanish Republic’s evacuation of children to other countries. The issue was invariably inseparable from the politics of the war and is starkly illustrated by the bias shown by the International Red Cross in favour of repatriating the children back to Spain whilst the conflict continued to rage. There is nevertheless a distinction to be made between the Spanish Republican authorities and parents who genuinely sought to remove children from the dangers of war, and the Nationalist authorities. Concerned about their international reputation, the latter lobbied foreign governments to

repatriate the evacuees and even resorted to falsifying parents' requests to be reunited with their children. The author also charts the difficulties encountered by the evacuees on their return to Spain, sometimes decades later, as well as the challenges confronted by other returnees. Even the prospect of assistance from the post-Francoist government was not enough for some returnees to remain in a country that no longer resembled the Spain they had come to remember.

Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand presents a case study of events in the country which accepted more Spanish Republicans than anywhere else in the world: France. A relatively liberal policy towards the Spanish refugees under the Popular Front government became increasingly restrictive under the influence of the Radical Party. By the time of the 1939 mass exodus of Spanish refugees into France, the French government was thereby determined to drastically limit the presence of Spanish refugees. The evidence suggests that some French officials actively tried to press some arriving refugees into either crossing back over the border or joining the Foreign Legion. This was followed by a concerted campaign by officials, within the internment centres in south-western France or the reception centres scattered across the remainder of the country, to pressurise refugees into joining the repatriation convoys. This strategy did not go unchallenged by either the refugees or the public in France. Nevertheless, by the end of 1939 a considerable amount of people had, for a variety of reasons, crossed back over the border. After this era of mass repatriation, return journeys became a more individual and sporadic affair as few exiles were willing to risk persecution or to legitimate the regime's spurious claims about national reconciliation.

The following chapters offer a closer insight into the personal and collective stakes surrounding the numerically small but significant return of high-profile personalities from the Spanish Republican exile. The presence of former exiles associated with ideas and culture was an important phenomenon for even though the Spanish Republic had been defeated militarily, the realm of culture remained one field where it could rightly claim victory. Franco's dictatorship thus had much to gain from every single return of a well-known person: it implied an implicit acceptance of the regime by the individual concerned while also creating a misleading impression that the authorities were seriously interested in national reconciliation.

María González Pendás' case study of two well-known modernist architects, Félix Candela and José Luis Sert, reflects on the politics and poetics of exile and return. The two architects adopted different approaches to building design as well as politics and yet estrangement

provided a point of commonality. This analysis employs the compelling concept of “apátrida” or stateless architecture to explain how some of the architects’ buildings were disconnected from the environments in which they were built and consequently denied a sense of home. By following the personal, professional, and political trajectories of Candela and Sert, this chapter weaves together several overlapping narratives. We thus gain a nuanced insight into the architects’ dilemmas about returning, how their constructions developed according to the likelihood of return, and the concomitant attempts by the Francoist regime to appropriate their modernist ideas into architectural culture in Spain.

The stakes surrounding the return of high-profile personalities is explored further by Pedro García Guirao. While there have been an abundance of studies on the influential anarchist Federica Montseny, less is known about her writings in the exilic press. García Guirao addresses this by examining her writings about return in two anarchist papers published in France. The articles were a response to the Francoist dictatorship’s efforts at enticing eminent personalities into returning and consequently sought to undermine the regime’s propaganda. In this way, they served to prevent the return of well-known individuals but also to limit the damage to Spanish Republicans’ morale each time such an event occurred. The writings also aimed to negate one of the most compelling effects of exile: nostalgia and the desire to return to die in one’s place of origin. As an anarchist Montseny rejected the idea of patriotism and yet she recognised that the ageing process could engender a powerful longing to go back to Spain. This study analyses the narrative techniques sustaining Montseny’s reflections about equality, the struggle against injustice, and the problems with returning to die in the land of one’s birth, all of which are all alluded to in her evocative statement: “the ground rots equally everywhere”.

The final chapters of Part I concentrate on two groups who have received much less attention within studies of the Spanish Republican exile: women and children. The chapters provide a captivating and nuanced insight into the different ways in which women and children have responded to the issues of return and home. Individuals have mobilised the past or employed the creative domain of literature to construct myriad identities and an imagined sense of home.

