

CHAPTER TWO

The Flight to France and Concentration Camps:
The NJC and the Spanish Refugees

*I fear that with thousands of refugees gathered in such a small space there will be terrible suffering.*¹

–Richard Rees, Volunteer for the Society of Friends and NJC, January 1939

As Francoist troops reached Barcelona, approximately 500,000 Spanish refugees fled over the Pyrenees to the French border along with National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief (NJC) and other British relief workers who had been working in Barcelona. Of this experience, Dr. Audrey Russell, who had a long history of working with both the Society of Friends and the NJC, stated, ‘From the last few days in Barcelona and the flight to France, I have seen such horrible things that I no longer have the ability to feel. I have become a robot.’² Instead of remaining behind to provide relief to the hundreds of thousands in Barcelona still without food, clothing and shelter, NJC workers mobilised their efforts, setting up tents beside the road from which to distribute food and provide medical care. As the refugees and aid workers reached the French frontier, the refugees were herded into internment camps – women and children were scattered throughout the country in smaller groups while men were concentrated along the Mediterranean coast. Most humanitarian organisations accepted the war’s end and saw the physical needs of the refugees as their new aim, providing food, shelter and medical supplies. The antifascist stance of the NJC workers, however, allowed them to sympathise, and indeed empathise, with the refugees who could not fathom living under a fascist dictator. Instead, like the refugees, they viewed the camps as a new phase of the war against fascism and remained mindful of the ideological needs of the Republic, which positively affected their aid to the Republican refugees.

¹ Richard Rees to his mother, 28 January 1939, Richard Rees Papers (RR), University College London, London, England, file 13.

² Cited in Núria Pi-Sunyer i Cuberta, *L'exili manllevat* (Barcelona: Proa, 2006), 128. This translation and all subsequent translations from Spanish, Catalan or French are mine unless noted.

Providing relief during the *Retirada*

Leaving Barcelona was not a foregone conclusion, but the situation in which relief workers found themselves when Franco invaded the city forced their departure. Muriel McDiarmid, one of the last relief workers to leave Barcelona, reported hearing that

the head of a relief organisation had been threatened with hanging in the Plaza Catalunya for giving food to ‘red’ children, and when he protested that he did not believe children were of any particular colour, and that anyway, he had given food to all children, the military commandant replied: ‘Oh yes, they are red, these children, they raise their fists in salute. We shall take all the food away from the red children and give it to the white children.’³

Relief workers who attempted to stay were forced to work under Auxilio Social, the official aid agency of the Nationalists,⁴ which closed all of the NJC-funded and Quaker-run canteens in Barcelona in favour of its own dining rooms, whilst also appropriating their storehouses throughout Catalunya.⁵ Due to these conditions, all British relief workers soon left Barcelona, and many transferred their efforts to the concentration camps in southern France.

As thousands retreated from Barcelona in what would come to be known as the *Retirada*, or ‘Withdrawal’, the NJC continued the transportation service it had started at the beginning of 1937. Cooperating with the Spanish Medical Aid Committee (SMAC) and the Amalgamated Engineering Union, it sent ‘a convoy of five lorries containing about £4,000 worth of supplies’ such as food, blankets and medical supplies to the refugees, one of which was driven by Randal McDonnell, the 8th Earl of Antrim.⁶ The empty lorries then evacuated

³ Muriel McDiarmid, *Franco in Barcelona* (London: United Editorial Limited, 1939), 9. See also Muriel McDiarmid, ‘The Fall of Barcelona’, in *Women’s Voices from the Spanish Civil War*, eds. Jim Fyrth and Sally Alexander (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991), 239. Angela Jackson claims the ‘head of a relief organisation’ in McDiarmid’s story was Alfred Jacob, head of the British Quaker mission in Spain. See *British Women and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Routledge, 2002), 164.

⁴ For more information on Auxilio Social, see Ángela Cenarro Lagunas, *La sonrisa de Falange: Auxilio Social en la guerra civil y en la posguerra* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2006) and Mónica Orduña Prada, *El Auxilio Social (1936–1940): La etapa fundacional y los primeros años* (Madrid: Escuela Libre Editorial, 1996).

⁵ Farah Mendlesohn, *Quaker Relief Work in the Spanish Civil War* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 110–111. For the looting of storehouses, see also Alfred Jacob, ‘Recollections of the Closing Days of the Children’s Relief Services in Barcelona at the Close of the War of 1936–1939’, 29 January 1979, Centre Recursos per a l’Aprentatge i la Investigació, Biblioteca del Pavelló de la República (CRAI), Barcelona, Spain, Fons_FP (Ricart I Grau), 1/7(3) and McDiarmid, *Franco in Barcelona*, 13.

⁶ ‘Earl Will Drive Lorry’, *Daily Mirror*, 31 January 1939.

women and children – three lorry drivers, all from the Printers' Anti-Fascist Movement, reported the transportation of '150 children to safety' – after discharging their cargo in Figueres, the last major town in Spain before the frontier.⁷

Nancy Johnstone, a British relief worker, described the scene in Figueres as 'packed with refugees; there was hardly a doorstep without a sheltering family'.⁸ She rejected an offer by the Quakers to make Figueres a headquarters for children's colonies waiting to enter France due to the imminent air raids and stayed in Figueres only as long as necessary for a collective passport to be arranged by Richard Rees, whose long history of relief during the Spanish Civil War included work with the SMAC, Quakers and the NJC. From the lorry leaving Figueres, Johnstone heard the planes passing overhead and circling the town, then 'the rattle of the feeble defences, then the heavy, dead sound of the bombs' – the first round of air raids designed to destroy the town that had recently become the seat of the Spanish government.⁹ Rees stayed in Figueres as long as possible, leaving the day before Franco's troops arrived and taking with him the last group of children who had taken shelter in a theatre during four rounds of afternoon air raids.¹⁰

Refugees were no safer on the roads than they were in the villages as planes continued to bomb and shoot them as they travelled toward the frontier. Roy Poole, one of the convoy drivers who delivered supplies to Figueres for the NJC, stated in the *Manchester Guardian* that 'bombing and gunning women and children makes no more difference to Franco than if they were cattle, though indeed he would probably be less inclined to bomb cattle'.¹¹ Sam

⁷ Philip Bolsover, 'Three London Printers in Spain Rescue', *Daily Worker*, 9 February 1939. See also National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, 'How We Helped the Refugees', *Spanish Relief: Bulletin of the National Joint Committee* 18 (March 1939): 2, Marx Memorial Library (MML), London, England, 1/C/7i.

⁸ Nancy Johnstone, *Hotel in Flight* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), 345.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 353.

¹⁰ Richard Rees to his mother, 7 February 1939, RR, 13. Rees claimed in his autobiography, however, that he 'never saw any bombing or machine-gunning of refugees' during the retreat. See *A Theory of My Time: An Essay in Didactic Reminiscence* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1963), 109.

¹¹ Our London Staff, 'Aid for Spanish Refugees', *Manchester Guardian*, 31 January 1939. McDiarmid also mentioned refugees walking through fields rather than on roads, 'where they were probably safer, owing to the road being continuously bombed and machine-gunned' (*Franco in Barcelona*, 5).

Russell,¹² who saw first hand the bombing of Figueres and several other frontier towns, reported for the *Daily Worker* that ‘there could have been only one object, and that was just plain murder, to massacre those who had left everything rather than live under Fascism’, and a Scottish SMAC nurse, Annie Murray, related how, in Figueres, Spanish children’s hands were blown off after bombs that looked like bars of chocolate were dropped from Italian planes.¹³ She later claimed, ‘If there was any experience of the war in Spain needed for any reinforcement of our anti-fascist hatred this was it’.¹⁴ Fascist brutality towards the refugees, therefore, was widely known and later led Gabriel Jackson to assert that covering the roads with Red Cross flags to stop the Nationalists from bombing the refugees would have been pointless as ‘the aviators know perfectly well what and whom they were bombing’.¹⁵

Yet it was along these roads where the Quakers and the International Commission for the Assistance of Child Refugees in Spain (IC) set up canteens with donations of food, lorries and funds from the NJC. While the Society of Friends had been formally affiliated with the NJC since its establishment, the IC was constituted as an independent, and neutral,¹⁶ aid agency on 3 December 1937, initiated by Edith Pye, a leading Quaker humanitarian, and Paul Sturge, General Secretary for the Friends Service Council, in hopes of attracting large sums for relief from international governments. Its original mission was to provide one meal a day

¹² Sam Lesser, writing under the last name Russell, fought in the International Brigades until machine-gun wounds forced him out of combat and into journalism.

¹³ Sam Russell, ‘Franco Bombs Massacre Refugees’, *Daily Worker*, 6 February 1939; Charles Duff, ed., ‘Chocolate Box Bombs’, *The War in Spain: A Weekly Summary* 59 (4 March 1939): 238, MML, 17/B; ‘Refugees Die in French Camp Terror’, *Daily Worker*, 18 February 1939. The Duke of Atholl related the story to the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, and Lord Halifax at the Foreign Office on 17 February 1939 (The National Archives (TNA), Kew, England, FO 371/24127, W3213/8/41).

