

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Revolutionary Encounters:
Mexican Communities and Spanish Exiles, 1906-1959

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

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History

by

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University of California San Diego

2021

DEDICATION

For my grandparents, Teodoro and Victoria Aguilar.

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- 2019 “Ricardo Flores Magón and the Ongoing Revolution,” *Oxford Encyclopedia of Mexican History and Culture*, edited by William H. Beezley. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.
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- 2017 Translation from Spanish to English: Bieito Alonso, “Spanish Syndicalists and Workers in the IWW, 1900-1922,” in *Wobblies of the World: A Global History*, edited by Peter Cole, David Struthers, and Kenyon Zimmer. London: Pluto Press, 2017.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Revolutionary Encounters:
Mexican Communities and Spanish Exiles, 1906-1959

by

Kevan Antonio Aguilar

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California San Diego, 2021

Professor Eric Van Young, Co-Chair

Professor Matthew Vitz, Co-Chair

This dissertation examines the social and political relations that emerged between Mexican laborers and Spanish political refugees between 1939 and 1959. Following the collapse of the Second Spanish Republic (1936-1939) and the ascension of the dictatorship of Francisco Franco (1939-1975), Mexico granted 20,000 Spaniards political asylum. The initiative marked the first time and only time in world history that a formerly colonized nation granted political asylum to inhabitants of its imperial metropole. As Mexican campesinos and workers navigated, defined, and challenged the parameters of their country's social revolution (1906-1940), their acceptance or rejection of Spanish exiles depended on their communities' historical relationships to land, radical thought, their

communities their communities' historical relationships to land, radical thought, and the Mexican state. My dissertation therefore examines specific sites of Spanish settlement to determine how encounters between local populations and refugees challenged the Mexican state's conceptions of class, race, and citizenship.

Using archival sources collected from Mexico, Spain, the United States, and the Netherlands, my dissertation analyzes the ways workers and peasants from both countries shaped their sociocultural viewpoints and ideological convictions through their respective struggles for land, autonomy, and democracy. I argue that for many Mexican peasants and industrial laborers, the exiles were not descendants of the Spanish colonizers that previously exploited their nation, but rather as allies who invigorated the ideals and possibilities of the Mexican Revolution through their own radicalism and civil war. My reading of the Mexican Revolution as a key moment in twentieth-century global, rather than a regional, revolutionary struggle—a flashpoint for intense debates regarding equality, decolonization, and transnational solidarity—is enabled through a mapping of social relations between Mexicans and Spanish immigrants prior to, during, and after the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Subsequently, this research explores the transnational formation of radical social consciousness, the politics of exile within postcolonial contexts, as well as the impact of social revolution on notions of belonging, difference, and community.

INTRODUCTION

The boundary will be drawn in different ways between the various lands cultivated by individuals or groups, depending on the requirements of production. The land that you cultivate, brother, is yours, and we will help you to keep it by every means in your power. But the land that you do not cultivate is for a companion. Make room for him, for he, too, knows how to make the land fruitful.

- Elisé Reclus, "To My Brother the Peasant," 1893.¹

We have always lived in slums and holes in the wall. We will have to accommodate ourselves for a time. For, you must not forget, that we can also build. It is we who built these palaces and cities, here in Spain and in America and everywhere. We, the workers. We can build others to take their place. And better ones. We are not in the least afraid of ruins. We are going to inherit the earth. There is not the slightest doubt about that. The bourgeoisie might blast and ruin its own world before it leaves the stage of history. We carry a new world, here, in our hearts. That world is growing in this minute.

- Buenaventura Durruti, *Toronto Star* interview, 1936.²

On June 13, 1939, twenty-one-year-old Claudio Esteva Fabregat arrived at the Port of Veracruz after nineteen days at sea with 1,600 other Spanish refugees. Like many of the passengers, Esteva Fabregat spent three years fighting in the Spanish Civil War and the last six months in a French concentration camp before receiving political asylum in Mexico. Although safe from the threats of the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, the refugees found themselves thrown into yet another civil war. Shortly after arriving, Esteva Fabregat relocated to Mexico City, where delegates from the Mexican Communist Party informed him and other exiles of an imminent coup perpetrated against Mexican president Lázaro Cárdenas by the opposition candidate, Juan Andreu Almazán. For several nights, Esteva Fabregat stood guard with hundreds of other exiles outside the

¹ Elisé Reclus, *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity: Selected Writings of Elisé Reclus*, eds. John Clark and Camille Martin (Oakland: PM Press, 2013), 115.

² Originally published in the *Toronto Star* article, "2,000,000 Anarchists Fight for Revolution, says Spanish Leader" (Toronto), August 18, 1936, republished in Abel Paz, *Durruti in the Spanish Revolution* (Oakland: AK Press, 2006), 478.

Casa del Agrarista, the national center of campesino unions and agrarian leagues, awaiting word from their Mexican comrades who were to distribute weapons to the Spaniards in the event of an armed attack. Although the coup never took place, the refugees stood side-by-side Mexican unionists, campesinos, and other radicals at a moment's notice, with the intention of fighting and possibly dying for their nation of refuge. In his recollections of the incident, Esteva Fabregat felt a sense of obligation to defend the reforms of the Mexican Revolution, proclaiming, "Cárdenas was calling us, he trusted us, and for that, we were there for him."³

Even before his exile, Esteva Fabregat was enamored by the ideals of the Mexican Revolution. Born to working-class parents in Barcelona, he learned from older anarchists in the community of the ongoing agrarian revolution in Mexico, as well as the ideals of Mexican revolutions such as the anarchists Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón and the prominent campesino leader Emiliano Zapata. The stories were tinted with the libertarian character of the transnational radical press that arrived through the transatlantic network of Spanish radicals migrating to and from the Americas, and they further reinforced Esteva Fabregat's internationalist worldview.⁴ His own interest in Catalan nationalism and the ongoing national liberation struggle in Ireland further influenced the radical reinterpretation of his social and political relationships to Spain and the inhabitants of its former colonies.⁵ When Esteva Fabregat and his fellow compatriots found

³ Interview with Claudio Esteva Fabregat, conducted by Elena Aub (1981), Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia-Dirección de Estudios Históricos (hereafter INAH-DEH), PHO/10/ESP 29, 110-111.

⁴ As will be discussed later in this study, Spanish anarchist interpretations of the Mexican Revolution's radicalism often mischaracterized the most prominent impulses of the conflict. While Zapata was certainly influenced by the anarchist ideals of the Flores Magón brothers, the agrarian revolution that broke out in southern Mexico did not initiate their radical notions of communalization. See: Emilio Kourí, "El ejido de Anenecuilco," *Revista Nexos* (Mexico City) May 1, 2019; Helga Baitenmann, *Matters of Justice: Pueblos, the Judiciary, and Agrarian Reform in Revolutionary Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020).

⁵ Interview with Claudio Esteva Fabregat, 27.

themselves in the throes of a civil war against the rise of fascism, it was no surprise to them that Mexico aligned itself to the democratic and revolutionary causes of Spain's Loyalist forces. After being forced into exile following the rise of fascist dictatorship of General Francisco Franco, it was again Mexico that came to their aid. In exile Esteva Fabregat found that, much like him and his compatriots, Mexico's laboring classes were also deeply immersed in Spaniards' ongoing struggle for "land and liberty." Mexican workers and campesinos welcomed those displaced by the Civil War into their communities and saw them as integral actors in their own aspirations to expand the victories of the Mexican Revolution.

This dissertation analyzes how Mexico's laboring classes and Spanish refugees constructed racial and class identities as a result of two of the twentieth century's most significant social upheavals: the Mexican Revolution (1906-1940) and the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).⁶ I assess how interactions between Mexicans and Spaniards both prior and after the latter's arrival to the receiving country informed their respective notions of revolution, citizenship, and historical change. This study focuses on three central questions: Despite various instances of anti-Spanish xenophobia in Mexico's postcolonial history, why did Mexican workers and campesinos support their government's decision to grant asylum to political refugees fleeing the Spanish Civil War? In what ways did these responses complement or reject the Mexican government's refugee initiative and broader immigration policies? And lastly, what do the exiles' interactions with the Mexican people and the state tell us of the significance of transnational political movements in forging these encounters?

⁶ Whereas most conventional histories of the Mexican Revolution have chronologized its initiation to call for the overthrow of the Díaz dictatorship by Francisco I. Madero in 1910, I date the outbreak of the Revolution to the first instances in which popular movements galvanized insurrections that explicitly demanded the overthrow of the Díaz regime and the initiation of social revolution that occurred in the insurrections organized by the Partido Liberal Mexicano in 1906.

In April 1938, Mexican president Lázaro Cárdenas announced that Mexico, a former colony of Spain, would provide political asylum for those seeking refuge from the Spanish Civil War. Within a year, half a million Spaniards would be displaced from their home country. By 1940, over 8,000 of the exiles relocated to Mexico. In total, approximately 20,000 people were granted political asylum between 1939 and 1959, marking the first time in world history that a formerly colonized nation had provided asylum for residents of its former empire. Yet Cárdenas's refugee initiative was not solely an act of humanitarianism; it was also a concerted effort to proliferate Mexico's revolutionary nationalist aspirations to advance *mestizaje*—the intermixing of European and Indigenous peoples. Despite three centuries of colonial subjugation under the Spanish Empire, Mexico had long maintained a preference for Spanish immigrants based on their shared cultural attributes and “blood” lineage. The revolutionary nationalist sentiments of the Mexican Revolution denounced the eugenicist claims of European superiority, all the while government officials and intellectuals alike championed the belief that European émigrés embodied the characteristics of modernity and entrepreneurship. Although the United States and South America had the largest European immigrant communities throughout the early twentieth century, the non-interventionist policies that these nations maintained during the Spain's three-year civil war left those displaced by the conflict with few alternatives for refuge.⁷ Mexico, by circumstance and by design, opened its doors to support the fledgling Second Spanish Republic and to advance its racial and economic modernization through the refugees' incorporation into the Mexican countryside.