Alicia Mira Abad and Mónica Moreno Seno’s study focuses on the experiences and memories of Spanish Republican women and their children. Women invested in an imagined form of return which, in some respects, mirrored a dual aspect to their identities: the idea of homecoming and the hope of Republican democracy in Spain echoed their roles in the



domestic space and in political activism. Even less politically active women regarded themselves as guardians of an inherited national memory which encompassed the ideals of Republican Spain. For mothers, this could entail a double (or perhaps a triple) bind that involved acting as agents of acculturation and integration in the context of the host country whilst also maintaining links with Spanish Republican ideals and Spanish culture. The daily lives of many women were sustained by the idea of returning but also involved mediating between the identity of an increasingly mythologised Spain and that of their host country. Some women actually returned with their families, which in some cases could engender the paradoxical situation of an end to exile for themselves but the start of another for their children. Whether or not they returned, mothers were intrinsic to transmitting a sense of exile to their children involving an idealised representation of Spain and often an investment in the idea of returning.

Mariama Ifode's chapter continues with the idea of exile as an inherited experience through an analysis of the writing of Federico Patán thereby contributing to the under-developed subject of the second-generation or "Hispano-Mexican" writers. As Patán was only two years of age when his family left Spain, exile has been acquired from his family rather than through lived experience. Consequently, exile has been experienced differently and perhaps even transformed in the process. Ifode deftly mediates between the author's background and the portrayal of home and return in his novel *Esperanza*, which can be translated in English as hope or waiting. The story's main protagonists are solitary and isolated characters who live a different form of estrangement to the traditional notion of exile but who nonetheless engender questions about home and return. More specifically, they yearn for a refuge where they can feel acceptance and a sense of validation. In this case, home has to be created through an act of imagination and manifests itself as text to which both characters return time and time again. If a textual home is seen as a potential answer to one of the protagonists, the other can find no solace in this respect. Ifode's conclusion thus leaves us with a haunting idea of home for exiles more generally: it can be a place of self-realisation but also self-deception.

The dilemmas associated with exile affected an ever-growing population as the Second World War erupted in the wake of the conflict in Spain. By 1945, people had been scattered across the European continent and beyond. Restoring them to their original place seemed to be the logical solution to this chaos. Putting this simple principle into practice was often far more difficult and even less desirable than originally thought. The

following contributions, in Part II “The Aftermath of War in Central and Eastern Europe”, show some of the difficulties encountered. The authors focus on Germany and the Soviet Union. To differing extents, they all make use of a variety of historical methodologies, including biography, social history, political history and diplomatic history, and this distinctive methodological blend suggests the shape of a possible “refugee history”.

Franziska Meyer continues the dialogue about the possibilities of discovering home through text with an intricate study into the private and public letters of two Jewish German women writers, Anna Seghers and Grete Weil, who returned to Germany in the post-war period. This analysis of epistolary evidence evokes the different and changing perceptions of return and home of two individual intellectuals. If their ideas of home resonate with themes tackled in Part I of this volume, there is nevertheless a radically different empirical context to take into account when considering the return of two Jewish women writers to Germany in the aftermath of the Holocaust. There is also the particularly Germanic notion of homeland or *Heimat* to consider. Both Seghers and Weil struggled to rediscover a sense of home in Germany whether in the form of a recoverable past constituted by an inhabited landscape of Segher’s youth, or a personal rural landscape where Weil could feel she belonged. At stake was the negotiation of the irreparable rupture resulting from war and genocide in Germany, and the destruction of a German-Jewish homeland. This begs the question of whether home and more specifically *Heimat* was somewhere where these writers were not?

There was certainly no fixed definition of *Heimat* in post-war Germany and neither was it an all-inclusive idea. Through an incisive examination of radio broadcasting in Germany Alexander Badenoch and Hans-Ulrich Wagner reveal that some groups were more successful than others in mobilising ideas about home and homecoming. The radio was still a relatively new media but one which had proved its propaganda potential during the war. The problems of “coming home” were discussed openly and frequently on German radio but soon began to reflect differing degrees of social agency between various groups. The stories of returning exiles emerged into the public sphere at the very moment when exiles were excluded from broadcasting. Refugees from the East of the country, on the other hand, featured rather than participated in programmes and became a screen onto which local populations reconstructed their own post-war identities and ideas of home. A gendered element to home-coming on the airwaves emerged with programmes about the preparation and celebration of returning soldiers known as the “young generation.” It was this last

group which came to dominate German broadcasting and the narratives of return.