¹⁴ Annie Murray, ‘I Shall Never Forget’, in *Women’s Voices*, eds. Fyrth and Alexander, 62. For more on Murray, see Ian MacDougall, *Voices from the Spanish Civil War: Personal Recollections of Scottish Volunteers in Republican Spain, 1936–39* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1986), 69–74.

¹⁵ Gabriel Jackson, *The Spanish Republic and the Civil War, 1931–1939* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), 463–464.

¹⁶ Unlike many aid agencies working in Spain, the IC worked on both the Republican and Nationalist sides of the war. Because the Nationalists were in control of the food-producing regions of Spain, the IC concentrated on sending warm clothing and shoes, suitable for winter. See ‘Memorandum on the Activities of the Commission’, 13 February 1939, TNA, FO 371/24136, W2625/66/41.

to 250,000 child refugees in Catalunya from both sides of the conflict.¹⁷ Due to its geographical focus, the IC unsurprisingly followed the refugees it had been assisting, and the roadside canteens were merely an extension of its mission to feed refugees wherever they were located. Once in France, it rebranded itself the International Commission for the Assistance of Spanish Child Refugees¹⁸ and gained permission from the British Government – one of its largest contributors – to extend its relief work to all refugees in concentration camps, with the exception of men of military age.¹⁹

The food used in these roadside canteens came from emergency donations sent directly to the frontier as well as the storehouses of the Comité Nacional de Ayuda a España.²⁰ In a report for the Friends Service Council, Pye identifies Pont de Molins as the main store, holding goods from the NJC foodship, the *Bramden*, sent by the Merseyside Foodship Committee to Barcelona in December 1938.²¹ In the face of such overwhelming need, however, Pye was not optimistic: ‘We are opening canteens at the main points of exit on the Spanish side and we are trying to provide hot drinks as well as food, but of course in these overwhelming numbers it is only the small children, some of the women and a few old

¹⁷ Paul Sturge to Lord Cranborne, 5 November 1937, TNA, FO 371/21378, W20054/37/41. Numerous letters and draft proposals are included in this file. The organisation was constituted in December 1937, but work did not begin for months due to the difficulty in getting governments to grant the necessary sums of money as each government insisted on the other governments donating first. The first British grant of £10,000 was not sent to the IC until 18 May 1938. See Sir G. Warner to Judge Michael Hansson, 18 May 1938, TNA, FO 371/22609, W6495/9/41. By February 1939, the IC boasted work through six delegations in Spain – Burgos, Bilbao, Barcelona, Valencia, Madrid and Murcia – which greatly increased the geographical range of its initial proposal. See ‘Memorandum on the Activities of the Commission’.

¹⁸ At the start of the Second World War, it changed its name again to the International Commission for the Assistance of Child Refugees, dropping the geographical determiner completely. See Howard E. Kershner, *Quaker Service in Modern War* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1950), xv.

¹⁹ Walter Roberts to [Michael Hansson], 2 February 1939, TNA, FO 371/24136, W1497/66/41.

²⁰ The Comité Nacional de Ayuda a España was the relief coordinating committee established by the Republican Government on 2 July 1938. The honorary president, Dolores Rivas de Azaña, was the wife of Manuel Azaña, twice Prime Minister of the Second Spanish Republic and president of the Republic during the war while the president, Diego Martínez Barrio was a Republican politician who also held the office of President of the Cortes during the war. Other members of the committee included Luisa Álvarez del Vayo, wife of the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, and noted Republican women such as Dolores Ibárruri, Victoria Kent and Federica Montseny. See ‘Comité Nacional de Ayuda a España’, *ABC* (Madrid), 12 July 1938.

²¹ Edith Pye, ‘Situation with Regard to F.S.C. and International Commission’, 4 February 1939, TNA, FO 371/24136, W2124/66/41; National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, ‘Your Food is Getting There’, *Spanish Relief: Bulletin of the National Joint Committee* 18 (March 1939): 8, MML, 1/C/7i.

people whom we can reach.’²² Several weeks later, a 19 February 1939 report issued by Russell revealed the distribution of 291,406 rations between 26 January and 13 February, with the canteens at Amelie-les-Bains, Prats-de-Mollo and Argelès still functioning.²³

As to roadside medical care, Russell converted other lorries into travelling dispensaries, ‘first aid posts were set up (in one of which half a dozen babies were born) and beds and medical equipment made available for some of the emergency hospitals opened by the French authorities’.²⁴ The SMAC also shipped supplies to the frontier and established emergency dressing stations and relief posts staffed with nurses and doctors from the fighting fronts in Spain who had volunteered to return.²⁵ Others, like Lilian Urmston, a nurse for the SMAC, retreated alongside the military unit to which she had been attached. Urmston reported that ‘operating work was done, and efficiently, just inside houses which stood by the roadside’.²⁶ The food and medical situation at the border was chaotic for relief workers, but it was even more so for the French authorities trying to contain the situation.

France’s hospitality to the Spanish refugees

The French opened its border to civilians – women, children and the elderly – on 28 January 1939 although refugees had been gathered there since 22 January. The correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph* described the situation the night before the border opened: ‘It is estimated that at least 15,000 refugees are waiting immediately opposite Bourg-Madame and a further 15,000 are massed immediately opposite Le Perthus.’²⁷ On 30 January, the NJC received the following telegram: ‘Tragedy of Frontier conditions indescribable. No shelters

²² Edith Pye to William Montagu-Pollock, 4 February 1939, TNA, FO 371/24136, W2124/66/41.

²³ Audrey Russell, Report, 19 February 1939, Society of Friends Archive (SOF), Friends House, London, England, FSC/R/SP/2/3. This figure does not include the number of rations given at the five milk canteens that were still functioning in Figueres.

²⁴ Friends Service Council, ‘Quaker Service in Spain, 1936–1940’, (n.d.): 16, SOF, FSC/R/SP/5.

²⁵ Spanish Medical Aid Committee, ‘For the Refugees’, *Bulletin*, February 1939, MML, 29/B/12.

²⁶ Spanish Medical Aid Committee, ‘Refugee Camps’, *Bulletin*, March 1939, MML, 29/B/14. Also published in Lillian [sic] Urmston, ‘Concentration Camp’ in *Women’s Voices*, eds. Fyrth and Alexander, 333.

²⁷ Our Special Correspondent, ‘France Opens Frontier to Civilian Refugees’, *Daily Telegraph*, 28 January 1939.

for miles. Road impassable. Your money being used for emergency canteens giving bread, hot drinks to many thousands adults and children.²⁸ Raoul Didkowski, the prefect of the Pyrenees-Orientales, initially authorised the entry of 2,000 civilians per day, but more than 100,000 crossed the frontier before 2 February.²⁹ The total number of refugees grew again when French authorities opened the border to the Republican Army during the afternoon of 5 February 1939, and 20,000 soldiers crossed into France the first night, lacking the munitions and the material to keep fighting.³⁰ This stage of the exodus ended on 13 February when Franco's troops planted a flag at the frontier, leaving approximately half a million refugees at the mercy of French hospitality.³¹

Entering France, the refugees and aid workers held varying expectations. Some believed the country that espoused '*liberté, égalité, fraternité*' and the 'Rights of Man' would welcome them with open arms. Johnstone wrote that the refugees thought 'France stood for safety; freedom from bombs and machine-gun bullets; bread in abundance' and that the soldiers entered France trusting it to be just one stop on their way to re-joining the Spanish army in Valencia or Madrid.³² This sentiment was shared by Urmston who was held for several days at the concentration camp of St. Cyprien. Urmston later stated, 'Although sad at leaving our Spain, we all realised that this had to be and looked forward to a rapid reorganisation in France which would result in our going back to another sector of Spain to

²⁸ Note on the Relief Situation, n.d., Eleanor Rathbone Papers (ER), University of Liverpool, Liverpool, England, RP.XIV.2.12 (58).

²⁹ David Wingeate Pike, *Vae Victis! Los Republicanos Españoles Refugiados en Francia, 1939-1944* (Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1969), 13.

³⁰ Joan Villarroya i Font, *1939: Derrota i exili* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 2000), 11; Pablo de Azcárate, *En defensa de la República: Con Negrín en el exilio* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2010), 107.

³¹ Teresa Artigas, trans., *El Document de Prats: Informe de l'exode de la població civil i dels exèrcits republicans espanyols a Prats de Molló del 27 de gener al 16 de març de 1939* (Barcelona: RBA Libros, 2009), 49. See also Eric Muggeridge, 'Spain Today and Yesterday', [1939], American Friends Service Council Archive (AFSC), Philadelphia, PA, Spain, Committees and Organisations – Foster Parents' Plan for Spanish Children. Muggeridge put the date of Franco's arrival at the frontier several days earlier, on 9 February.