In contrast to the aspirations of the Mexican state, many Mexican citizens and Spanish exiles perceived the government's asylum program as a means to expand the popular demands for

⁷ José C. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 45-59; Jürgen Buchenau, “Small Numbers, Great Impact: Mexico and Its Immigrants, 1821-1973,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 20, no. 3 (2001): 23-49.

revolutionary reform. As exiles such as Esteva Fabregat threw themselves into the defense of Cárdenas's revolutionary reforms, others hoped to use their labor and skillset to serve their host country. Mexican communities, in turn, actively petitioned the Mexican and exiled Spanish republican governments to relocate large portions of the refugee population into their villages, neighborhoods, and, most significantly, onto their collectively-held lands, the *ejidos*. The relations between Mexican popular classes and Spanish exiles emerged through notions of international solidarity and mutual aid, but also as responses to social, cultural, and political reconfigurations that emerged as a result of the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War.

Although many historians of the Mexican Revolution have referenced the role of Spanish radicals in the Mexican Revolution, few have investigated the grassroots political networks that bound the two countries throughout the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods.⁸ Internationalism's rejection of imperialism and cultural nationalism granted the opportunity for social movements throughout the Global South to build transnational political movements with

⁸ For more on Spanish anarchist influences during the Mexican Revolution. See José C. Valadés, *El socialismo libertario mexicano: Siglo XIX* (México: Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa, 1984); John Mason Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class, 1860-1931* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); Andrew Grant Wood, *Revolution in the Street: Women, Workers, and Urban Protest in Veracruz, 1870-1927* (Wilmington: SR Books, 2001); Myrna I. Santiago, *The Ecology of Oil: Environment, Labor, and the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Tabea Alexa Linhard's study of women in the Mexican Revolution and Spanish Civil War analyzes the upheavals in a comparative format, though interconnected networks are not addressed. Mario Ojeda Revah's study of the Mexican government's solidarity with the Second Spanish Republic provides a largely top-down perspective of the three-year struggle, though it does go into detail regarding Mexicans who fought amongst the International Brigades in Spain as well as the general support from Mexican commoners of the Spanish struggle and exiles. John Lear's analysis of the role of the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists, LEAR) in galvanizing Mexican solidarity for the Spanish Civil War. See Tabea Alex Linhard, *Fearless Women in the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005); Mario Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War: Political Repercussions for the Republican Cause* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2015); John Lear, *Picturing the Proletariat: Artists and Labor in Revolutionary Mexico, 1908-1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017).

communities in the Global North.⁹ Mexico was no exception to this phenomenon, though detailed studies of such networks have only recently been undertaken by scholars.¹⁰ Assessing the continuity of transatlantic revolutionary networks between Mexico and Spain after the Mexican revolution and Spanish Civil War grants a new view of both historical moments from its participants' perspectives. I suggest that these earlier networks between Mexican and Spanish radicals functioned as sociocultural buffers for exiles. Through these linkages, workers and peasants from both countries responded to their respective upheavals with a consciousness that transcended the enclosures of the nation-state.

A complimentary, albeit distinct, historiographical tendency has examined hostilities between local Mexican communities and earlier Spanish landowners throughout the Revolution.¹¹ When it comes to local responses to Spanish exiles, however, references have been largely anecdotal and with

⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (New York: Verso Books, 2005); Laura Briggs, Gladys McCormick, and J.T. Way, "Transnationalism: A Category of Analysis," *American Quarterly* 60:3 (2008): 625-648; Steven Hirsch & Lucien van der Walt, eds., *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Post-Colonial World, 1870-1940: The Praxis of National Liberation, Internationalism, and Social Revolution* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Manu Goswami, "Imaginary Futures and Colonial Internationalisms," *American Historical Review* 117, no. 5 (2012): 1461-1485; Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

¹⁰ Daniela Spenser, *Stumbling Its Way Through Mexico: The Early Years of the Communist International* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011); Claudio Lomnitz, *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2014); Stuart Hall, "Cosmopolitan Promises, Multicultural Realities," in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, eds. Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 386-408.

¹¹ For rural conflicts with Spanish landowners, see: Heather Fowler-Salamini, *Agrarian Radicalism in Veracruz, 1920-1938* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978); Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, Volume 1: Porfirians, Liberals and Peasants* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986); Matthew Butler, *Popular Piety and Political Identity in Mexico's Cristero Rebellion: Michoacán, 1927-29* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 62; Raymond B. Craib, *Cartographic Mexico: A History of State Fixations and Fugitive Landscapes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Heather Fowler-Salamini, *Working Women, Entrepreneurs, and the Mexican Revolution: The Coffee Culture of Córdoba, Veracruz* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013). For radical tenant organizing against Spanish landlords in Veracruz, see Andrew Grant Wood, *Revolution in the Street*. For conflicts with Mexican workers and Basque bakery owners, see Robert Weis, *Bakers & Basques: A Social History of Bread in Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012).

little archival inquiry.¹² Rather than focusing on the integration of refugees into the general population, most studies of the Spanish refugees focus on the contributions of middle- and upper-class exiles to Mexico's academic institutions, literature, and arts.¹³ Nearly half of the refugees, however, came from agricultural or industrial labor backgrounds, and despite composing a sizeable sector of the refugee population, most of their experiences in exile have been rendered virtually absent within even the most comprehensive studies of the refugee experience in Mexico.¹⁴ The consequences of the Civil War in both countries affected Spaniards and Mexicans senses of communities and their respective relationships to political struggle, their homelands, and their representative governments. How the Mexican and exiled Spanish republican governments

¹² Many studies cite newspapers, often opposing the protection of Spanish exiles, as the viewpoints of Mexicans. See Lois Elwyn Smith, *Mexico and the Spanish Republicans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955); Thomas G. Powell, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981). Some works have referenced émigrés perspectives of Mexicans, but only a few provide anecdotal references to popular opinions regarding Spanish exiles. See: Patricia Fagen, *Exiles and Citizens: Spanish Exiles in Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), 54-55; Michael Snodgrass, "'We Are All Mexicans Here': Workers, Patriotism, and Union Struggles in Monterrey," in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 330; Dolores Pla Brugat, "Un río español de sangre roja: Los refugiados republicanos en México," in *Pan, trabajo y hogar: El exilio republicano español en América Latina*, ed. Dolores Pla Brugat (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (hereafter INAH), 2007), 35-127.

¹³ The literature on Spanish writers, artists, and intellectuals in Mexico is too extensive to provide an exhaustive list, but for notable contributions, see: Clara E. Lida, *La Casa de España en México* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1988); Sebastiaan Faber, *Exile and Cultural Hegemony: Spanish Intellectuals in Mexico, 1939-1975* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002); Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, *Ensayos sobre la literatura del exilio español* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 2006); Andrés Lira, *Estudios sobre los exiliados españoles* (Ciudad de México: El Colegio de México, 2015).

¹⁴ Notable exceptions to this include a number of studies that focus on demographic statistics or oral testimonials on the refugee experience. It is within these texts that details of the lives and experiences of exiled laborers are more commonly acknowledged. See: María Mercedes Molina Hurtado, *En tierra bien distante: Refugiados españoles en Chiapas* (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Gobierno del Estado de Chiapas, 1993); Enriqueta Tuñón Pablos, *Varias voces, una historia: Mujeres españoles exiliadas en México* (México, D.F.: INAH, 2011); Dolores Pla Brugat, *Els exiliats catalans: Un estudio de la emigración republicana española en México* (México, D.F.: INAH, 1999); Clara E. Lida, *Caleidoscopio del exilio: Actores, memoria, identidades* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 2009).

responded to popular manifestations of revolutionary solidarity between exiles and citizens opened—and closed—the possibilities for new imaginaries of camaraderie and collaboration.

Recent studies of the diplomatic relationship between the Mexican and exiled Spanish republican governments have noted the various barriers imposed on Spanish refugees affiliated with revolutionary movements, particularly those associated with anarchists and leftists, in their attempts to obtain asylum.¹⁵ To expand upon these works, this study focuses on the experiences of Spanish anarchist and leftist refugees who sought to contribute to Mexico's social revolution and how both the Mexican and exiled Spanish republican government responded to these efforts. Amidst a rapidly shifting national and international political climate, both governments curtailed the advancement of radical social movements throughout World War II and the subsequent Cold War. State-mandated repression contributed to the vast expansion of investigations by the Mexican secret police of refugees and their Mexican comrades as agents of social dissolution.¹⁶ The consolidation of Mexico's post-revolutionary state and the attempts to assert the government's power on the Mexican populace were enforced through a one-party regime, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI), which maintained control of the federal government from 1946 to 2000.¹⁷ As a result of the growing encroachment of the Mexican state, Spanish exiles became

¹⁵ Ángel Herrerín López, "Políticas de los anarcosindicalistas españoles exiliados en México, 1941-1945," *Tzintzun. Revista de Estudios Históricos* 39 (2004): 141-160; Ángel Herrerín López, *El dinero del exilio. Indalecio Prieto y las pugnas de posguerra, 1939-1947* (Madrid: Siglo XXI de España Editores, 2007), 52-53; Aurelio Velázquez Hernández, *Empresas y finanzas del exilio. Los organismos de ayuda a los republicanos españoles en México, 1939-1949* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 2014), 109-112.