It is axiomatic to state that the uncertainties shaping issues of home in Germany were not restricted to Germans but also affected migrants who found themselves in the country at the end of the war. While there was something of a liminal quality to life for Germans coming to terms with defeat and the uncertainties of Allied occupation, for the mass of displaced persons (DPs) the destabilising effects of being in-between were manifestly more apparent. Many people were unable to become fully incorporated into German society or afforded the opportunity to return to their countries of origin. Anu Heiskanen's account of the experiences of Finnish women who journeyed to Nazi Germany during the war is suggestive of the complexity of both individual trajectories and the bureaucratic procedures involved in managing migration. In most cases, the women had decided to leave Finland during the war to work for Nazi organisations, although they had often taken their decisions on the basis of faulty or misleading information. After 1945, the women were in limbo: often recruited by Allied and UN organisations as administrative staff, but unable to return Finland. Passing through a series of DP camps frequently represented the prelude to repatriation. In other cases, however, women were deprived of any institutional support or welfare. The study shows the strategies they developed to cope with this awkward situation, and contrasts this with common clichés concerning single women in that era.

The next contribution adopts a more top-down approach to the issue of repatriation by explaining how the mass of displaced persons from the Soviet Union in Germany and elsewhere became embroiled in Cold War politics. Simo Mikkonen analyses how the Soviet Union attempted to adapt to the existence of a large émigré community outside its borders and—more importantly—outside its control. The original hard-line approach, which considered all émigrés as potential traitors, slowly evolved in the 1950s with the powerful Repatriation Committee attempting to persuade rather than intimidate émigrés into returning to their countries of origin. At the same time, the North American authorities adopted a counter-repatriation strategy as the continued presence of exiles implied conditions were invariably better in the West. The flow of returnees to the Soviet Union remained a trickle rather than a flood and as such there was a further change in Soviet policy. Initial concerns about exiles' revealing some of the abuses occurring within the Soviet Union were replaced by an attempt to bolster international reputation through encouraging émigrés to feel positively about their countries of origin.

The final chapters to this volume maintain a long-running theme in this volume: the gulf which often separated national authorities'—both emergent and established—views towards refugees and the actual desires of the refugees themselves. Jan Lanicek's study is centred on the issue of the Jewish minority in Czechoslovakia and concerns the conflict between nation-building and pluralistic national identities. Lanicek's premise is that the question of returning Jews to Czechoslovakia cannot be fully understood by a focus limited to the aftermath of the war. His study therefore explains the debates occurring both during and after the war-time period. In the 1930s, some Jews had felt an affinity with German culture but for the Czech resistance movements, such hyphenated identities were not acceptable for they sought to build a new unitary national culture in post-1945 Czechoslovakia. Returning Jews were given the options of becoming Zionists (and therefore leaving for Israel) or being Czech or Slovak. Such ideas had practical consequences: a rigorous screening programme was implemented after the war, and Jewish-Czechoslovakian citizens were required to produce proof of their loyalty to the new nation.

Sharif Gemie's chapter draws some wider conclusions from the post-1945 crisis. He takes the example of DPs to address the role played by twentieth-century refugee camps in dismantling and transforming identities among refugee populations. Whether as a staging post to an anticipated return or as a first step towards reconstructing a sense of home, these spaces have been host to multiple, and sometimes conflicting, narratives owing to the interaction of government authorities, aid agencies, and refugees. The camps clearly reflect the imposition of national will by the authorities of the host country, but they have additionally been sites from where refugees' ideas about new national or perhaps transnational identities have emerged. Grouping together refugees in confined spaces has involved both the denial and affirmation of agency. In this way, Gemie alerts us to the captivating idea that while a refugee can be seen as an unsuccessful citizen, a citizen can be regarded as a successful refugee.