³² Johnstone, *Hotel in Flight*, 356.

carry on the struggle against Fascist aggression.’³³ Upon entering a provisional camp, however, some refugees were told: ‘You have allowed yourselves to be expelled from your own homeland. Do not forget that this is France, and that here you have no right to anything.’³⁴ Others maintained lower expectations, and even these went unmet. Pere Calders, for example, hoped for nothing more than a place to wash and change his clothing and to sleep under shelter.³⁵ Yet, as Federica Montseny, the Spanish Minister of Health during the war and the first woman to be appointed to a cabinet ministry position in Spain, pointed out, ‘Those who tried to invoke the Right of Asylum in France were channelled to places intended for concentration camps.’³⁶

While the men were funnelled toward the Mediterranean and placed in seaside concentration camps, women and children received better accommodation. Instead of being concentrated in a single area, the French authorities dispersed them to ‘a few hundred places in many small towns where at least they had shelter from the elements in disused schools or barns’, although they were still enclosed by ‘a ring of barbed wire [that] was put up to keep them from straying away, though the likelihood of their doing that in their situation must have been extremely remote’.³⁷ In fact, the Quakers later reported that they ‘found 2,000 of those camps, scattered over France. They ranged in numbers of inmates from half a dozen up to two or three thousand.’³⁸ Due to differences in population and geography, the quality of these colonies varied greatly. A visitor to three colonies judged two of them – one of 300 refugees in a chateau and the other of 400–500 refugees in a disused factory – to be very

³³ Urmston, ‘Concentration Camp’. Constanca de la Mora noted that soldiers could only return to Francoist Spain and ‘would not be allowed to board any ships we might be able to charter for democratic Spain’ in her work, *In Place of Splendour: The Autobiography of a Spanish Woman* (London: Michael Joseph, Ltd., 1940, p. 410).

³⁴ Vicente Fillol, *Los Perdedores: Memorias de un exiliado español* (Madrid: Ediciones ‘Gaceta Ilustrada’, 1973), 8.

³⁵ Pere Calders, ‘Pàgines d’exili,’ *Revista dels Catalans d’Amèrica* (Mexico) 2 (November 1939): 69–74. Cited in *ALLEZ! ALLEZ! Escrits del pas de frontera, 1939*, ed. Maria Campillo (Barcelona: L’Avenç, 2010), 19.

³⁶ Federica Montseny, *El éxodo: Pasión y muerte de españoles en el exilio* (Barcelona: Galba, 1977), 26.

³⁷ Norma Jacob, untitled essay, spring 1939, CRAI, Fons_FP (Ricart I Grau), 1/7(11). Although this essay is dated spring 1939, it must have been written much later, post-1975, as Jacob refers to the death of Franco.

³⁸ Kershner, *Quaker Service in Modern War*, 30.

good, although congested with beds almost touching each other and ‘a great deal of scabies amongst the children’. The third, however, a prison at Yvetot, shared many of the shortcomings as the larger men’s camps: threats of repatriation, dismal shelter, insufficient food and poor medical care.³⁹ Other colonies included sixty girls interned in an abandoned hospital who ‘had been there two months, and not allowed to leave the building because of some precaution that was being taken in the vicinity’. Although housed and fed, the prison-like conditions led to ‘disintegration from mental and physical inactivity’, which the Quakers solved by sending sewing materials to provide stimulation. Other refugees in well-run colonies benefited from meals of bread, vegetable stew and occasionally meat or cheese eaten in a dining room, and children in the better-organised colonies were able to attend school and learn French.⁴⁰

The French plan may have been rooted in the good intention of providing better accommodation for the most vulnerable populations, but familial separation was a major distress for the refugees, particularly since many of these women had just recently been reunited with husbands who had been fighting at the front. As Russell explained to fellow aid worker, Francesca Wilson,

The gardes mobiles tore away wives and children from their men because they were told to send them to places where they would have roofs over their heads. They should have explained this through the loud-speakers. Refugees are not cattle. Plans should be explained to them – they will co-operate if asked to do so.⁴¹

Other NJC workers saw more sinister motives in France’s actions. Eric Muggeridge believed that when women and children were sent to the train station along with men who wished to

³⁹ Anne Calio to Eleanor Rathbone, 18 July 1939, ER, RP.XIV.2.12 (11).

⁴⁰ Kershner, *Quaker Service in Modern War*, 32–35. Other accounts of the women’s and children’s colonies can be found in Gertrude Kershner, Report on Camps Visited in Northern France April– May 1939, 22 May 1939, AFSC, Spain, Committees and Organisations – International Commission for the Assistance of Child Refugees in Spain, Spanish Refugees in France; Molumphy, *For Common Decency*, chapter 4; Eric Muggeridge, ‘Conditions of the Spanish Refugee Women and Children in the Concentration Centers in France’, [1939], AFSC, Spain, Committees and Organisations – Foster Parents’ Plan for Spanish Children; Eric Muggeridge, ‘I Saw It Happen’, [1939], AFSC, Spain, Committees and Organisations – Foster Parents’ Plan for Spanish Children and Francis G. Smith, Jr., ‘Spaniards in Exile’, *Nation* (New York) 148, no. 20 (13 May 1939): 557.

⁴¹ Cited in Francesca M. Wilson, *In the Margins of Chaos: Recollections of Relief Work in and between Three Wars* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1945), 241.

return to Franco while men wishing to remain with the Republic were sent by foot to Argelès, France was trying to entice as many men to return to Spain as possible, as they could stay longer with their families. Furthermore, Muggeridge testified to the indiscriminate packing of women and children on trains, without the French bothering to confirm if families were together.⁴² In this way, even women and children within the same family were separated. Antonia Illazque recalled her cousin and grandmother being sent to Grenoble while she was interned at Argelès along with her mother and brother.⁴³ Most women in the concentration camps of Argelès and St. Cyprien had refused to go elsewhere, with many even threatening suicide if forced, and it is possible that Antonia's brother was considered an 'able-bodied man' whom her mother would not leave, even if the French had done little to prepare the beaches for their arrival.⁴⁴

On 8 February 1939, Donald Darling, one of the key NJC workers in Perpignan, telephoned the Foreign Office to relay the scene of complete confusion and the poor condition of the refugees – 'if possible, worse than it had been on the Spanish side of the frontier' – and that 'to all intents and purposes no relief was being provided except by the voluntary organisations' as the French 'were doing very little themselves'.⁴⁵ Russell echoed this sentiment the following day, telephoning the Foreign Office to insist the conditions in France were 'far worse, in fact, than anything that the Commission had seen in Spain' and that 'the French authorities had done practically nothing for the men and there were no signs that any steps were about to be taken'.⁴⁶ This lack of effort on the part of the French government when confronted with the enormity of the problem followed a previous lack of preparation when the possibility of a massive refugee problem became apparent. French

⁴² Muggeridge, 'I Saw It Happen'.

⁴³ Cited in Scott Soo, *The Routes to Exile: France and the Spanish Civil War Refugees, 1939–2009* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 25.

⁴⁴ On the threat of suicide, see Francesca Wilson, quoted in Friends Service Council, 'Friends Service in Spain', Bulletin no. 34, 10 May 1939, SOF, FSC/R/SP/5.

⁴⁵ William Montagu-Pollock, Foreign Office Minute, 8 February 1939, TNA, FO 371/24136, W2399/66/41.

⁴⁶ William Montagu-Pollock, Foreign Office Minute, 9 February 1939, TNA, FO 371/24154, W2694/2694/41.

authorities had started planning for this eventuality as early as 29 April 1938, but they estimated the number of refugees to be only 15,000 men and made no provisions for women, children or the elderly.⁴⁷ By late January 1939, a much larger refugee population was apparent, and preparations reported in the *Times* included ‘special measures to meet the human flood’ such as ‘military occupation of the frontier’. Accommodation went unmentioned.⁴⁸ Instead, the French utilised barbed wire to create enclosures to contain the refugees. For the French it was ‘the best material for a temporary structure [as] a solid wall leaves traces, but barbed-wire fence leaves nothing’; yet for the countless Spanish internees, barbed wire would become ‘the essence of the camp’.⁴⁹

Three stages of concentration camps

Of the 500,000 who entered France, 163,160 were sent to other departments in the interior, leaving around 336,840 interned in the concentration camps of the Pyrenees-Orientales – a figure that included approximately 299,885 men (both military and civilian) and 36,955 women, children and elderly.⁵⁰ Using the term ‘concentration camp’ rather than ‘refugee camp’ or ‘internment camp’ is a contentious issue.⁵¹ However, this term will

⁴⁷ President du Conseil Ministre de la Defense Nationale et de la Guerre to the General of Montpellier and Toulouse, 29 April 1938, Archives Departementales des Pyrénées-Orientales (ADPO), 1287W1. The provisions suggested in this secret correspondence include the installation of ‘camps of circumstances’, each containing 1,000–3,000 men. One week later, the Prefect of Pyrenees-Orientales recommended four sites for these camps, including Argelès and St. Cyprien. Further notes show Argelès to have a recommended population of 3,000, but St. Cyprien’s potential capacity was recorded as ‘endless possibilities’ (Prefect of Pyrenees-Orientales to the General of Montpellier, 7 May 1938, ADPO, 1287W1). See also Felip Solé and Grégory Tuban, *Camp d’Argelers 1939–1942*, 2nd ed. (Valls, Spain: Cossetània Edicions, 2011), 33.

⁴⁸ Our Special Correspondent, ‘Flight from Catalonia’, *Times* (London), 30 January 1939.