¹⁶ Halbert Jones, *The War Has Brought Peace to Mexico: World War II and the Consolidation of the Post-Revolutionary State* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014); Andrew W. Navarro, *Political Intelligence and the Creation of Modern Mexico, 1938-1954* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

¹⁷ Stephen R. Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1999); Tanalis Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata: The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of the Pax Priista, 1940-1962* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Benjamin T. Smith, *Pistoleros and Popular Movements: The Politics of State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); Robert F. Alegre, *Railroad Radicals: Gender, Class, and Memory in*

increasingly scrutinized as prospective threats to national stability. The story as to how Mexico's laboring classes and Spanish exiles came under the lens of state surveillance and responded to the persistent criminalization of political collaboration has, until now, been unstudied. I place the Mexican state's investigations of Spanish political exiles within the broader history of Mexico's policing of immigrant communities on the basis of desirability.

Despite these obstacles, Mexican citizens' efforts to incorporate Spanish refugees within their economic and political struggles signified the former's desire to expand revolutionary reforms during a period often characterized as the "end" of the Mexican Revolution. Spanish exiles similar saw themselves as contributors to these struggles and defied both the Mexican and exiled Spanish republican governments which attempted to obstruct their incorporation into local conflicts. The practice of mutual aid emanating from working class and campesino communities to Spanish exiles represents both the "geopolitics of diaspora from below" as well as the creation of transnational communities predicated on shared political struggles.¹⁸ The constructions of a global identity among workers and peasants in Mexico and Spain laid the foundations for exiles to reinitiate their struggles against Franco in exile, integrate themselves within Mexican social movements, and to contribute to broader emancipatory struggles emerging throughout Latin America.

Cold War Mexico (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013); Thomas Rath, *Myths of Demilitarization in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 1920-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of Nebraska Press, 2013); Paul Gillingham and Benjamin Smith (eds.), *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938-1968* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Gladys McCormick, *The Logic of Compromise in Mexico: How the Countryside Was Key to the Emergence of Authoritarianism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Paul Gillingham, *Unrevolutionary Mexico: The Birth of a Strange Dictatorship* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021).

¹⁸ For a study on the political geography of diaspora, see Michael Rios and Naomi Adviv, *Geographies of Diaspora: A Review* (Davis: UC Davis Center for Regional Change, 2010); Milton Santos's call for the rejuvenation of critical geography through the study of "social space" (originally published in French in 1978), a premise that would be rectified and redefined by Edward W. Soja in 1989 as "triple dialectics," the analysis of space, time, and social being. See: Milton Santos, *Por una geografía nueva* (Madrid: Editorial Espasa-Calpe, 1990); and Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso Books, 1989).

Historiographical Intervention

My dissertation makes three interventions within the histories of Mexico, the Spanish diaspora, and transnational revolutionary movements. First, it complicates the national focus of previous studies of the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War by revealing moments in which the popular aspirations of these revolutionary movements converged. Between 1936 and 1939, for example, Mexican officials and labor organizers frequently met with the most radical sectors of the Spanish republican factions, including providing financial and tactical resources to anarchist labor federations and communist peasant organizations. When Spanish republicans fled the ascension of the Franco regime, various Indigenous communities and Mexican peasant leagues requested that the exiles be sent to their communities as a means to support the Spaniards' struggle against fascism as well as to empower local demands for radical agricultural industrialization initiatives, factory expropriations, and the communalization of lands. While the Mexican state evoked long-held stereotypes of European entrepreneurship and industriousness to promote the refugee program, Mexican citizens envisioned the Spaniards' integration into their communities as a means to expand their claims for agrarian justice throughout the redistribution of land.

Second, I argue that the bonds between Mexicans and Spanish radicals significantly altered both groups' conceptions of race, class, and citizenship. Whereas Mexican state officials foresaw the refugee program as a means to encourage *mestizaje* (racial mixture) in rural Indigenous enclaves, Mexican communities and Spanish exiles frequently reinterpreted the legacy of colonialism as a consequence of global racial capitalist exploitation. Envisioning identity, community, and change through the eyes of those who determined and embodied "difference" enables deeper insight into processes through which new communitarian relations emerged.¹⁹ I suggest that communities are

¹⁹ Doreen Massey, *Spatial Divisions of Labor: Social Structures and the Geography of Production* (London: Macmillan Press, 1984); Doreen Massey, "Places and their Pasts," *History Workshop Journal* 39 (1995):

not restricted to predetermined codifiers, but are fluid social constructions redefined and reconsidered during moments of intense historical transformations.

Lastly, this study examines the internal workings of the Mexican state and how its policies of asylum were informed on exclusionary immigration practices enforced throughout much of the early twentieth century. In dialogue with recent works that have scrutinized the humanitarian significance of President Lázaro Cárdenas's asylum policies, this dissertation demonstrates the persistence of exclusionary policies used to curtail politically-motivated migration to Mexico before, during, and after the Cárdenas administration.²⁰ In doing so, I complicate our understanding of the internal workings of the *cardenista* government by exploring how different sectors of the Mexican and Spanish Republican officials influenced the initiative. Far from exhibiting a hegemonic control over the institutions of the state, Cárdenas's policies on immigration and exile were carried out by various political actors that actively exhibited partial and, at times, arbitrary selection and policing practices, conflating migrant communities' racial, class, and ideological identities through the nationalist codifiers of "revolutionary" citizenship. As Pablo Yankelevich has poignantly argued in his studies on Mexican immigration and asylum policies throughout the early twentieth century, notions of desirability mitigated state officials' extralegal practices toward émigrés and exiles, often to the

182-192; Tim Cresswell, *In Place/ Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2000); Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression, 25th Anniversary Edition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Devra Anne Weber, "Wobblies of the Partido Liberal Mexicano: Reenvisioning Internationalist and Transnational Movements through Mexican Lenses," *Pacific Historical Review* 85, no. 2 (2016): 188-227; David M. Struthers, *The World in a City: Multiethnic Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 2019); Stuart Hall, *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, edited by Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).

²⁰ Daniela Gleizer, *Unwelcome Exiles: Mexico and the Jewish Refugees from Nazism, 1933-1945* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*; Abdón Mateos and Agustín Sánchez Andrés, eds., *Ruptura y transición: España y México, 1939* (Madrid: Eneida, 2011); Fernando Saúl Alaís Enciso, *They Should Stay There: The Story of Mexican Migration and Repatriation during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

detriment of the most marginalized sectors of these communities.²¹ Despite a great deal of support emanating from the country's laboring classes, I argue that Mexican and Spanish republican state officials enforced policies that inhibited efforts by Mexican communities and Spanish exiles to ease the latter's assimilation into Mexican society. Whereas previous studies have emphasized the personal motivations for exiles' abandonment of rural colonies established for them, I explore how state modernization initiatives compounded the failure of such endeavors.²²

Methods and Theory

My research utilizes multiple archival sites largely absent in the study of Spanish exiles in Mexico. Previous works have emphasized procedural documents (i.e., immigration records and public policy) and newspaper coverage, yet a vast assemblage of local histories remain unexamined, obscured by the myopic focus on Spanish intellectuals, artists, and politicians. In my archival research at the Archivo General de la Nación (National Archive, AGN) and the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia (National Library of Anthropology and History) in Mexico, as well as in Spanish archives such as the Fundación Universitaria Española (Spanish University Foundation, FUE) and the Fundación Pablo Iglesias (Pablo Iglesias Foundation, FPI), I located state surveillance documents, diplomat correspondence, community petitions, refugee aid reports, cultural texts, land dispute records, and popular publications that detailed the interactions between Mexican communities and exiled Spanish campesinos and workers.

I also reviewed over 130 oral history transcriptions conducted with Spanish political exiles by the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (National Institute of Anthropology and History,

²¹ Pablo Yankelevich, *¿Deseables o inconvenientes?: Las fronteras de la extranjería en el México posrevolucionario* (México, D.F.: Bonilla Artigas Editores, 2011); Pablo Yankelevich, *Los otros: Razas, normas y corrupción en la gestión de la extranjería en México, 1900-1950* (Ciudad de México: Bonilla Artigas Editores, 2020).

²² Fagen, *Exiles and Citizens*, 53-54; Pla Brugat, *Els exiliats catalans*, 217-218.

INAH) during the 1970s and 1980s. By looking at the biographical trajectories of refugees, I highlight the many ways in which Spaniards formulated their understanding of internationalism, national identity, race, and class formation. Moreover, these testimonial provide insights into the various political collaborations between Spanish exiles and Mexican dissident that went undocumented in state archival sources as well as the organizational archives of prominent political organizations, such as the Partido Comunista Mexicano (Mexican Communist Party, PCM), the Partido Comunista de España (Communist Party of Spain), the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labor, CNT), and the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (Iberian Anarchist Federation, FAI). I also utilize materials collected from the Centro de Estudios del Movimiento Obrero y Socialista (Center for the Study of the Labor and Socialist Movement) in Mexico City, the Archivo Histórico del Partido Comunista de España (Historical Archive of the Communist Party of Spain) in Madrid, and the CNT and FAI archival collections at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam to document the networks between Mexican and Spanish radicals that were legible within their respective archival collections. I therefore place archival records and refugee testimonials in conversation with one another to document the unstudied collaborations between the two countries' anarchist and communist movements and to further illustrate the possibilities and limitations of transnational political collaborations.