Associating the history of refugees with citizenship encourages us to consider refugees' experiences as more of a norm rather than an exception. There can be no denying the immense scale of displacement during the twentieth century, and more specifically during the turbulent decades of the 1930s and 1940s when countries across the European continent sought to come to terms with profound and much-needed structural change. How national authorities, aid agencies, and the refugees themselves grappled with issues of returning and rediscovering, or reconstructing, a sense of home has been the central preoccupation of this first volume of the "Coming Home?" series. The temporal and spatial focus of this book has

encompassed the conflict which afflicted Spain in Western Europe as well as the series of civil wars that simultaneously or subsequently raged in Central and Eastern Europe. The terrain of the next volume, *Coming Home? Conflict and Postcolonial Return Migration in the Context of France and North Africa*, moves to the Mediterranean and offers insights into the histories and legacies of human displacement and colonialism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We hope these contributions will, however modestly, further our understanding of the conflicts and mass population displacements that have characterised the contemporary era.

## Notes

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\* The editors' surnames are listed alphabetically for both this introductory chapter and the book.

<sup>1</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), 28.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Valeriano Espiga, Fargues-Saint-Hilaire, France, 25 May 2002.

<sup>3</sup> The term "Spanish Republicans" refers to Spaniards who sided with the Spanish Republic during the Civil War.

<sup>4</sup> Helga Schneider, *The Bonfire of Berlin*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Vintage, 2006), 64.

<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Manley, "The Perils of Displacement: the Soviet Evacuee between Refuge and Deportee," *Contemporary European History* 16, no. 4 (2007): 505–6.

<sup>6</sup> Magda Denes, *Castles Burning: A Child's Life in War* (London: Transworld, 1997), 48.

<sup>7</sup> Miguel narrated this event from his unpublished diary of the period 1939–1940. Interview with Miguel Oviedo, Fargues-Saint-Hilaire, 24 September 2002.

<sup>8</sup> For more details on Miguel's history and also on how Spanish Republicans' mobilised memory as a strategy for both returning and not returning to Spain, see chapters 6 and 7 in Scott Soo, *The routes to exile: France and the Spanish Civil War refugees, 1939–2009* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1996), 6.

<sup>10</sup> On Zionist attitudes to Palestinian Arabs in 1948, see: Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and Nur Masalha, *The Politics of Denial: Israel and the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (London: Pluto, 2003). On the complex issue topic of Israeli debates concerning the Holocaust, see the analysis in Dan A. Porat. "From the Scandal to the Holocaust in Israeli Education," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 4 (2004): 619–36.

<sup>11</sup> Jessica Mann, *Out of Harm's Way: the Wartime Evacuation of Children from Britain* (London: Headline, 2005), 2.

<sup>12</sup> See P. Malerbe, "Un intellectuel dans le Sud-Ouest: Manuel Tuñón de Lara (1955–1997)" in *L'exil républicain à Toulouse (1939–1999)*, ed. Lucienne

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Domergue (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires de Mirail, 1999), 243–8. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 1978).

<sup>13</sup> Florence Guilhem, *L'obsession du retour* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires de Mirail, 2005), 109–24.

<sup>14</sup> Judith T. Shuval, *Immigrants on the Threshold* (New York: Atherton Press, 1963), 20.

<sup>15</sup> Jean-Pierre Cassarino, “Theorising Return Migration: The Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants Revisited,” *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* 6, no. 2 (2004): 275.

<sup>16</sup> Angelika Bammer, “The Question of ‘Home,’” *New Formations* no. 17 (1992): 3–15.

<sup>17</sup> Takeyuki (Gaku) Tsuda, “When Home if not the Homeland: The Case of Japanese Brazilian Ethnic Return Migration,” in *Homecomings: unsettling paths of return*, eds. Fran Markowitz and Anders H. Stefansson (Oxford: Lanham, Md., 2004).

## **PART I**

### **DURING AND AFTER THE WAR IN SPAIN**

# CHAPTER ONE

## REPATRIATION OR RETURN? THE DIFFICULT HOMECOMING OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR EXILES\*

ALICIA ALTED VIGIL

Exile, forced displacement and refuge in another country entail a rupture, an uncertain border crossing, and even an alienation from time itself. In relation to this latter point, Claudio Guillén observes that “for many, this is the worst of all punishments: expulsion from the home country’s present; and therefore from its linguistic, cultural and political future.”<sup>1</sup> From this moment onwards, the uprooted person lives between two horizons that become ever more distant as exile unfolds in time. In the process, the idea of returning to the abandoned physical and existential space of the home country becomes increasingly problematic and subject to multiple interpretations which eventually make the prospect of the return an impossibility. Yet the desire to return is virtually inherent in any exile. Reality can transform this desire into an endless loop that merges origin and destination, past and future, into a timeless present. The moment when one decides to return can therefore evoke conflicting feelings: nostalgia for what was left behind and a longing for what will be left behind. No more so than when the actual return engenders an awareness of the passage of time along with the realisation that the joys, dreams and hopes of the past have all been replaced by estrangement and oblivion.