⁴⁹ Olivier Razac, *Barbed Wire: A History*, trans. Jonathan Knight (London: Profile Books, 2002), 58. One difference between the French and German camps that Razac points out is electricity. While German camps often used electricity as a deadly deterrent to escaping, the French camps did not.

⁵⁰ *Refugies Espagnols*, n.d.

⁵¹ See discussion in Joan Ramon Resina, ‘*Allez, Allez!* The 1939 Exodus from Catalonia and Internment in French Concentration Camps’ in *War, Exile and Everyday Life, 1936–1946*, ed. Sandra Ott (Reno, NV: Center for Basque Studies, 2011), 141–143. Historians who have chosen not to use ‘concentration camp’ include Helen Graham who considers the punishment camps such as Le Vernet to be ‘concentration camps’ but the beach camps of Argelès, St. Cyprien and Barcarès to be ‘internment camps’ in *The War and Its Shadow: Spain’s Civil War in Europe’s Long Twentieth Century* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2012) and Peter Gatrell who also categorises the punishment camps of Collioure and Le Vernet as ‘concentration camps’ but refers to the other camps as ‘refugee camps’ in *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). See

continue to be used throughout this thesis because of its contemporary and continual use by those who were in the camps. The French established these camps as ‘concentration camps’ without full knowledge of what Nazi concentration camps would entail during the Second World War, yet they were not the first, nor the last, to use the term. By 1939, the phrase ‘concentration camp’ had been used in at least two previous contexts – by the Spanish during the Cuban War of Independence (1895–1898) and the British during the Second Boer War in South Africa (1900–1902)⁵² – each of which would have been known to the Spanish refugees and British volunteers, respectively. Indeed, as one doctor interned in St. Cyprien explained to Joan Purser, an SMAC nurse, ‘The treatment is as it must be expected at a place which is called concentration camp. We must not be astonished by it.’⁵³ As Avel·lí Artís-Gener stated, ‘The judgment of a concentration camp – like a jail or sitting in the electric chair – is radically different when it comes from people who are around them or who dwell within them. Obviously, those who can make the most fair assessment are those inside.’⁵⁴

Refugee diaries and memoirs written during 1939 and the early 1940s consistently label these camps ‘concentration camps’, never using the term ‘internment camps’ or ‘refugee camps’.⁵⁵ Many refugee memoirs and contemporary sources equate the camps with

also Progreso Marín, the son of exiled Republicans, in *Exili: Testimonis sobre la guerra civil, els camps i la resistència al franquisme*, trans. Michel Camprubi (Lleida, Spain: Pagès Editors, 2010) and Denis Peschanski in *La France des camps: L'internement, 1938–1946* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002).

⁵² For more information on the Cuban camps, see A. M. Davey, ‘The Reconcentrados of Cuba’, *Historia* 5, no. 3 (September 1960): 193–195; Francisco Pérez Guzmán, *Herida Profunda* (Havana: Ediciones Unión, 1998) and John L. Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba 1895–1898* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). On the South African camps, see Elizabeth van Heyningen, *The Concentration Camps of the Anglo-Boer War: A Social History* (Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana Media, 2013); Fransjohan Pretorius, ed., *Scorched Earth* (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 2001) and S. B. Spies, *Methods of Barbarism? Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics: January 1900–May 1902* (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1977). A more recent analysis by Iain R. Smith and Andreas Stucki into the function of the camps in both Cuba and South Africa parallels with the French camps since French authorities were motivated by public safety concerns (‘The Colonial Development of Concentration Camps (1868–1902)’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 3 (September 2011): 417–437). An extensive overview of the history of concentration camps is found in Joël Kotek and Pierre Rigoulot’s *Le siècle des camps: Détection, concentration, extermination, cent ans de mal radical* (Paris: Lattès, 2000).

⁵³ Doctor Freudmann to Joan Purser, 10 February 1939, MML, B-3/PUR/1.

⁵⁴ Avel·lí Artís-Gener, *La diaspora republicana*, trans. Francisco Ruiz Campos (Barcelona: Editorial Euros, 1975), 56.

⁵⁵ See, for example, José Bartolí and Narcís Molins i Fabrega, *Campos de concentración, 1939–194...* (México, D.F.: Ediciones ‘Iberia’, 1944); Jaime Espinar, ‘Argeles-sur-Mer’ (*Campo de Concentración para Españoles*)

the hell found in Dante's *Inferno*, with one journalist for the French local paper *L'Independant* claiming, 'If Dante had been present at the exodus of the Spanish people to France, he would have had the material to write a new chapter of his *Inferno*'.⁵⁶ One International Brigader labelled the camps 'hell holes... from which Germany has much to learn'.⁵⁷ Similarly, José Pujol asserted that the 'tactic of humiliation and of destruction of all moral values of men: the feeling of honour, dignity, pride, modesty, conscience, moral and physical resistance to promiscuity, scientifically practiced in the German concentration camps' had been 'already inaugurated in the refugees' concentration camps in France'.⁵⁸ After the full horrors of the Nazi concentration camps were realised, refugees still employed the term to describe the French camps as they published memoirs in the subsequent decades, with only a few choosing to replace the term with another.⁵⁹ Even a recent fictionalised account of the sailing of the *Sinaia*, the first mass-emigration ship to Mexico, describes the camps as 'refugee camps – no, not refugee camps: concentration camps'.⁶⁰

Perhaps the continued comparison stems from similarities between French camps and later Nazi camps. While the French camps were not death or even labour camps, they were

(Caracas: Editorial 'Elite', 1940); Manuel García Gerpe, *Alambradas: Mis nueve meses por los campos de concentración de Francia* (Buenos Aires: Editorial 'Celta', 1941) and the diary of Pietat Roig, published in *El manuscrit d'Argelès-sur-Mer* (Tarragona, Spain: Silva Editorial, 2013). In Agustí Centelles' diary from Bram, *Diari d'un Fotògraf: Bram, 1939*, he enclosed the word refugee in inverted commas, rather than the term concentration camp: 'Shut in a concentration camp as a "refugee" according to the French authorities' (Barcelona: Edicions Destino, 2009, p. 15).

⁵⁶ See, for example, Pablo Casals, *Joys and Sorrows: Reflections by Pablo Casals as told to Albert E. Kahn* (London: Macdonald, 1970), 233; Miguel Giménez Igualada, *Más allá del dolor* (Mexico, D.F.: Tierra y Libertad, 1946), 108 and Ramon Moral i Querol, *Diari d'un Exiliat (1939–1945)* (Montserrat, Spain: Publicacions de l'Abadia, 1979), 8. For the journalist's comment, see *L'Independant*, 31 January 1939, as cited in René Grando, Jacques Queralt and Xavier Febrés, *Camps du mépris des chemins de l'exil à ceux de la résistance 1939–1945*, 5th ed. (Canet, France: Editions Trabucaire, 2004), 39.

⁵⁷ Anonymous untitled article, *Volunteer for Liberty* 4 (April 1940): 4, MML, 23.

⁵⁸ Cited in Montseny, *El éxodo*, 47.

⁵⁹ Examples of memoirs continuing to use the phrase 'concentration camp' include Manuel Andújar, *St. Cyprien, plage... campo de concentración* (Huelva, Spain: Diputación Provincial de Huelva, 1990); Avel·lí Artís-Gener's *Viure i veure*, vol. 3 (Barcelona: Editorial Pòrtic, S.A., 1991); Lluís Ferran de Pol, *Campo de concentración (1939)* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 2003) and Francesc Tosquellas i Albert, *1939–1948: Entre filferades. Memòries de l'exili* (Barcelona: Katelani, 2001). Francisco Pons' memoir, *Barbelés à Argelès et autour d'autres camps* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1993), is one of the few that does not use 'concentration camp'. Rather than replace it with another term such as 'refugee camp' or 'internment camp', Pons utilises the single word, 'camp'.

⁶⁰ Jordi Sierra i Fabra, *Sinaia: El Vaixell de l'Exili* (Barcelona: Columna Editions, 2006), 8.

patrolled by brutal Senegalese and Algerian Spahis, an irony not lost on Republicans who equated these colonial guards with the Moors of Franco's troops and equated French use of colonial troops with 'sympathy with the nationalists and a desire to degrade the republicans'.⁶¹ Even worse than the symbolism, however, was the guards' treatment of the Spanish refugees: Urmston recalled Republican soldiers receiving bayonet wounds, and an International Brigader in Argelès reported seeing a Spahi kill a man who jumped ahead in the bread queue.⁶² Furthermore, many refugees, such as Silvia Mistral and Antonio Vilanova, reported having their personal belongings – watches, jewellery, fountain pens, cameras and cigarette lighters – confiscated by the guards.⁶³ Yet, tangibles were not the only things taken: Ramon Moral i Querol, claimed that he lost his identity in the camps and became nothing but a number – 'I am the number 15,221, no more no less. This number is my name' – an occurrence that foreshadowed Nazi camp practices.⁶⁴ Finally, several refugees equated the camps with prison more than refuge. Camps were run with 'strict military discipline' of 'frequent roll-calls, patrols, constant surveillance, and confinement'.⁶⁵ Manuel García Gerpe, a refugee who spent nine months in the French concentration camps, stated, 'We were truly prisoners', and Jaime Espinar referred to Argelès as 'a prison defined by barbed wire'.⁶⁶ Even Albert Sarraut, the French Minister of the Interior, insisted on 2 February 1939 that 'the camp of Argelès-sur-Mer will not be a penitentiary centre, but a concentration camp. It is not the

⁶¹ Stein, *Beyond Death and Exile*, 41.