This dissertation explores the affective relationships that common people develop with one another, despite differences, and how they foster political imaginaries during moments of profound social change.²³ Within the context of this study, distant colonial racial relations and the ongoing

²³ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1968); Arno J. Mayer, *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Greg Grandin, "Living in Revolutionary Time: Coming to Terms with the Violence of Latin America's Long Cold War," in *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America's Long Cold War*, eds. Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1-42.

socioeconomic influence of foreigners did not deter Mexican commoners' ability to redefine their community to include Spanish exiles, nor did it obstruct Spaniards from seeing themselves within the ongoing struggle of mestizo and Indigenous peoples during the Mexican Revolution. An analysis on common receptions to exiles during moments of mass upheaval makes visible the fractures within nation-state ideologies, as well as the possibilities of popular imaginaries to forge new conditions for what constitutes community belonging. This dissertation follows these shifts in popular consciousness from the beginning of Mexico's social revolution in 1906, through the Spanish Civil War, and ending with yet another formative moment of social upheaval from Mexican citizens and Spanish refugees serving as important collaborators in the clandestine mobilizations that led to the Cuban Revolution of 1959.

Theoretically, this study engages with critical race theory and post-colonial studies, specifically in the long-term relations between former imperial and colonial subjects after decolonization. While Mexico had not been a colony of Spain for over a century prior to the exiles' arrival, the legacy of colonialism continued to influence the way that both nations' popular classes articulated their collective identities. In dialogue with works that situate Indigenous reclamation of land rights, sovereignty, and self-determination, this study examines proposals made by Indigenous and mestizo communities which attempted to reconceptualize the configuration of their communities through the incorporation of Spanish refugees.²⁴ The persistent requests from

²⁴ Julie Evans, Ann Genovese, Alexander Reilly, and Patrick Wolfe, eds., *Sovereignty: Frontiers of Possibility* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013); Manu Vimalassery, Juliana Hu Pegues, and Aloysha Goldstein, "Introduction: On Colonial Unknowing," *Theory & Event* 19, no. 4 (2016); Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (New York: Verso Books, 2016); Craig Fortier, *Unsettling the Commons: Social Movements Within, Against, and Beyond Settler Colonialism* (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2017); Adam Gary Lewis, "Imaging Autonomy on Stolen Land: Settler Colonialism, Anarchism, and the Possibilities of Decolonization?," *Settler Colonial Studies* 7, no. 4 (2017): 474-495; Mariana Mora, *Kuxlejal Politics: Indigenous Autonomy, Race, and Decolonizing Research in Zapatista Communities* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017); Hall, "Pluralism, Race, and Class in Caribbean

campesino communities to integrate Spanish exiles onto their collectively-held lands ultimately contrasted the imposition of rural refugee colonies as means to ameliorate the perceived tensions that could emerge between exiles and rural dwellers. Such bottom-up efforts by native and mixed-race communities to resolve the Spanish refugee crisis through the establishment of new, reciprocal relations to Spaniards demonstrates the ways that such communities navigated, challenged, and coopted the racial and economic modernization initiatives of the Mexican state. Spanish exiles' willfulness to work and struggle alongside these communities signified attempts to distinguish themselves from past perpetrators of racial and economic injustice. Exiles and citizens thus envisioned a future that embraced racial difference through internationalist political visions, disavowing both the legacies of colonial subjugation and state-sponsored racial modernization projects.

The conditions from which such gestures of transnational solidarity emerged were intrinsically linked to each community's respective notions of social difference, acceptance, and change. By analyzing the affective and political motives among vast sectors of Mexicans and Spanish exiles, I assess how their "structures of feeling," as Raymond Williams described the multiplicity of affective consciousness that occur at a given time and place, to juxtapose state aspirations for the refugee initiative and the aspirations of the exiles and the communities that welcomed them.²⁵ Often times, notions of "difference" are formulated through the lens of nationalism and citizenry.²⁶ Yet as this dissertation seeks to demonstrate, community also emerges transnationally through the rejection of a shared territorial, ethnic, and cultural identity. Just as the nation-state is both inclusive and exclusive, one's positionality within networks of class formation, colonial emancipation, and social

Society" and "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structure in Dominance," *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, 136-160, 195-245.

²⁵ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

²⁶ Rios and Adiv, *Geographies of Diaspora*, 12.

revolution also inform how communities distinguish “insiders” from “outsiders.” Rather than employing constructions of exclusion, the temporal openings experienced throughout the Mexican and Spanish Revolutions provided working people in both countries to reimage their relations to one another through the transcendence of borders and national identities.²⁷

Chapter Overview

To explain the origins of popular transnational solidarities between revolutionaries in Mexico and Spain, chapter one, “First Encounters: Spaniards and the Mexican Revolution, 1906-1936,” provides an overview of interactions between the two countries’ working-class movements from the beginning of the Mexican Revolution in 1906 to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. While these encounters largely consisted of interactions occurred in Mexico between radicals and Spanish immigrants, they also existed in the wide distribution of radical literature traversing the same migratory paths taken by European émigrés. Subsequently, a radical mapping of shared political and economic struggles occurring in Mexico and Spain connected participants as they developed imagined and real relationships to popular struggles on both sides of the Atlantic. Moreover, the radical press also provided a space in which Spanish anarchists could demonstrate their support for the Mexican Revolution, whether it the form of donations to Mexican revolutionaries, protests, or critical reflections of the nations’ shared historical trajectories. It was within these physical and literary spaces that new understandings of race and class solidarity emerged through a deeply anti-

²⁷ James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power* (London: Pluto Books, 2010); Maia Ramnath, *Decolonizing Anarchism: An Antiauthoritarian History of India’s Liberation Struggle* (Oakland: AK Press, 2011); Raymond B. Craib, *The Cry of the Renegade: Politics and Poetry in Interwar Chile* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Johnhenry Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation: A History of Revolutionary Haiti* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019); Struthers, *The World in a City*.

colonial interpretation of internationalist solidarity. This chapter contextualizes the significance of the subsequent encounters that took place between Mexicans and Spaniards during the Spanish Civil War and within the communities' refugees of the conflict would come to join.

In the second chapter, "Racial Regimes and Exile in Revolutionary Mexico," I scrutinize Mexican immigration and asylum policies as integral components of a broader racial and economic modernization initiative that determined desirable and undesirable attributes among prospective émigrés to Mexico. Framed within the racialist discourses of *mestizaje*, these policies demonstrate the significance that political ideology played in the Mexican state's assessment of the qualities and behaviors of prospective Spanish migrants throughout the Mexican Revolution and up until the introduction of President Cárdenas's refugee asylum initiative during the Spanish Civil War. This chapter demonstrates that, despite Cárdenas's ardent support for refugees regardless of their political affiliation, the qualifications established by Mexican state and Spanish republican aid officials regularly excluded many of the refugees that were at the greatest risk of persecution under the Franco regime. As such, anarchist and leftist exiles were forced to navigate the strenuous bureaucracies of racial, economic, and political desirability constructed by their home country as well as the receiving nation.

Chapter three, "Mexican Popular Opinion on the Spanish Civil War and the Asylum Initiative," looks at the ways in which popular support for the Popular Front and Cárdenas's refugee program emerged among Mexico's laboring classes. Whereas most studies have privileged newspaper coverage to demonstrate criticisms of the exile initiative, I suggest that much of the Mexican working class and peasantry supported the republican and revolutionary contingents during the Spanish Civil War. Through community petitions, fundraisers, radio broadcasts, mixed media exhibitions, and rallies, workers and campesinos explicitly linked their own struggles to those being fought for by Loyalist forces. Opposition to the republican cause, I suggest, mainly emanated from

the upper echelons of Mexican society, including the wealthy Spanish immigrant community that overwhelmingly supported the military uprising. Interestingly, both proponents and opponents of Cárdenas's refugee initiative invoked claims of shared historical and racial affinities with Spaniards, albeit in favor of those Spaniards that most represented their own class and ideological tendencies.

The fourth chapter, "Ambassadors of the Revolution: Anarchist Diplomacy during the Spanish Civil War," investigates how anarchist groups established strong ties with Mexican diplomats and the Mexican Left during the Civil War. This examination provides a different assessment of the Spanish anarchist movement than most conventional studies by demonstrating the various means in which the CNT and the FAI collaborated with Mexican groups and leaders that were diametrically opposed to their own ideological tendencies. Using the internal organization records of Spanish anarchist groups housed at the International Institute of Social History, communications between the Cárdenas government and libertarian groups, and transnational newspaper correspondence, I assess how and why anarchists in Spain held such a deep admiration not only for the Mexican Revolution, but the government of Lázaro Cárdenas. Among its followers and its extraofficial delegations to Mexico, Spanish anarchists promoted a radical interpretation of relations between the two nations, one that upheld a deeply anti-colonial and internationalist framing among Mexico's and Spain's laboring classes. By emphasizing a shared historical lineage based on popular struggle, anarchist organizations such as the CNT and the FAI utilized a class analysis to forge racial bonds to Mexico's mestizo and Indigenous masses. Such efforts, however, were not without their shortcomings. Among its delegates to Mexico, racist impulses still characterized some interactions between Spanish anarchists and Mexican leftists, which reverberated into the two countries' broader organizational relationships. Yet the persistence of both sides of the Atlantic to work through and within constructions of difference led to new, previously unimagined comradeships between Spanish libertarian and Mexican leftist movements.

Chapter five, “Exiles in Transit: Selection, Restrictions, and Radical Visions of Life in Mexico,” provides a succinct overview of the social and political backgrounds of Spaniards that were accepted and rejected from receiving asylum in Mexico. In this chapter, I scrutinize the policies of both the Mexican government and Spanish republican aid officials to determine why ideological proclivity served as one of the primary conditions for obtaining refuge in the country in spite of the Cárdenas government’s willingness to accept all exiles. I also seek to demonstrate the diversity of the refugee population, noting their upbringings, heterogenous political identities, and aspirations for life in exile. That those that were granted asylum organized amongst themselves to determine how they could best support the Mexican revolutionary reforms, with specific attention to the ongoing agrarian initiatives championed by the Cárdenas government. Through demographic data, oral testimonies, and newspapers published onboard the ships en route to Mexico, this chapter explains how Spaniards envisioned themselves as contributors to an ongoing revolution, and how this fact posed significant concerns for state officials seeking to diminish the perceived threats of radical émigrés.