These reflections could be substantiated by any number of examples given the extent of forced displacement throughout history and across the world.<sup>2</sup> The focus of this chapter, however, is on the spatial and temporal context of the exile provoked by the Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939. More specifically, it explores how the processes of repatriation and return were conditioned by the evolving political situation in Spain, the various countries of refuge, and the wider international arena.



## **Terminology**

Although repatriation and return express a similar idea, there are clear differences in respect to the number of people concerned and the extent of state intervention. In the context of this paper, repatriation refers to the organised return of several different and distinct groups: firstly, the combatants and civilians who were evacuated away from the advancing Nationalist armies to either another place in Spain or abroad; it also alludes to the child evacuees who were sent to other countries in order to protect them from the bombing and the dangers of living in “open” towns; and finally, it describes the collective return journeys of refugees from France to Spain which occurred throughout 1939 because of the pressure of the French government and the acquiescence of the Francoist authorities. These repatriations can be distinguished from the notion of return through two characteristics: firstly, they were overwhelmingly collective (though there were some individual repatriations); and secondly, they were promoted and organised by the governments of both Spain and the countries of refuge. The notion of return, however, will be employed with reference to the exiles who were forcibly displaced from Spain during the final stages and aftermath of the war, and who returned by their own means either individually or in very small groups usually composed of relatives. In order to return they often had to negotiate a seemingly endless series of bureaucratic obstacles to obtain official authorisation. Their journeys back to Spain occurred throughout the Francoist period and following the General’s demise in 1975. Before tackling the circumstances surrounding these experiences of return in more depth, this chapter begins with a study of repatriation and with a particular emphasis on child evacuees.<sup>3</sup>

## **Children and Repatriation in Context**

Throughout the war in Spain there were flows of civilians and combatants into France. The French government immediately repatriated the troops allowing them to re-enter Spain via the Nationalist or Republican zone. Civilians were encouraged to accept repatriation, while those who wished to remain in France were moved away from the border. In addition to this constant flow of people between Spain and France, the Spanish Republican government and various political, trade-union and humanitarian organisations sought to evacuate children from the war—and especially from the aerial and naval bombardments—to Mediterranean Spain or abroad.<sup>4</sup>

This organised, mass evacuation of children was without precedent and highly controversial with animated debates about the evacuation process, repatriation and the length of residency in the host countries. It was also very complicated to organise. The Spanish and Basque authorities had difficulty in tracking or even controlling the children's destination owing to the array of organisations and different countries involved. This was not helped by disagreements within the government of the Spanish Republic about responsibility for the guardianship of these minors.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) opposed the Spanish Republic's evacuation policy from the start. Some of the reasons behind their opposition were outlined in an ICRC report of 23 September 1937, which was produced following a visit by Paul Lippens—a member of the Belgian Red Cross Central Committee—to Spanish Republican Spain. The report stated:

The Committee has never agreed to sponsor these evacuations and has not lent any support since it considers that the moral danger to which child evacuees are exposed in foreign countries are as bad as the physical dangers associated with the fall of a town/city during wartime. The International Committee has the impression that the mass evacuation of children to foreign countries, which are often very far away, is driven by political rather than truly humanitarian aims. However, the International Committee is trying to reunite these evacuated children with their original families.<sup>5</sup>

There can be no denying the political motivations which surrounded the whole episode of evacuation and repatriation, or the fundamental role played by Republican propaganda aimed at international public opinion. The calls by the Spanish government to “save the children of the Republic” were taken up by many left-wing organisations while Catholic organisations were receptive to the Basque government's requests. The subject of the child evacuees clearly provoked a very strong sense of solidarity that benefitted the Republic's cause. But while there were various arguments employed to justify the evacuations, the overriding desire nonetheless consisted of removing children from danger zones.