⁶² SMAC, 'Refugee Camps'; 'Our Eyewitness of the Fascist Terror in France', *Volunteer for Liberty* 5 (May 1940): 2, MML, 23.

⁶³ Silvia Mistral, *Éxodo: Diario de una refugiada española* (Barcelona: Icaria editorial, 2009), 82; Vilanova, *Los olvidados*, 5; Isabel de Palencia, *Smouldering Freedom: The Story of the Spanish Republicans in Exile* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., Inc., 1945), 41.

⁶⁴ Moral i Querol, *Diari d'un Exiliat*, 58.

⁶⁵ Stein, *Beyond Death and Exile*, 70.

⁶⁶ García Gerpe, *Alambradas*, 9; Espinar, 'Argelès-sur-Mer', 86. This idea can also be found in Remedios Oliva Berenguer, *Éxodo: Del campo de Argelès a la maternidad de Elna*, trans. Emilia Sancey (Barcelona: Viena Ediciones, 2006), 41.

same thing.⁶⁷ Yet, for most refugees and aid workers, the two terms were synonymous as refugees struggled to leave and aid workers struggled to enter.

The improvised system of concentration camps established by the French developed in three stages.⁶⁸ In the first stage, provisional camps located along the frontier acted as reception centres into which refugees were placed until more permanent camps were established.⁶⁹ In many of these, however, refugees remained for weeks, if not months; as Artís Gener, a resident of the provisional camp Prats-de-Mollo, pointed out, ‘usually, provisional things can last forever’.⁷⁰ In this camp and the nearby camp at Amélie-les-Bains, the Quakers set up canteens and hospitals in SMAC-donated tents.⁷¹ These initial reception camps, and the others located in the Pyrenees, were soon evacuated because of the cold weather – although not fully evacuated for six weeks. Their internees were sent to the larger stage-two camps on the beach or smaller sorting camps near Perpignan such as Les Haras, where Carles Fontserè recalled French men and women coming to look at the refugees behind the barbed wire like monkeys at a zoo.⁷² It was the larger camps, however, that gained notoriety.

The second, and most infamous, stage began with the construction of large semi-permanent concentration camps along the beaches of Argelès-sur-Mer, St. Cyprien and

⁶⁷ ‘Les Conséquences du voyage d’inspection de MM. Sarraut et Rucart à la frontière pyrénéenne’, *La Dépêche* (Toulouse), 2 February 1939.

⁶⁸ Denis Peschanski promotes the idea of three stages of camps in many of his works. See ‘El paso de Le Perthus pone punto final a la República’ in *Republicanos españoles en Midi-Pyrénées: Exilio, historia y memoria*, ed. José Jornet (Zaragoza: Gobierno de Aragón, 2007), 126; *La France des camps*, 42–43 and ‘Reception Camps’ in *Agustí Centelles: The Concentration Camp at Bram, 1939*, eds. Teresa Ferré Panisello and Manuel Guerrero (Barcelona: Arts Santa Mònica, 2009), 12–13. The divisions here have been modified slightly as Peschanski starts stage three with the building of more permanent huts in the large stage-two camps and includes only tent-like structures in stage two.

⁶⁹ This group of camps included Amélie-les-Bains, Arles-sur-Tech, Le Boulou, Bourg-Madame, Latour-de-Carol, Les Haras, Mazères and Prats-de-Mollo. Vilanova also included Saint-Laurent-de-Cerdans but omitted Amélie-les-Bains (*Los olvidados*, 4).

⁷⁰ Artís-Gener, *La diáspora republicana*, 56.

⁷¹ Russell, Report, 19 February 1939.

⁷² Fontserè, *Un exiliado de tercera*, 16. Other similar reports include David Granda who remembered being gawked at by French tourists, often with skis atop their cars (cited in MacMaster, *Spanish Fighters*, 114) and Enric Faraudo who recalled a truck visiting Argelès ‘full of people and throwing bread, as if throwing to turtles or camels at the zoo’ (cited in Dolores Pla Brugat, *Els exiliats catalans: Un estudio de la emigración republicana española en México* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1999), 62).

Barcarès. These camps were established as holding spaces with little more than barbed wire surrounding an expanse of sand into which the refugees were herded, although Vilanova suggested that ‘the word “established” is too exaggerated to designate a sandy beach several kilometres long by one wide and whose outer limit was enclosed with barbed wire. That was all. Inside... nothing.’⁷³ Peter Rodd, a NJC volunteer in France, theorised in a letter to the Foreign Office that during this stage only a few small camps were constructed, no larger than 600 yards by 250 yards and thus heavily congested, due to ‘the small number of troops immediately available to act as guards’.⁷⁴ The wind and sand exacerbated the primitive conditions of these camps, leading to serious cases of conjunctivitis for the healthy and infection for the wounded.⁷⁵ In a report written by Martinez Cuenca, passed on to the Foreign Office by Russell, Cuenca, a Spaniard who had worked with *Asistencia Social*⁷⁶ and the Quakers in Barcelona, testified that during his six weeks in the camp, ‘the chief cause of discomfort has been the wind’.⁷⁷ Temperature differences between night and day compounded the situation. Isabel de Palencia, a Spanish author who had been appointed Ambassador to Sweden for the Republic at the end of 1936, recalled her son’s experience at Argelès: ‘In the morning they found several of their comrades frozen to death. The next day

⁷³ Vilanova, *Los olvidados*, 5.

⁷⁴ Peter Rodd, ‘Notes on the measures taken by the French authorities for the reception of Spanish refugees’, 21 February 1939, TNA, FO 371/24154, W3454/2694/41.

⁷⁵ Soldiers with war wounds also suffered unnecessary amputations, leading to an increased risk of infection, as the French doctors were unfamiliar with the new methods of preventing wound infections pioneered in the Spanish Civil War. As the *Times* explains, ‘During the fighting in Spain it became the practice to set in plaster any severe shrapnel or bomb-splinter wound in arm or leg. The process consists in packing the cavity, after extraction of such splinters as can be found, with some greasy substance, vaseline or cod-liver oil, and rapidly sealing it up in a plaster bandage, for which wire splints are used. The wounded man can then move about and requires no attention sometimes for weeks. Pressure set up inside the wound forces out the pus, which drips off or is wiped away. It is a dreadfully smelly process, but has given remarkable results. On the plaster is pencilled the date of the wound and a summary drawing or description of the particulars observed by the doctor who dressed it. Unfortunately French doctors do not appear to understand the process and are amputating’ (Our Special Correspondent, ‘Spanish Refugee Camps’, *Times* (London), 24 February 1939).

⁷⁶ *Asistencia Social* was the official relief organisation established by the Spanish government and had worked closely with the NJC during the evacuation of the Basque children in 1937. See Leah Manning, *A Life for Education: An Autobiography* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1970), 127–128.

⁷⁷ Martinez Cuenca, ‘Report on the Camp of Argeles’, 2 May 1939, TNA, FO 371/24156, W7347/2694/41.

the sun took its turn. A brilliant, torturing sun beat down on the inmates of the camp as the wind had torn through them the night before. Instead of ice, fire.’⁷⁸

Argelès opened first, on 5 February, and was thus the least prepared of all the camps although as David Scott reported for *News Chronicle*, ‘It is a rather cruel mockery to call it camp at all. The word camp implies shelter, and only a small minority of the 100,000 refugees now at Argelès have any sort of roof over their heads.’⁷⁹ There were also no washing facilities, latrines or even spades with which to dig latrines and no cooking facilities, but, as Rodd observed, ‘the shortage of utensils for cooking and fuel to cook with is hardly an urgent problem at the moment for lack of ingredients’.⁸⁰ Refugee memoirs and newspaper reports claim it was several days before the refugees received any food, and then ‘the food ration was barely sufficient for life’.⁸¹ Pumps were installed to extract water from four or five metres below the surface, but ‘the water would wreak havoc’, causing dysentery – ‘diarrhoea that came on suddenly, tortured your bowels and left you spent, exhausted’.⁸² A radical-socialist visitor to Argelès claimed 12% of the camp, or 9,000 people, was ill with dysentery, pneumonia, typhoid, tuberculosis, leprosy and conjunctivitis, and there were only eighteen doctors to care for them.⁸³ Furthermore, medical supplies were rare, and most refugees remember only having aspirin to cure everything – which, as one refugee put it, ‘as famous as

⁷⁸ Palencia, *Smouldering Freedom*, 56–57.

⁷⁹ David Scott, ‘Pitiful Scenes at Argelès: “We Must Get Help”’, *News Chronicle*, 9 February 1939.

⁸⁰ Rodd, ‘Notes on the measures’.