The sixth chapter, “The Prospects and Failures of Rural Refugee Colonies,” highlights the contrast between popular and refugee visions of Mexico’s agrarian reform in juxtaposition of the objectives of the Mexican government and the Spanish republican government in exile. The chapter investigates Mexican campesinos’ various requests to relocate Spanish refugees into their communities and onto their collectively owned *ejido* lands. Despite the overwhelming support to integrate refugees into specific localities, state officials from both countries instead promoted the establishment of isolated Spanish refugee colonies through the support of Cárdenas’s government allies. Whereas the failure of these colonies within a few years of their foundation has been broadly seen as a result of refugees’ preferences for urban life, I utilize colonist testimonials, refugee aid records, and state correspondence to suggest that the projects’ failures were largely a consequence of top-down mismanagement and the changing political climate of the post-Cárdenas era. Moreover, as

many colonists ardently demanded to support popular requests for community immersion, the unsettled conflicts of the Mexican Revolution further complicated such collaborative endeavors. This chapter therefore examines the refugee colonization efforts from multiple perspectives to explain how and why the initiative subsequently failed.

The final chapter, “From Comrades to Subversives: Mexican Secret Police and ‘Undesirable’ Spanish Exiles, 1939-1959,” analyzes over 200 declassified intelligence investigations of Spanish refugees as suspected threats to Mexican national security. State investigations of Spanish refugees’ political activities demonstrated a marked shift from the Cárdenas era to subsequent administrations as World War II and the subsequent Cold War led to an increasingly suspicion of all radical political tendencies. Along with anarchists, communist exiles soon came under scrutiny due to the growing fear of Soviet intrusion into Mexican politics, leading state agents to violate the rights of thousands of exiles, many of whom had become naturalized Mexican citizens. As part of the Mexican state’s increasing dedication to Cold War policies of anti-communism, hyper-nationalism, and a growing surveillance apparatus, collaborations between Spaniards and Mexicans were purposefully suppressed in an effort to repress the remaining popular movements calling for revolutionary reform. Despite these efforts, oral testimonies and declassified secret police records demonstrate the various ways in which refugees evaded state surveillance and continued their political activities, not only against the Franco regime, but also in the various revolutionary struggles developing throughout Latin America, including the Cuban Revolution of 1959.

CHAPTER ONE

First Encounters: Spaniards and the Mexican Revolution, 1906-1936

On June 25, 1911, members of the Spanish anarchist federation Solidaridad Obrera (Worker Solidarity) gathered in the port of A Coruña, Galicia to protest the arrival of Mexico's recently overthrown dictator, Porfirio Díaz. At a reception held in the port of Santander a week earlier, Díaz remarked to a crowd of onlookers that he was pleased to be received so warmly in Spain, a country "to which he was bound by ties of blood, language, and beliefs."¹ Yet the working-class population of A Coruña did not share his enthusiasm. Their affinities instead aligned with radical sectors of the Mexican population that sought to overthrow Díaz and initiate a social revolution. In an article published in the socialist republican newspaper, *Tierra Gallega*, one organizer announced to the crowd:

In Mexico, the people have risen to the cry of "Land and Liberty!" The land is commonly held and liberty is an inherent human right. Learn from this, republicans, and you will see how the people will follow you when you have the will to say, "People! We do not want councils or municipalities: we want revolution!"²

During the rally, two women from the federation walked through the crowd collecting donations to be sent to the "Mexican rebels" of the anarchist Partido Liberal Mexicano (Mexican Liberal Party,

¹ "Díaz Says His Ties to Mexico are Cut," *New York Times* (New York, NY), June 19, 1911.

² Though the phrase "land and liberty" was popularized by the agrarian revolutionary Emiliano Zapata, it was originally coined as the rally cry of Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón and the Partido Liberal Mexicano. During the PLM's 1911 Baja California uprising, the phrase was emblazoned on red flags and raised above cities occupied by the insurgency. According to John Womack, Zapata's forces took on the phrase through the influence of former PLM member and then-anarchist Antonio Díaz Soto y Gama in 1914. See: "*Tierra Gallega* de noticia de un mítin realizado por solidaridad obrera en apoyo a los revolucionarios mexicanos y del llamada a otro en protesta por el paso de Porfirio Díaz por aquella localidad," translated from *México y España durante la revolución mexicana*, ed. Carlos Illades (Ciudad de México: Archivo Histórico Diplomático Mexicano, 1985), 161-163; John Womack, *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1969), 193-194.

PLM) and its insurrection in Baja California.³ On July 15, 1911, the PLM's newspaper *Regeneración* mentioned that it had received a letter of solidarity from "a [Spanish] comrade that communicated that a great enthusiasm has awakened among the radical sectors of various cities of [Spain] toward the sentiments of the Partido Liberal Mexicano." In October of that year, the paper noted that more letters of support had arrived from various Spanish anarchist newspapers, including the *coruñés* periodical *La Voz del Obrero*.⁴ For Spanish radicals that did not migrate to the Americas, the Mexican Revolution was perceived and defined within a broader context of global revolution. Through this lens, Spanish campesinos and workers developed real and imagined relations to Mexicans and the Mexican Revolution based on their own struggles for radical social change. In contrast to liberal and republican perceptions of the Revolution, radical and working-class organizations looked to Mexico as a model for their own country's prospective social revolution.

This chapter maps Spanish radicals' interactions with Mexican revolutionaries and how such encounters shaped their understanding of race, class, and community. In many of the same ways that Mexicans reimagined their relationship to working people in Spain throughout the decades of Mexican Revolution, Spanish radicals also envisioned new social and political affinities toward a people that were former colonial subjects to their own nation's empire. Yet unlike Mexicans who persistently interacted with Spanish émigrés, migration networks stayed largely one directional for hundreds of years, leaving few opportunities for Spain's laboring classes to encounter workers and

³ For more on the PLM's 1911 Baja California uprising, see: Ethel Duffy Turner, *Revolution in Baja California: Ricardo Flores Magón's High Noon* (Detroit: Blaine Ethridge Books, 1981); Lomnitz, *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores*, 319-381; Kenyon Zimmer, *Immigrants against the State: Yiddish and Italian Anarchism in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 124-134; Struthers, *The World in a City*, 127-156.

⁴ "Movimiento de solidaridad," *Regeneración* (Los Angeles, CA), July 15, 1911; "De todo el mundo se escucha el aplauso para los que luchan bajo la bandera roja en los campos mexicanos," *Regeneración* (Los Angeles, CA), October 14, 1911; Jacinto Barrera and Alejandro de la Torre, *Los rebeldes de la bandera roja. Textos del periódico ¡Tierra!, de La Habana, sobre la Revolución Mexicana* (México, D.F.: INAH, 2011), 32.

campesinos from the Americas. This changed in 1939, when approximately 20,000 of the Spaniards fleeing the ravages of the Spanish Civil War found asylum in Mexico. Exile, in some ways, provided the first opportunity for Spaniards of modest backgrounds, most of whom had never stepped foot outside of the borders of Spain, to live among a culture and people indelibly marked by colonialism, independence, and revolution. However, Spaniards' conceptions of Mexicans and the Mexican Revolution did not begin as a result of exile. For decades, the movement of ideas and people to and from Spain allowed campesinos and workers to confront, rethink, and enact ideals that critiqued the former structures of inequality perpetuated by their compatriots in the Americas.

While historians have analyzed the Mexican Revolution from the perspective of Spanish diplomats and businessmen residing in Mexico, few have assessed the persistent circulation of radical organizers and literature travelling across to and from the countries throughout the early twentieth century.⁵ For working-class Spanish immigrants, the Mexican Revolution was as intimately tied to their own struggles against economic exploitation as it was to those of the Mexican working class. Many Spaniards participated in strikes and uprisings, organized labor unions, contributed writings for anarchist periodicals, and even organized campaigns against foreigners—many of whom were also Spaniards—accused of exploiting Mexican workers and campesinos. As seen throughout

⁵ Carlos Illades, *México y España durante la Revolución Mexicana* (México, D.F.: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1985); Carlos Illades, *Presencia española en la Revolución Mexicana, 1910-1915* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1991); Josefina Mac Gregor, "México y España: De la representación diplomática oficial a los agentes confidenciales, 1910-1915," *Historia Mexicana* 50, no. 2 (2000): 309-330; Rosario Sevilla Soler, "España y los revolucionarios mexicanos en la prensa andaluza: Una vision condicionada," in *Insurgencia y republicanismo*, ed. Jesús Raúl Navarro García (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 2006), 297-337; Javier Moreno Lázaro, "La otra España. Empresas y empresarios españoles en la Ciudad de México durante la revolución mexicana," *América Latina en la Historia Económica* no. 27 (2007): 111-156; Beltrán Dengra, "La opinion sobre la Revolución Mexicana (1911-1917) en la prensa anarquista española," *Espiral: Estudios sobre Estado y Sociedad* 14, no. 41 (2008): 169-205; Almudena Delgado Larios, *La revolución mexicana vista desde España, 1910-1931* (México, D.F.: Publicaciones Cruz O., S.A., 2010); Weis, *Bakers and Basques*, 83-146.