Some of the child evacuees were sent to centres in the Mediterranean zone under Spanish Republican control and then on to Catalonia as the front advanced. But a strain on resources soon occurred as the number of child evacuees increased. The government of the Spanish Republic received offers of support from a wide array of organisations together with favourable responses from foreign governments concerning the provisional shelter of the children. It therefore began promoting evacuation from Spain. The government was partly motivated by the

prospect of sending children to centres or host families away from the destabilising influences and physical dangers of war. It was also aware that in some cases parents had disappeared or families dispersed with fathers and elder brothers fighting at the front. Perhaps as a result of its preoccupation with the war, the government's considerations did not extend to the effects of family separation on the children concerned.

Parents mostly gave their consent convinced that the separation would be provisional and in their children's best interests. The children's experiences varied considerably: for some their stay was very positive but others had a tremendously difficult time. But whatever the experience there can be no doubt that evacuation proved to be a major turning point in the lives of the vast majority of children concerned, and especially for those who returned much later on. Even if it were desirable, it would be extremely difficult to make any judgement about this mass evacuation within the context of a war. Any attempt to comprehensively understand this phenomenon would require the impossible task of placing ourselves in the critical period of late 1936 and 1937 and deciphering the motivations behind each individual's decision in the evacuation process.

We can be more certain about the Nationalists' anti-evacuation campaign. The Nationalist camp was very much concerned about the propaganda value of these highly emotive evacuations, and was especially sensitive to images of children being saved from fascist aggression and the bombing of towns and cities throughout Spain. It was therefore keen to counter the damage to its reputation stemming from the humanitarian organisations' work with the children; the commentaries in the left-wing press; and the large number of host families in other countries prepared to offer refuge. The fact that the majority of these minors were Basque and Catholic also questioned the Nationalist narrative of the conflict in Spain as a religious "Crusade". The Nationalists reacted by calling for the rapid repatriation of the evacuees, claiming that it was necessary to respect the parents' wishes to recuperate their children. They mounted a campaign that paid particular attention to the press with claims that the children had been evacuated without their parents' consent as part of a propaganda drive by the Spanish Republic. The Nationalists were notably injurious in relation to the child evacuees to the Soviet Union spreading depictions of a communist-controlled government of the Spanish Republic obeying "Kremlin orders" to "wrench" children away from their homeland.<sup>6</sup>

In order to try and accelerate repatriation, the Nationalist regime instructed its official and unofficial diplomatic representatives to pressurise the authorities of the various countries which had received the children. It secured the help of the Catholic Church and its press in

Belgium, Great Britain, and France. The Red Cross also collaborated, which was unsurprising given the ICRC's opposition to the evacuation of children. On 1 July 1938, the Nationalists announced plans for a co-ordinating body to deal with the repatriation issue. The Extraordinary Delegation for the Repatriation of Minors (Delegación Extraordinaria de Repatriación de Menores–DERM) was subsequently created and began to operate from within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. From 24 June 1941, it became part of the Foreign Service section of the regime's sole and official political party, the Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista (FET y de las JONS).<sup>7</sup> Despite the zeal with which the DERM pursued the repatriation issue it was not a complete success. With the passage of time the repatriations involved ever smaller groups, even single individuals, who had become old enough to work or undergo military service. In November 1949, the Delegation reported that it had repatriated 20,266 out of 34,037 children evacuated during the Civil War. By 1954 it had practically ceased all activity.<sup>8</sup> To obtain a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding the repatriations we will now look more closely at some of the reception countries involved.

## **From Reception to Repatriation**

The organised evacuation of children began with the northern campaign in the spring of 1937 and was an initiative of the Basque government, supported by the government of the Spanish Republic. An initial group of 450 children were transferred to centres in France to be looked after and educated by Spanish personnel. Between April and October of 1937 another several thousand evacuees followed. They were placed in children's holiday centres and host families throughout France or transferred to other countries such as Belgium, Switzerland and the Soviet Union.

France received more child evacuees during the Spanish Civil War than any other country. By September 1937, it was sheltering an estimated twenty thousand minors and towards the end of the war large groups of children arrived as Aragon and Catalonia fell to the rebel troops. Amongst the wide range of organisations which helped establish accommodation centres for the children, it is worth mentioning the Reception Committee for Spanish Children (Comité d'Accueil aux Enfants d'Espagne) which grouped together all of the left-wing and working-class relief organisations in France; or the National Catholic Reception Committee for Basques (Comité National Catholique d'Accueil Aux Basques) created by the Social Catholic Action Committee (Comité d'Action Social Catholique).