⁸¹ Palencia, *Smouldering Freedom*, 86. See also Jokín Gálvez Preito, cited in Sharif Gemie, Fiona Reid, Laure Humbert, and Louise Ingram *Outcast Europe: Refugees and Relief Workers in an Era of Total War 1936–48* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012). Pike claims the refugees were given only bread and water for the first ten days at Argelès (*Vae Victis*, 45) – a claim undoubtedly cited from the report of the French Socialist Party (SFIC) (‘The Situation of Spanish Refugees in France’ Report, 24 February 1939, WG, WG/SPA 579), which was published in the French paper *Le Midi Socialiste* on 19 February 1939 and states that the inquiry took place between 9 and 14 February. Exaggerated reports in the British press reported a ration as high as twenty-five Spaniards for each loaf of bread (O. D. Gallagher, ‘Britons Sleep in Sandholes, Eat Mule Stew’, *Daily Express*, 13 February 1939; ‘Still Suffering’, *Manchester Guardian*, 14 February 1939).

⁸² Pons, *Barbelès à Argelès*, 37.

⁸³ Cited in Pike, *Vae Victis*, 35–36. Many of the sickest refugees were transferred to the old Military Hospital in Perpignan or two hospital ships docked at Port Vendres. See also Nancy Cunard, ‘The Two Hospital Ships at Port Vendres’, *Manchester Guardian*, 18 February 1939.

it is, is not a universal and miraculous cure'.⁸⁴ A British visitor described the death rate at Argelès in late February as 'very heavy', adding, 'there seems to be no organised burial ground, the dead are being buried in holes scraped in the sand by their companions. Seventeen had died during the night before I left.'⁸⁵

With more refugees than space to accommodate them, the French opened an almost identical camp further east at St. Cyprien two days later. Approaching the camp, Victor Torres remembered seeing 'posters pasted on the walls, with arrows, that said "Concentration camp"'.⁸⁶ Like Argelès, St. Cyprien did not have barracks for many months: 'It was not until July, five months after the start of the exodus that the concentration camps of the Roussillon were truly organised.'⁸⁷ Nancy Cunard⁸⁸ wrote in the *Manchester Guardian* on 17 February 1939 that at St. Cyprien, the refugees 'have dug little hollows, as ineffective as a child's sand castles, in which to try to sleep'.⁸⁹ Nor did they have latrines for several weeks so that some 130,000 men used the open beach instead creating a 'smell of sewage' that, according to Russell, was 'abominable all over the camp'.⁹⁰ Poor hygienic conditions led to a typhus outbreak at St. Cyprien at the end of February, infecting 1,050 refugees and causing the deaths of 190 by the end of July.⁹¹ In early May, water still came from ground pumps, which the doctors advised against drinking, and lorries continued to bring in potable water insufficient for the needs of the refugees there while, by this point, Argelès had been fitted

⁸⁴ Pons, *Barbelés à Argelès*, 36. Also mentioned in Oliva Berenguer, *Éxodo*, 45. Mentioned in secondary literature in Pike, *Vae Victis*, 45 and Solé and Tuban, *Camp d'Argelers*, 51. The French Socialist delegation's report claimed Argelès did not even have aspirin.

⁸⁵ Susan Palmer, 'Report of Conditions in Spanish Refugee Camps near Perpignan', 28 February 1939, TNA, FO 371/24154, W3797/2694/41.

⁸⁶ Victor Torres, *Dietaris de l'exili: Al camp de Sant Cebrià i a París amb els presidents Irla i Tarradellas* (Lleida, Spain: Pagès Editors, 2014), 46.

⁸⁷ Grando, Queralt and Febrés, *Camps du mépris*, 81.

⁸⁸ Several biographies of Nancy Cunard recount her time on the French frontier such as Anne Chisholm, *Nancy Cunard* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1979) and Lois Gordon, *Nancy Cunard: Heiress, Muse, Political Idealist* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). For Nancy and her contemporaries' perspectives, see also Hugh Ford, ed., *Nancy Cunard: Brave Poet, Indomitable Rebel, 1895-1965* (Philadelphia: Chilton Book Company, 1968).

⁸⁹ Nancy Cunard, 'Misery in the French Refugee Camps', *Manchester Guardian*, 17 February 1939.

⁹⁰ Audrey Russell, 'Report on Medical Service in Spanish Refugee Camps and Hospitals', 2 May 1939, TNA, FO 371/24156, W7347/2694/41.

⁹¹ Joan Villarroja i Font, *Desterrats: L'exili Català de 1939*, 2nd ed. (Barcelona: Editorial Base, 2002), 38.

with plumbing to provide a 'drinkable' water supply.⁹² Yet, it was Argelès, not St. Cyprien, which was the first to be evacuated in June 1939 due to concerns over the impact of the camp on tourist season.⁹³

A third camp, Barcarès, the first camp to be purposefully built although still semi-permanent, was located on the beach east of St. Cyprien near a small fishing village. Construction began two days after St. Cyprien opened, and refugees were offered better food rations and cigars in exchange for constructing proper barracks.⁹⁴ It was not fully opened until four weeks later. Nevertheless, a handwritten addendum to Rodd's February report to the Foreign Office maintained that 'at the time of writing no adequate sanitary arrangements are even contemplated in the Barcares camp now building'.⁹⁵ By May, sanitary arrangements were considered good, yet as Denise Moran reported, men were still surrounded by triple rows of barbed wire and electric lighting did not extend into the barracks, which were very thin and did not have solid floors, leaving men to lie on the wet sand, often without blankets.⁹⁶

The third and final stage of the process saw the construction of permanent establishments, such as the specialised camps of Agde, Bram, Gurs and Septfonds and the punishment camps at Collouire and Le Vernet. The specialised camps were better in almost every way than the larger stage-two camps – smaller populations, purpose-built barracks, located inland rather than on the beach – yet, conditions were still poor. Although designed to

⁹² Charles Duff, ed., 'Refugee Camps in France', *Voice of Spain: A Weekly Summary of Facts and Comments Incorporating the War in Spain* 5 (6 May 1939): 20, MML, 17/C.

⁹³ *Boletín de los Estudiantes* 11 (8 June 1939) in *Plages d'Exil: Les Camps de Réfugiés Espagnols en France – 1939*, coord. Jean-Claude Villegas (Nanterre, France: Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine, 1989), 46; Our London Staff, 'Conditions To-day in French Refugee Camps', *Manchester Guardian*, 27 June 1939; Frida Stewart, 'Evacuation from Argelès', cited in Jackson, *British Women*, 166. A letter from Didkowski, the prefect of the Pyrénées-Orientales to Sarraut, the Minister of the Interior, dated 3 July 1939, states that 'as of that day, there were no more Spanish refugees in the camp of Argelès-sur-Mer' (Le Préfet des Pyrénées-Orientales à Monsieur le Ministre de l'Intérieur, 3 July 1939, ADPO, 31W274).

⁹⁴ Grando, Queralt and Febrés, *Camps du mépris*, 81.

⁹⁵ Rodd, 'Notes on the measures'.

⁹⁶ Russell, 'Report on Medical Service'; Denise Moran, 'Les camps civils et les camps militaires' in *Deux Missions Internationales visitent les Camps de Réfugiés Espagnols (Mai 1939)*, coord. Comité International de Coordination et d'Information pour l'Aide à l'Espagne Republicaine (Paris: Marcel Puyfourcat, 1939), 5.

hold between 15,000–18,000 internees, two of these, Agde and Gurs, peaked at 25,000 and 26,000, respectively.⁹⁷ Even in camps with smaller populations, conditions were dreadful: an internal French report admitted in late May that Agde still did not have a sufficient water supply, and Bram experienced a spate of fifty deaths within two weeks due to German measles and typhoid.⁹⁸ In the punishment camps, on the other hand, Spanish refugees experienced the worst conditions. Unlike other centres of punishment in which individuals may be sent for misbehaviour, the French punishment camps held ‘Republicans deemed to be dangerous due to their political engagement’.⁹⁹ Since leaving Spain did not mean leaving their political convictions behind, the threat of the punishment camps concerned all refugees.

Providing relief in the camps

Entering the camps, both the colonial guards and the barbed wire – used in the Spanish Civil War to protect trenches and fortifications – reminded the refugees of the war they had just lost and prompted them to view their interment as another stage of the conflict. This sense of continuation is common in memoirs, such as de Palencia’s, which describes the conclusion of the war as only ‘an apparent end, for the Republican Spaniards did not even then give up their fight for freedom and for democracy’.¹⁰⁰ Rather than admitting defeat, the refugees continued their struggle against fascism, and many British aid workers, particularly those who worked with the NJC, shared this outlook, viewing their work in the camps as an extension of their war work. At a London Regional Conference in June 1939, the All London Aid Spain Council declared, ‘The people’s struggle for Freedom in Spain continues, though

⁹⁷ Peschanski, *La France des Camps*, 43.

⁹⁸ Le Général Fagalde, Commandant la 16^e Région à Monsieur le Préfet du Département de l’Hérault à Montpellier, 25 May 1939, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), Washington, D.C., RG-43.103M, 2W620; Peschanski, ‘Reception Camps’, 16.

⁹⁹ Marta Marín-Dòmine, ‘Catalan Concentrationary Literature’, *Catalan Review* 25 (2011): 12.