Latin America in the early twentieth century, transnational political and labor relations encouraged workers and immigrants to reconceptualize their social affinities beyond the category of the nation and created the framework of what I refer to as transnational communitarian traditions, the imaginative and quotidian ways in which citizens and foreigners challenged historical legacies of exploitation through internationalism and mutual aid.⁶ Such traditions not only expanded the worldview of workers and campesinos as they became exposed to radical ideas and organizers from different parts of the world, they also forced adherents to critically examine their own definitions of community, compatriots, and nation through tangible and abstract affinities with people of different races, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds. In the case of Mexico and Spain, this included the social and cultural structures that perpetuated imperial/subject relationships that continued to exist well after the end of Spanish colonial rule in 1821. I argue that these traditions problematized the codifiers of citizenship and allegiance based not on one's origins, but on their pragmatic and ideological efforts to work within and through categories of difference.

First Encounters: Spanish Revolutionaries in Mexico

Initial interactions between Mexicans and Spanish anarchist émigrés began as early as the

⁶ For other instances of transnational communitarian traditions in Spanish America, see: Jorell A. Meléndez-Badillo, "Interpreting, Deconstructing, and Deciphering Ideograms of Rebellion: An Approach to the History of Reading in Puerto Rico's Anarchist Groups at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century," in *Without Borders or Limits: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Anarchist Studies*, eds. Jorell A. Meléndez Badillo and Nathan Jun (New York: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 57-75; Christina Heatherton, "University of Radicalism: Ricardo Flores Magón and Leavenworth Penitentiary," *American Quarterly*, Special Issue: *Las Américas Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2014): 557-581; James A. Baer, *Anarchist Immigrants in Spain and Argentina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015); Craib, *The Cry of the Renegade*; Joshua Savala, "Ports of Transnational Labor Organizing: Anarchism along the Peruvian-Chilean Littoral, 1916-1928," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 99, no. 3 (2019): 501-531; Christopher J. Castañeda and Montse Feu, eds. *Writing Revolution: Hispanic Anarchism in the United States* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019); Ariel Mae Lambe, *No Barrier Can Contain It: Cuban Antifascism and the Spanish Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

1870s, culminating in the formation of Mexico's first labor unions and artisan guilds.⁷ One of the first anarchist newspapers in Mexico, *La Comuna*, founded in 1877, was edited by Spanish anarchist émigrés.⁸ The paper criticized the liberal property reforms enacted under President Benito Juárez and, more specifically, their effects on Indigenous land tenure practices. Spanish anarchists also participated in clandestine meetings between different Indigenous groups that formed the first organized campesino movements.⁹ Yet it was the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in 1906 that solidified transnational networks between Spanish and Mexican radicals. During the Cananea mining strike of 1906, Spanish socialist Rafael Carmona and PLM organizer Lázaro Gutiérrez de Lara mobilized a multiethnic labor stoppage that signaled the first legitimate challenge to the Díaz regime.¹⁰ While imprisoned for violating U.S. neutrality laws in June 1908, the anarchist revolutionary Ricardo Flores Magón wrote to his jailed brother Enrique Flores Magón and other detained leaders of the PLM to encourage the participation of Spanish and Italian anarchists in their efforts to overthrow the Díaz regime. Upon the outbreak of the Mexican revolt, Flores Magón imagined that European radicals would flock to Mexico to support the most recent effort to spark global revolution. Although he saw foreign radicals' support as critical to the PLM's ambitions to overthrow the Díaz regime, Flores Magón did not necessarily foresee them as permanent settlers.

⁷ Clara E. Lida and Carlos Illades, "El anarquismo europeo y sus primeras influencias en México después de la Comuna de París, 1871-1881," *Historia Mexicana* 51, no. 1 (2001): 103-149; Daniela Spenser and Richard Stoller, "Radical Mexico: Limits to the Impact of Soviet Communism," *Latin American Perspectives* 35, no. 2 (2008): 58-59.

⁸ Interview with Luis Chávez Orozco, conducted by James Wilkie and Edna Monzón de Wilkie (1964), Oral History Interviews with Mexican Political Leaders and Other Personalities, 1964-1965, University of California, Berkeley, Bancroft Library Special Collections, 52.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ David Struthers, "'The Boss Has No Color Line': Race, Solidarity, and a Culture of Affinity in Los Angeles and the Borderlands, 1907-1915," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 7, no. 2 (2013): 65. For more on the Cananea strike, see: W. Dirk Raat, *Revoltosos: Mexico's Rebels in the United States, 1903-1923* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1981); Philip J. Mallinger, *Race and Labor in Western Copper: The Fight for Equality, 1896-1918* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995), 59-72.

Rather, he expected them to return to their home countries to organize similar rebellions. In order to expedite a global insurrection, Flores Magón foresaw that the dissemination of anarchist propaganda and literature as a crucial component in building a transnational revolutionary movement.¹¹ “It is very possible that our revolution breaks the European equilibrium and that those [foreign] proletarians will decide to do what we do,” Flores Magón speculated.

While historians have identified the social and political status of Spanish émigrés during the Porfirian era as one of the primary grievances that sparked the Mexican Revolution, their depictions of the “Spanish colony” as a homogenous social entity comprised of landowners and businessmen ignores the demographic diversity of the community as a whole.¹² At the turn of the twentieth century, Spanish immigrants made up the largest sector of Mexico’s immigrant population, amounting to approximately 30,000 of the 70,000 immigrants legally residing in the country, with as many as 40,000-50,000 in total when counting both documented and undocumented immigrants from Spain.¹³ During this time, the Spanish colony was largely a city-based community, with 66% of Spanish immigrants working in urban and commercial ventures and only 10% working in agriculture.¹⁴ In Mexico City, where the largest population of Spanish émigrés resided, Spaniards

¹¹ Letter from Ricardo Flores Magón to Práxedes Guerrero and Enrique Flores Magón (Los Angeles, CA), June 13, 1908, Archivo Histórico de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, México, D.F.), digitized by Archivo Electrónico Ricardo Flores Magón [hereafter Archivo Magón], accessed May 24, 2021. <http://archivomagon.net/obras-completas/correspondencia-1899-1922/c-1908/cor265/>.

¹² Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, Volume 2: Counter-Revolution and Reconstruction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 43-44; Clara E. Lida, ed. *Una inmigración privilegiada. Comerciantes, empresarios, y profesionales españoles en México en los siglos XIX y XX* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1994).

¹³ Pedro Pérez Herrero, “Algunas hipótesis de trabajo sobre la inmigración española a México: Los comerciantes,” in *Tres aspectos de la presencia española en México durante el porfiriato: Relaciones económicas, comerciantes, y población*, ed. Clara E. Lida (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1981), 109; Illades, *Conflict, Domination, and Violence: Episodes in Mexican Social History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 52.

¹⁴ Clara E. Lida, “El perfil de una inmigración, 1821-1939,” in *Una inmigración privilegiada: Comerciantes, empresarios y profesionales españoles en México en los siglos XIX y XX*, ed. Clara E. Lida (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1994), 35.

owned 53% of all foreign-controlled factories, although their overall industrial capital lagged behind that of North American, British, German, and French business ventures.¹⁵ The specific occupations of Spanish immigrants complicates traditional readings of the community, which in actuality represented a much more diverse and socially stratified group than has been previously suggested. Between 1913 and 1914, approximately 80% of the 1,222 Spanish men living in Mexico City worked as unskilled wage earners, in contrast to 16% who were employed as merchants.¹⁶ Although Javier Moreno Lázaro suggests that the presence of a largely wage-earning Spanish immigrant population complicates earlier historiographical interventions that labelled Spaniards as “privileged immigrants,” some wage-earners undoubtedly served the interests of their countrymen as intermediaries and overseers and thus contributed to the Mexican working class’s disdain toward the *gachupín*, the exploitative Spanish immigrant.¹⁷ Notwithstanding, the diversity in skillset and social status among Spanish immigrants forces us to reconsider the homogeneity of class interests during the Mexican insurgency.

A reassessment of Spanish émigrés as antagonists during the Mexico’s social upheaval is particularly crucial when analyzing the nature of revolutionary violence. Throughout the armed stage of the Revolution (1910-1919), only 220 Spaniards were killed by insurgent forces—mostly victims of Zapatista and Villista attacks—whereas 550 U.S. and 471 Chinese immigrants were slain during the same period.¹⁸ However, instances of Hispanophobia did not reflect a general racial prejudice toward all Spaniards, but an animosity specifically targeting Spanish immigrants perceived of benefiting from various social disparities during the Díaz regime. As anti-Yankee sentiments and racism toward Asian immigrants motivated the efforts to purge these groups, Carlos Illades notes

¹⁵ Pérez Herrero, “Algunas hipótesis de trabajo sobre la inmigración española a México,” 131-133.

¹⁶ Moreno Lázaro, “La otra España,” 117.

¹⁷ Lida, “El perfil de una inmigración,” Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, Volume 1*, 87.

¹⁸ Illades, *Conflict, Domination, and Violence*, 53.

three distinct characteristics regarding revolutionary violence inflicted against Spaniards: the local economic activities of the Spanish immigrant population; Spaniards' social and cultural status within Mexican society; and the anti-revolutionary sentiments of affluent Spanish émigrés.¹⁹ Incidents of revolutionary violence against Spaniards were more commonly a result of local, situational xenophobic episodes rather than a systematic reprisal toward the Spanish population. This was not the case, however, for Chinese immigrants, who experienced racialized forms of violence based on their role as economic intermediaries as well as on accusations that their assimilation into Mexican society caused racial degeneration within the mestizo race.²⁰ The most egregious attack against Spaniards, the 1915 expulsion of foreigners from Torreón organized by Francisco "Pancho" Villa, was a consequence of the Spanish immigrant community's financial support for the 1913 rebellion of Victoriano Huerta and its members' economic prominence as local merchants, landowners, clerks, and clergy.²¹ Incidents of revolutionary violence against Spaniards were more commonly a result of local, situational xenophobic episodes rather than a systematic reprisal toward the Spanish population.