In terms of non-French humanitarian organisations one could cite the Swedish Committee for the Assistance of Spanish Children (Comité Suédois pour l'Aide aux Enfants d'Espagne); the Foster Parent's Committee for Spanish Children; or the Quaker-inspired International Commission for the Assistance of Spanish Child Refugees (Commission Internationale d'Aide aux Enfants Espagnols Réfugiés) which was created in Geneva during the spring of 1937. Several thousand children were also cared for by host families from left-wing circles and, in the case of Basque children, by Catholic families.

Some children were reunited with parents or relatives who had managed to cross the border into France and reconstitute their family in exile. At the same time, small groups of children were repatriated from France throughout the Spanish Civil War but in 1939 the numbers grew significantly. Children from reception centres as well as families were assembled at railway stations to be transported to the border crossing of Hendaye via Paris. They were usually accompanied by representatives of the French committees that had organised their stay in France and by Red Cross personnel. Crossing the border tended to be a painful experience. The children encountered a country devastated by three years of war, famine and deprivation. Moreover, the landscape was saturated with the symbols and paraphernalia of a new regime that was the very antithesis to the Spanish Republic. There were also repatriation convoys of adult refugees who had crossed into France with the mass exodus of January and February 1939. As the French context surrounding these repatriations will be discussed in the next chapter, we will explore some of the other countries involved.

In Belgium 1,267 children, mainly Basques were sheltered by Catholic organisations. The Archbishop of Malinas appointed Monsignor Jansen as head of a commission that received financial support from the Belgian government and which was responsible for encouraging and arranging repatriation. The Red Cross in Belgium also participated by dealing with "requests" from parents wishing to reclaim their children. Delivered by the Nationalist authorities, these requests were often either falsified or the result of pressure on the families concerned. These machinations were initially unsuccessful with only 185 children returning during the months of October and November 1937. However, efforts were doubled and between January 1938 and the end of 1939 a total of 1,150 children who had been sheltered by Catholic organisations returned to Spain. Among those who remained, fifty eight were reclaimed by their parents in Belgium and five died in various circumstances. The remainder stayed with host families either because they had been orphaned or because their

biological families believed their children were generally better off in Belgium.<sup>9</sup>

The end of the Spanish Civil War and outbreak of conflict elsewhere in Europe brought a change of posture from the socialist committees and organisations which had hitherto opposed repatriation. By the end of 1939, 4,069 out of the 5,000 or so child evacuees in Belgium had left. According to Alonso Carballés' calculations just over five hundred remained. But as he states, the children were profoundly affected irrespective of whether they returned to Spain or not:

Both the return to Spain and permanent resettlement in Belgium gave rise to new traumas for children who already carried a heavy burden. Going back to Spain involved saying goodbye again, but this time to host parents now regarded by some children as their own, and a journey into a hellish place that was virtually beyond all imagination [...] Staying in Belgium, on the other hand, meant the tragic experience of saying goodbye to their parents and country of birth. The effects of this rupture would last for many years to come.<sup>10</sup>

In Great Britain the government had consented to the arrival of around 4,000 Basque children in 1937 but wasted no time in calling for their return after the Basque Country fell to the Nationalists. In October 1937, the Spanish Children's Repatriation Committee was created with the Duke of Wellington at its head to speed up the process. Between 1937 and 1939, around 3,000 were repatriated and a further 600 followed in various waves over the following years, leaving just 400 minors in the country at the end of the Second World War.<sup>11</sup>

Elsewhere in Europe Switzerland received 432 Basque children from France in June 1937 who were then placed with Catholic host families. According to Sebastián Farré this had been organised by the National Catholic Welcome Committee for the Basques (NCWCB), an organisation that had been created to organise the reception of children in France and to act as an intermediary between the Basque Nationalist Party and Catholic associations. The Swiss government was not directly involved, although it was lobbied to repatriate the children via an unofficial representative of the Francoist authorities. The same representative also sought to gain political currency from the situation by underlining how Catholics had successfully managed to save the children from Soviet claws through the "Crusade" in Spain.

As the situation in Spain was deteriorating towards the end of January 1939, Switzerland received a further 390 children, three quarters of whom were girls. They had been transferred from French centres in Sète and Montpellier to be placed with families in Geneva and other Swiss cities. In