¹⁰⁰ Palencia, *Smouldering Freedom*, 30. This theme is also strong in memoirs of the emigration to Mexico.

in a new form... our struggle on behalf of the Spanish people must go forward now and in an intensified form, adapting itself to the new conditions that have arisen'.¹⁰¹

Dedicating themselves to this new task, the humanitarian organisations in southern France were anxious to help. Unfortunately, once the refugees had been placed into camps, the French authorities were initially unwilling to let aid agencies enter, particularly those deemed 'left-wing political organisations', leading to much confusion and delay.¹⁰² As Russell explained to Wilson, 'People with great tenacity like ourselves have eventually received permits to enter the camp and bring amenities but [the French] are still very suspicious of us'.¹⁰³ Entering the camps was only the first hurdle. In a letter from 9 March 1939, Russell complained that due to the frequent firing of camp commanders, 'which seems to be about twice a week', she wasted at least two days each week meeting the new commander and convincing him that she was 'a fit and proper person to hold a pass at all'.¹⁰⁴

After receiving permission to enter the camps, the workers still faced challenges with distributing food and clothing to the refugees. Camp commanders insisted these items be made into parcels and addressed to individuals rather than delivered as a load of supplies to be dispersed throughout the camp, and, in order to comply, Isabel Brown and several other NJC workers first had to obtain a list of names from one of the soldiers in the camp.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, receiving individual parcels greatly enriched camp life as refugees were divided between those who possessed a few things, whether given by family in France or

¹⁰¹ All London Aid Spain Council, 'Spain—The People's Struggle To-Day', London Regional Conference Report, [June 1939], MML, 2/A/19, emphasis theirs.

¹⁰² Edith Pye, confidential memorandum, n.d., SOF, FSC/R/SP/3/4.

¹⁰³ Cited in Wilson, *In the Margins of Chaos*, 241. The papers of Josep Maria Trias i Peitx also attest to the difficulty of entering the camps. The archive of Trias i Peitx, the Director of International Catholic Aid (Secours International Catholique), contains his authorisation cards for each camp, bearing the signature of General Menard, the Chief Coordinator of Services for the Spanish refugees, that allowed Trias i Peitx to enter the camps for periods of two to three weeks at a time. Not only would Menard have been difficult to locate for a signature the first time, but having to return every few weeks for yet another signature also thwarted the efforts of humanitarian workers. Even Trias i Peitx's *laissez-passer permanent*, or permanent pass, for St. Cyprien granted on 1 April was only valid until 15 April and extended again to 30 April. See CRAI, Fons_FP (Trias i Peitx), 2(1)a.I.17, 2(1)a.I.20 and 2(1)a.I.23.

¹⁰⁴ Letter from Audrey Russell, 9 March 1939, SOF, FSC/R/SP/3/4.

¹⁰⁵ Isabel Brown, interview by Margaret A. Brooks, 1977, sound recording, IWM, 844, reel 7; May Hill, *Red Roses for Isabel* (London: May Hill, 1982), 86–87.

benefactors such as the NJC and the Quakers, and those with ‘nothing more than their hungry, abused bodies; lonely and poor like rats’.¹⁰⁶ Vicente Fillol, who received a parcel from the Quakers even though he did not personally know any, believed that it is because of their generosity that he lived to tell his story.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Rose Duroux, remembered several charities who gave aid but stated that the Quakers gave clothes for children, and ‘not once but consistently’. Such was the extent and significance of the Quaker’s aid that Duroux advocated for an official recognition of the debt of gratitude by the Spanish government.¹⁰⁸

Other efforts on behalf of the refugees included lobbying the authorities for better living conditions. Pye later claimed that it was through the ‘persistent efforts’ of the Quakers that ‘the camp authorities have arranged proper married quarters for the Camp at St. Cyprien to which the women and children with their husbands have been transferred from Argelès which is now closed.’¹⁰⁹ The NJC, on the other hand, focused more on removing refugees from the camps. One refugee, María Tarragona, described the functions of the NJC as ‘caring for the sick, obtaining documentation to leave the concentration camps, visas for England and other countries; train and bus tickets for those who left or escaped the camps for other regions of France, paying for passage to other countries’.¹¹⁰ Tarragona referred to the NJC as the British Committee for Republican Spanish Relief; to the refugees, if not to the British public at large, it was obvious with which side the NJC sympathised.

Political solidarity with the recipients of its aid allowed the NJC to join with cultural initiatives already begun in the camps by the Spanish refugees, a work that Russell described as ‘the most extraordinary relief work that was ever devised’.¹¹¹ As Lilian Pouységur notes,

¹⁰⁶ Andújar, *St. Cyprien*, 54.

¹⁰⁷ Fillol, *Los Perdedores*, 12.

¹⁰⁸ Rose Durox and Raquel Thiercelin, ‘Los niños del exilio: asignatura pendiente’ in *Emigración y Exilio: Españoles en Francia, 1936–1946*, coords. Josephina Cuesta and Benito Bermejo (Madrid: Eudema, 1996), 172.

¹⁰⁹ Edith Pye, ‘Perpignan’ Report, 28 June 1939, SOF, FSC/R/SP/4.

¹¹⁰ María Tarragona, ‘Gratitud en el recuerdo’, in *Nuevas Raíces: Testimonios de Mujeres Españoles en el Exilio*, 213–235 (México, D.F.: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, 1993), 223.

¹¹¹ Quoted in Friends Service Council, ‘Friends Service in Spain’, Bulletin no. 33, 11 April 1939, SOF, FSC/R/SP/5.

‘The camps are also a place of intense cultural activity, which is a catalyst of the Spanish republican identity. The objective is to produce cohesion among the refugees.’¹¹² This work, including printing camp bulletins,¹¹³ language and other academic courses, including those to eradicate illiteracy, artistic exhibitions and concerts, expanded the previously mentioned cultural programmes that had their roots in the politics of the Second Spanish Republic and which continued through the civil war.¹¹⁴ The second Student Bulletin published in Argelès in mid-April commenced: ‘The Spanish students, in the Camp of Argelès-sur-Mer, continue the work of spreading the culture that began in Spain’, when they ‘brought art to the most remote villages of Castille and the rest of Spain’.¹¹⁵ Likewise, Yves Moreau, part of a French delegation that toured the camps during May 1939, attributed the continuation of typed bulletins in all camps and wall newspapers (when allowed) to ‘the popular cultural work that they had undertaken in Spain since 1936’.¹¹⁶ In September, the Teaching Professionals’ bulletin of Argelès gratefully acknowledged the Quakers for ‘providing support for our educational work of extraordinary importance’.¹¹⁷ Several years later, Francisco Pons, a refugee who spent time in several of the large stage-two camps, traced the development of the camp’s cultural initiatives back to the Cultural Militias and the cultural front that existed during the war, but he remarked that fully implementing this initiative in Argelès was

¹¹² Lilian Pouységur, ‘Les réfugiés républicains espagnols dans le sud-ouest de la France’, in *Les camps du sud-ouest de la France, 1939–1944: Exclusion, internement et déportation*, eds. Monique-Lise Cohen and Eric Malo (Toulouse: Editions Privat, 1994), 28.

¹¹³ For examples of camp bulletins, see Jean-Claude Villegas, *Escrits d’Exil: Barraca et Desde el Rosellón, Albums d’art et de littérature, Argelès-sur-Mer 1939* (Sète, France: Les Nouvelles Presses du Languedoc, 2007).

¹¹⁴ For more information on the cultural programs during the Second Republic and the civil war, see José Álvarez Lopera, *La política de bienes culturales del gobierno republicano durante la guerra civil española*, 2 vols. (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1982); Carl-Henrik Bjerström, *Josep Renau and the politics of culture in Republican Spain, 1931–39: Re-imagining the nation* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2016) and Juan Manuel Fernández Soria, *Educación y cultura en la guerra civil (España 1936–1939)* (Valencia: Nau Llibres, 1984).

¹¹⁵ *Boletín de los Estudiantes* 2 (17 April 1939) in *Plages d’Exil*, coord. Villegas, 21.

¹¹⁶ Yves Moreau, ‘Les étudiants dans les camps’ in *Deux Missions Internationales*, coord. Comité International, 9.

¹¹⁷ ‘Ayuda’, *Profesionales de la Enseñanza* (n.d.) in *Plages d’Exil*, coord. Villegas, 79.

impossible as the refugees had ‘no scholarly material, no books, no notebooks. Nothing.’¹¹⁸ The NJC and the Quakers vitally aided the cultural activities of the camps by providing material for this Spanish initiative.