The Spanish immigrant population in Mexico represented a socially and ideologically diverse social body with various reasons for migrating to Mexico. Some sectors of the Spanish colony rejected the racial and class privileges of their compatriots and instead collaborated with Mexican workers and campesinos to bring about social, economic, and political change. Indeed, the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution galvanized many sectors of the country's immigrant population to join

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Gerardo Rénique, "Race, Region, and Nation: Sonora's Anti-Chinese Racism and Mexico's Post-Revolutionary Nationalism, 1920s-1930s," in *Race & Nation in Modern Latin America*, eds. Nancy P. Applebaum, Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 211-236; Jason Oliver Chang, *Chino: Anti-Chinese Racism in Mexico, 1880-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

²¹ Friedrich Katz, "Pancho Villa and the Attack on Columbus, New Mexico," *American Historical Review* 83, no. 1 (1978): 103; Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, Volume 2*, 119-120.

labor unions and to protest social and economic injustices. The Catalan anarchist exile, Amadeo Ferrés, helped establish Mexico's first nationwide labor confederation, the anarcho-syndicalist La Casa del Obrero Mundial (House of the World Worker, COM), which attempted to free organized labor from state oversight.²² In February 1913, Spanish immigrant wage earners organized alongside French immigrants affiliated with the aptly named Sociedad Cosmopolita de Dependientes (Cosmopolitan Society of Subordinates) and joined the COM labor confederation to challenge abuses inflicted by Spanish businessmen in Mexico City. Correspondence between Spanish businessmen and Spanish diplomatic representatives in Mexico spoke candidly of the growing social and economic divide within the Spanish Colony and its subsequent impact on organized labor.²³ Regardless of their shared national origin, Spaniards in Mexico exhibited many of the same social, economic, and political characteristics of conflicts arising in Spain during the same time period.²⁴ In the port of Veracruz, Spanish sex workers led mass tenant strikes with their Mexican *compañeras* throughout the 1910s and 1920s, which galvanized fellow prostitutes and tenants to reject the abuses of Spanish landlords that profited off their work and living spaces.²⁵ In the ports, refineries, and oil fields of the Huasteca region, Spaniards worked as stevedores, labor organizers, and teachers and

²² Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class*, 104-125.

²³ Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class*, 117; Alicia Gil Lázaro, *Inmigración y retorno* (Madrid: Marcial Pons Ediciones Jurídicas y Sociales, 2015), 156.

²⁴ For more on Spanish revolutionary movements in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, see: Clara E. Lida, *Anarquismo y revolución en la España del XIX* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno de España Editores, 1972); Jerome R. Mintz, *The Anarchists of Casas Viejas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); Temma Kaplan, *Anarchists of Andalusia, 1868-1903* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); George Richard Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology and the Working-Class Movement in Spain, 1868-1898* (Berkeley: University of California, Press, 1989); José Álvarez Junco, *La ideología política del anarquismo español, 1868-1910* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno de España Editores, 1991); Chris Ealham, *Class, Culture, and Conflict in Barcelona, 1898-1937* (London: Routledge, 2005); Angel Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution, and Reaction: Catalan Labour and the Crisis of the Spanish State, 1898-1923* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007); James Michael Yeoman, *Print Culture and the Formation of the Anarchist Movement in Spain, 1890-1915* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

²⁵ Wood, *Revolution in the Street*; Rómula Pardo Urías, ed. Margarita Urías Hermosillo, *Obra histórica* (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 2017), 581-590.

helped establish ties to labor movements throughout the Atlantic and the Andean Pacific.²⁶

Newspapers such as *Germinal* (Tampico, Tamaulipas), *El Rebelde* (Orizaba, Veracruz) and *Solidaridad* (Veracruz, Veracruz) reported on the persecution of anarchists back in Spain and published updates of their comrades who had been deported back to Spain by the government of Venustiano Carranza due to their activities in Mexico.²⁷ José Prat, a Spanish anarchist and editor of the Casa del Obrero Mundial newspaper in Tampico, *Germinal*, encouraged readers to reject social divisions produced by capitalist interests and instead fight as one unified entity. To do so, Prat proclaimed, would require building new institutions of popular power that rejected the hierarchies of the past:

While the proletariat has been scattered, disjointed, and worse, without class consciousness, the privileged classes have dominated the disinherited multitudes because they knew how to organize for the defense of their class institutions. The poor and ignorant have failed against their adversaries, who have appropriated wealth and culture...The bourgeoisie have also organized a strong material force to legally and financially protect their property as sacred and inviolable, which keeps the working class bowed.²⁸

Spanish anarchist émigrés like José Prat regularly stressed the need to create a strictly working-class identity that counteracted the influence of business and state elites. As Constitutionalist forces at this time emphasized the consolidation of insurgent struggles through the growing apparatus of the state, Spanish radicals and their Mexican accomplices encouraged workers to look beyond the boundaries of the nation to establish an internationalist movement of revolutionary ideas and antagonists.

²⁶ Peter DeShazo and Robert J. Halstead, “Los Wobblies del Sur: The Industrial Workers of the World in Chile and Mexico,” Unpublished manuscript (University of Wisconsin, 1974), 1-57; Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class*, 157-158.

²⁷ “Desde España: Carta del compañero Rubio,” *Solidaridad: Periódico Semana Sindicalista Revolucionario*, (Veracruz), August 21, 1921; “Correspondencia especial de Barcelona,” *Solidaridad: Periódico Semana Sindicalista Revolucionario* (Veracruz), August 17, 1921; “Sebastián San Vicente fue desterrado,” *El Rebelde: Vocero Libertario* (Orizaba), August 9, 1923.

²⁸ “Luchas y cuestiones sociales,” *Germinal* (Tampico), June 28, 1917, translated by author, as quoted in Aurora Mónica Alcayaga Sasso, “Librado Rivera y los Hermano Rojos en el movimiento social y cultural anarquista en Villa Cecilia y Tampico, Tamaulipas, 1915-1931” (PhD diss., Universidad Iberoamericana, 2006), 87.

The bonds between Mexican and Spanish radicals also flourished outside of Mexico since the earliest moments of the Revolution. In February 1905, when the exiled Mexican anarchists Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón were jailed by U.S. authorities for publishing their anti-Díaz newspaper, *Regeneración*, the Spaniard Florencio Bazora collaborated with the with the Jewish American anarchist Emma Goldman to raise funds for the brothers and other imprisoned leaders of the Partido Liberal Mexicano.²⁹ Bazora relocated with the PLM's junta to California in 1908 and served as an intermediary to the group's closest organizational ally—the revolutionary syndicalist union, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).³⁰ Spaniards affiliated with the IWW solidified relations between the Mexican anarchist movement and radical immigrants located throughout the United States, contributing to the growing calls for global social revolution.³¹ The bonds between exiled Mexican revolutionaries and Spanish immigrants endured even behind bars, as PLM leaders, who were once again arrested by U.S. authorities in 1918 for sedition under the Espionage Act worked closely with imprisoned Spanish anarchists and IWW maritime workers, such as the Galician labor organizer Manuel Rey, during their years of confinement in Leavenworth Penitentiary.³² After Ricardo Flores Magón's death in prison and Enrique Flores Magón's subsequent deportation from

²⁹ Ward Albro, *Always a Rebel: Ricardo Flores Magón and the Mexican Revolution* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1992), 30.

³⁰ Letter from Ricardo Flores Magón to Manuel Sarabia (Sacramento, CA), March 11, 1907, Archivo Magón, accessed May 24, 2021. <http://archivomagon.net/obras-completas/correspondencia-1899-1922/c-1907/cor141/>; Salvatore Salerno, "No God, No Master: Italian Anarchists and the Industrial Workers of the World," in *The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism: Politics, Labor, and Culture*, eds. Philip V. Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer (Westport: Prager, 2003), 174.

³¹ Kirk Shaffer, "Tropical Libertarians: Anarchist Movements and Networks in the Caribbean, Southern United States, and Mexico, 1890s-1920s," in *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World*, 273-320; Kevan Antonio Aguilar, "The IWW in Tampico: Anarchism, Internationalism, and Solidarity Unionism in a Mexican Port," in *Wobblies of the World: A Global History of the IWW*, eds. Peter Cole, David Struthers, and Kenyon Zimmer (London: Pluto Books, 2017), 124-139; Bieito Alonso, "Spanish Anarchists and Maritime Workers in the IWW," in *Wobblies of the World*, 89-102; Struthers, *The World in a City*.

³² Peter Cole, *Wobblies on the Waterfront: Interracial Unionism in Progressive-Era Philadelphia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 66-68, 87-91, 119-120.

the U.S. to Mexico in 1923, Manuel Rey continued to keep correspondence with PLM militants active in the labor movement of Coahuila throughout the 1920s.³³

Through the multiple networks established by radical Spanish émigrés, militants in Spain formulated a sophisticated, albeit subjective, view of one of the first social revolutions of the twentieth century. The circular distribution of ideas and people travelling between Spain and Americas also provided Mexican radicals the opportunity to articulate new social, political, and cultural endeavors with Spaniards that actively rejected colonial and capitalist exploitation. That such affinities survived the consolidation of state power that occurred after 1917 further speaks to the prevalence of internationalist political views during this time as well as the sophisticated ways in which anti-capitalist movements reconceptualized historical traumas through contemporary bonds of class solidarity. A similar phenomenon also occurred in Spain during this period, as well. Just as Mexican radicals articulated radical interpretations of racial and class relations with Spaniards and other ethnic groups they encountered, so too did the labor and anarchist movements in Spain. In the face of burgeoning international political ruptures, including the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the historical ties between Spain and Mexico provided a social and cultural foundation for deeper affective bonds to emerge between revolutionary movements in both countries.