In spring 1939, when the NJC switched its focus from foodships to refugee relief, it began appealing for goods such as blankets, food, clothing and shaving materials but also for musical instruments, games, writing materials, sewing materials and books ‘to break the insufferable boredom of concentration camp life’.¹¹⁹ Even more than the NJC, the Quakers provided continuing support for this work, lasting through the Second World War. As early as April, Russell advocated for ‘helping with the organisation of adult schools, workshops for the women, and the distribution of such things as we can send – books, educational material etc.’¹²⁰ In late May, Dorothy Morris, a NJC nurse who had worked in a Quaker-run hospital during the war, received £30 from Wilson for cultural relief, which she spent on building cupboards for schools and supplying the children with sewing equipment and footballs.¹²¹ In early June, the work continued with a £50 grant from the Quakers and a further £500 from the IC, followed by a late-June report to the Society of Friends, in which Pye appealed for books (dictionaries and text books), paper, pencils, clay and other art materials to aid both ‘individuals and ... the cultural groups formed by the Spaniards themselves’.¹²² As Mendlesohn later confers, ‘much of the relief was predicated upon what the Spanish camp leaders requested to support their own efforts at mobilising the educational and vocational expertise which existed among the camp inhabitants’.¹²³ The Quaker contribution, therefore,

¹¹⁸ Pons, *Barbelés à Argelès*, 118. Pons made this statement about his first stay in Argelès, from February to June 1939. In June, he was transferred to Barcarès when Argelès closed, but he returned to Argelès after the start of WWII and helped the Quakers with the schools and libraries they established. Because this occurred after the start of WWII and after the NJC withdrew from the camps, it is not a focus of this thesis.

¹¹⁹ Felice Clark, circular letter, 30 March 1939, WG, WG/SPA 589; Charles Duff, ed., ‘What Refugees require’, *Voice of Spain: A Weekly Summary of Facts and Comments Incorporating the War in Spain* 14 (8 July 1939): 56, MML, 17/C.

¹²⁰ Audrey Russell to Dorothy Thompson [*sic*], 21 April 1939, SOF, FSC/R/SP/3/4.

¹²¹ Dorothy Morris to Dorothy Thomson, 26 May 1939, SOF, FSC/R/SP/3/4.

¹²² Pye, ‘Perpignan’ Report.

¹²³ Mendlesohn, *Quaker Relief Work*, 126.

consisted of delivering material, including stationary and textbooks for several camps and school supplies for twenty-five boys between the ages of eight and sixteen who were found among the refugees at Barcarès. Indeed, Morris attested, ‘Judging from the letters which we are receiving in reference to this work, small though our means appear in relation to the large number of men, it is giving great satisfaction—combating much inertia and incipient despair.’¹²⁴

Mary Elmes, an Irish nurse who had worked closely with Morris in Spain, took control of the work in August and was allowed to stay in France throughout the Vichy regime since Ireland remained neutral. Beyond the work that Morris had already begun, Elmes established ‘very small circulating libraries’, which mirrored the travelling library and bibliobus services of the Front devised by the Spanish Republic.¹²⁵ She also organised language courses – often already initiated by the refugees themselves – as learning new languages helped the refugees look forward to a new life outside of Spain. One refugee in Bram wrote a letter to Sarraut requesting French lessons as language was the most secure link with a country and not being able to speak the language of the country in which they were living added to the suffering of being in a concentration camp.¹²⁶ To this end, the Quakers, under Elmes’s guidance, sent

packets of French and English grammars to individual applicants... The recipient can then, and usually does, share such books with a group of acquaintances, and is able to proceed more quickly and easily with his study of languages. The recent arrival of 1,600 French and English grammars from Mexico has made such a system of distribution possible. These grammars were obtained by the National Joint Committee, and handed to us for distribution.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Dorothy Morris, ‘Work in Progress in Perpignan’ Report, 5 August 1939, SOF, FSC/R/SP/4.

¹²⁵ Mendlesohn, *Quaker Relief Work*, 126. For more information on the travelling libraries, see Maria Cugueró, Maria Teresa Boada and Vicenç Allué, *El Servei de Biblioteques del Front 1936–1939* (Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona, 1995) and Miquel Joseph i Mayol, *El bibliobús de la llibertat: La caiguda de Catalunya i l’èxode dels intel·lectuals catalans* (Barcelona: Símbol Editors, 2008).

¹²⁶ Giménez Igualada, *Más allá del dolor*, 106.

¹²⁷ Mary Elmes, ‘Report on the Cultural Work in the Refugee Camps in Southern France’, 11 September 1939, SOF, FSC/R/SP/4.

By early November, Elmes had organised a school for 1,500 children at Argelès, which had reopened after the start of the Second World War, and was preparing to start ‘a similar institution for the odd 600 boys between the ages of 14 and 17, who at present live as they can without any special attention or education amongst the grown-ups in the Men’s Camps also at Argelès’.¹²⁸

Continuing its cultural relief, the NJC also provided aid to artists in the camps. Darling gave drawing materials to two refugees, Carles Fontserè and Antonio Clavé, and insisted on purchasing the finished drawings rather than accepting them as gifts. He later commissioned a portrait of the Duchess of Atholl, chairman of the NJC, earning them a bit of extra money in a ‘concentration camp [where] no one earns anything, except a beating’ – extra money that allowed Fontserè to send financial assistance to his mother.¹²⁹ Another refugee gave soap sculptures to both the Duchess of Atholl and Frida Stewart with gratitude for the work done by the NJC.¹³⁰ As the Duchess told the story in her autobiography several years later, she entered ‘a hut labelled *Exposition*, and went in to find an exhibition of sculpture in soap, the only available material. The work of one man appealed to me greatly. It was a Madonna and Child. The artist gave it to me, and it has been a treasured possession ever since.’¹³¹ Soap sculptures were common in the camps as soap was given in abundance, but washing facilities were almost non-existent.¹³²

Finally, the NJC sponsored a group of students, including Alexandre Cirici who later became a leading art historian in Spain. With the help of the NJC, this group left the camps and were allowed to continue their studies in Montpellier with plans to move to England and

¹²⁸ Mary Elmes to Emily Hughes, 7 November 1939, SOF, FSC/R/SP/3/4.

¹²⁹ Fontserè, *Un exiliado de tercera*, 48.

¹³⁰ See Katharine Atholl to Frida Stewart, 13 September 1955 and Katharine Atholl to Frida Knight, 19 September 1955, MML, B-7/D/17.

¹³¹ Duchess of Atholl (Katharine Majory Stewart-Murray), *Working Partnership* (London: Arthur Barker Limited, 1958), 231.

¹³² Oliva Berenguer, *Éxodo*, 45. Another Catalan sculptor dedicated a soap carving of a simple figure of a man against a broken cross as a symbol of suffering Spain’ to the Quakers. See Friends Service Council, ‘Friends Service in Spain, Bulletin no. 35, 4 July 1939, SOF, FSC/R/SP/5.

attend university beginning in autumn 1939. At the end of their studies, they would not be allowed to remain in England but would be offered residency in any of the commonwealth countries such as Canada, India or Australia. Unfortunately, with the start of the Second World War, this plan never came to fruition. The students lost the support of the NJC, were re-interred in Agde and chose to return to Spain rather than spend the war in a concentration camp.¹³³ Like much of the NJC's work, political motivations determined its actions; and with England finally fighting its own war against fascism, support for the Spanish decreased in favour of support at home.

Enhancing relief through politics

The NJC's political stance allowed them to spend the months between the exodus from Barcelona until the start of the Second World War, aiding a refugee population 'bonded by that concept so broad and vague called antifascism'.¹³⁴ NJC workers understood that Spanish Republicans valued culture and education and strove to assist the Spanish in their cultural initiatives, rooted in the Second Republic. The Spanish viewed these 'cultural manifestations... as a means of safeguarding the identity of a Republic that had used education and culture as instruments of popular dignity'.¹³⁵ Likewise, an International Brigader in Argelès affirmed that the internees resisted the barbarity in the camps with their morale and their culture.¹³⁶ Not only did Spanish culture contrast with the cruelty of the camps, Morris also used it to highlight the 'horrible repression going on over the border', explaining in a letter how it was impossible to import books from Spain where 'no modern or

¹³³ See Alexandre Cirici, *Les hores clares* (Barcelona: Edicions Destino, 1977).

¹³⁴ Espinar, 'Argelès-sur-Mer', 89.

¹³⁵ Alicia Alted Vigil, *La Voz de los Vencidos: El Exilio Republicano de 1939* (Madrid: Aguilar, 2005), 72.

¹³⁶ 'Argeles', Volunteer for Liberty.

liberal works of any kind [were] allowed', and she viewed her work in France as 'helping to save Spanish civilization in general'.¹³⁷

For the NJC, neutrality was never an option in its work with the Spanish refugees, even if it had attempted to proclaim neutrality throughout the war. Although it showed an increasing politicisation, particularly during the second half of 1938, by the fall of Catalunya in late January 1939, its illusion of neutrality was shattered. Nevertheless, this did not impede the work of the NJC, particularly as 'the Spanish exile of 1939 was a political exile'.¹³⁸ Indeed, holding similar political affinities as the recipients of its aid allowed it to better understand the needs of the recipient population when compared to neutral or right-wing organisations as well as to cooperate efficiently and effectively with other left-wing organisations.

¹³⁷ Mark Derby, *Petals and Bullets: Dorothy Morris – New Zealand Nurse in the Spanish Civil War* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2015), 105.

¹³⁸ Alicia Alted Vigil, 'Ayuda humanitaria y reorganización institucional en el exilio' in *Emigration y Exilio*, coords. Cuesta and Bermejo, 202.