Spanish Solidarity for the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1917

Across the Atlantic, news of the Mexican Revolution was a regular fixture of the Spanish mainstream and radical press, as different sectors of Spanish society interpreted the conflict in relation to internal conflicts. Rather than seeing these actors as ideologically motivated, mainstream

³³ Letter from Ricardo Flores Magón to Nicolás T. Bernal (Oakland, CA), February 14, 1921, Archivo Magón, accessed May 24, 2021. <http://archivomagon.net/obras-completas/correspondencia-1899-1922/c-1921/cor35-2/>.

newspapers attributed revolutionary violence to Mexicans' incivility. Such views of the Mexican Revolution highlighted the growing concerns within Spain regarding its post-colonial economic relationships to Latin America. Mainstream publications seeking to affirm Hispanic hegemony in the Americas condemned the ongoing violence against Iberian businessmen and landowners, regularly referring to Zapatista insurgents as "bandits" while portraying the émigrés as victims of "Indian barbarians."³⁴ Such descriptions not only ignored the motivations of popular insurgencies, they reproduced racist stereotypes of Indigenous peoples and the Mexican peasantry, much in the same vein as the Spanish press depicted Black Cuban revolutionaries during the War of Cuban Independence.³⁵ In contrast to mainstream publications, the Spanish radical press articulated the Revolution's intentions not from the viewpoint of Spanish businessmen and landowners, but from their own position as an exploited class of workers and campesinos that empathized with Mexicans' longstanding social and economic grievances. Radical publications frequently heralded the Zapatista insurgency as defenders of campesino rights in the face of capitalist exploitation.³⁶ Their support for the popular sectors of the Revolution emerged not only on the basis of class solidarity, but as a means to legitimize Mexican grievances of racial exploitation.

It was during the early years of the Mexican Revolution that revolutionaries on both sides of the Atlantic solidified their ties through their respective labor movements. As rebellions broke out across Mexico in the Fall of 1910, the second congress of the Solidaridad Obrera labor organization in Barcelona voted overwhelmingly to establish the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labor, CNT), shifting the regional libertarian organization into a nationwide

³⁴ Sevilla Soler, "España y los revolucionarios mexicanos en la prensa andaluza," 311.

³⁵ According to Yeoman, the Spanish mainstream press regularly characterized Black Cuban revolutionaries as "wild, bloodthirsty savages." See: Yeoman, *Print Culture and the Formation of the Spanish Movement*, 99.

³⁶ Sevilla Soler, "España y los revolucionarios mexicanos en la prensa andaluza," 312.

network of trade union locals. By September 1911, the CNT had 26,585 members throughout the country, along with 1,349 affiliated members whose union locals realigned with the CNT following a series of strikes.³⁷ The confederation's membership grew exponentially throughout the 1910s, claiming a membership of 800,000 by 1919.³⁸ Much like their Mexican counterparts, Spanish anarchists propagated their ideals through a global network of radical newspapers. Periodicals such as *Solidaridad Obrera* (Barcelona) connected CNT organizers, fellow travelers, and curious minds to one another and proliferated news of the movement's growth to militants both at home and abroad.³⁹ The radical printed press also created a platform to promote international mutual aid initiatives with Mexican revolutionaries. By April 1911, Spanish anarchist émigrés coordinated with revolutionaries based out Mexico, the United States, Costa Rica, Argentina, and Cuba, to financially support the Partido Liberal Mexicano's newspaper publication, *Regeneración* (Los Angeles, CA).⁴⁰ Such transnational networks proved crucial when, in June 1911, U.S. Officials arrested the organizing junta of the Partido Liberal Mexicano for coordinating the recent insurrection in Baja California in violation of U.S. neutrality laws. At the behest of the PLM's prisoner support committee, Spanish anarchists in the Americas and Europe requested their readers to donate funds to the PLM junta's legal support and to sustain the costs of publishing the newspaper. Beyond financial support, the Mexican junta called on Spaniards and militants throughout the world to publish "protest coupons" in their respective publications.⁴¹ Spanish papers, including *Solidaridad Obrera*, urged their readers to cut out and send the signed coupons to President William Howard

³⁷ "Confederación Nacional del Trabajo. Primero Congreso Obrero: Nuestro saludo á los delegados," *Solidaridad Obrera* (Barcelona), September 8, 1911.

³⁸ Yeoman, *Print Culture and the Formation of the Anarchist Movement in Spain*, 5.

³⁹ Ibid., 48-54.

⁴⁰ Barrera, *Los rebeldes de la bandera roja*, 12-13.

⁴¹ "A protestar todos" and "Cupón de protesta," *Regeneración* (Los Angeles, CA), August 5, 1911.

Taft in protest of the detention of the exiled Mexican anarchists.⁴²

Like many radical newspapers of the time, Spanish anarchist newspapers regularly published the names and locations of individuals that subscribed to donate funds for the PLM. These ledgers provide a glimpse into the paper's geographical dissemination throughout the Spanish-speaking world as well as the influence of the Mexican Revolution on its readership. In February 1913, a year and a half after the initial arrests, the Barcelona-based newspaper, *Tierra y Libertad*, received 181.74 pesetas in subscriptions to donate to the imprisoned PLM junta. Subscribers included railroad workers in Barcelona, along with individual donations from Vilanova I la Geltrú, Palamós, Elche, Eibar, Gijón, as well as Morocco and France.⁴³ Solidarity for Mexican revolutionaries also came from unexpected places. On March 4, 1914, the Barcelona-based *Tierra y Libertad* published a notice that anarchists imprisoned in Tarragona sent the editors a donation of 1.75 pesetas as part of the paper's campaign drive for imprisoned Mexican revolutionaries. Along with a detail of how much was given by each individual, the ledger included the pseudonyms of prisoners that wished to remain anonymous while professing their political ideals to the paper's readers and their intended recipient in Mexico. Whereas some signed their name as "No God, No Master," others proclaimed that the donor was from "a victim of the bourgeoisie," while another noted that their five-centavo donation was "all of their capital." Others directly referred to the Mexican Revolution in their inscriptions. One exclaimed, "¡México libre!" ("Free Mexico!"), whereas two others wrote that their contribution were from "a Zapatista Indian" and "a new Attila," a common albeit derogatory nickname given to Emiliano Zapata, who was characterized by anti-revolutionary journalists as the "Attila of the

⁴² I would like to thank Joshua Newmark for bringing this campaign to my attention. See: "La revolución en Méjico," *Solidaridad Obrera* (Barcelona), August 11, 1911.

⁴³ "Suscripción para ayudar a los libertarios mejicanos," *Tierra y Libertad* (Barcelona), February 13, 1913.

South” in Mexico.⁴⁴

News of the Mexican Revolution also contributed to Spaniards’ cosmopolitan and postcolonial worldview. Through radical newspapers, workers from rural villages to bustling industrial centers received updates on the military advances, labor strikes, and uprisings throughout the duration of the Mexican Revolution’s years of armed insurgency. Following the arrest of the PLM junta in June 1911, *Solidaridad Obrera* dedicated multiple pages of its July 14, 1911 issue to detail the nature of the Mexican Revolution to its readership. CNT central committee member Miguel Permañer proclaimed that the current rebellion was the most recent example of a century-long struggle against authority and despotism. “[Mexico’s] first liberating impulse, its first act of rebellion and hatred for a state of oppression and ignominy was carried out on September 16, 1810”—the day in which Mexican Independence leader Father Miguel Hidalgo first called on the New Spain’s Indigenous masses to rebel against Spanish colonial rule. Permañer continued by outlining various instances in which Mexico fought off foreign intervention, framing their struggle for emancipation and against the electoral reforms proposed by Díaz’s ouster, Francisco I. Madero.⁴⁵ The correlation between the revolution in Mexico and decolonization was also propagated by the Flores Magón brothers in their articles written for the Spanish radical press. In one article penned by Enrique Flores Magón while imprisoned at McNeil Island Penitentiary for the Barcelona-based *Tierra y Libertad*, he described Mexico’s “social question” as one rooted in the preservation of Indigenous communalist practices. “Mutual aid was the rule among the simple inhabitants, whose houses were built by the residents of the pueblo; the crops were raised by all; sowing and other labor which required more arms than those of a family were practiced in common,” Flores Magón claimed.

⁴⁴ “*Maremagnum*,” *Tierra y Libertad* (Barcelona), March 4, 1914.

⁴⁵ Miguel Permañer, “El genio revolucionario de un pueblo,” *Solidaridad Obrera* (Barcelona), July 14, 1911.

Natural resources, he continued, were owned in common. “Authority,” he claimed, “which has always been cordially hated by the Mexican people, was hardly felt.” In Flores Magón’s eyes, the Revolution vindicated the political and economic practices of the country’s native populations. That through this Indigenous uprising, capitalism in Mexico was in its death throes.⁴⁶

Within the Mexican and Spanish anarchist press, the Revolution was characterized as a conflict to undo capitalist exploitation of the Mexico’s landless peasantry and growing working-class. In their reporting of the Revolution’s various insurrections, PLM leaders Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón attributed the armed expropriation of lands as acts of restitution mobilized by aggrieved Indigenous communities. These depictions of insurrection, particularly for readers outside of Mexico, gave the impression that all popular acts of retribution emerged as affronts to capital and the state. For example, in a June 1912 article published on the burning of henequen plantations in Temax, Yucatán, Ricardo Flores Magón described the insurrection as an effort to expropriate privately owned lands by Indigenous *comuneros*.⁴⁷ However, the Temax uprising, like many of the conflicts that comprise the Mexican Revolution, was initiated by a variety of local actors with many insurrectionists seeking to affirm their claims to small family owned properties against hacendados and political bosses—some of whom were aggrieved relatives of the insurgents.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the PLM’s demands to return ancestral lands and to collectivize private property was not without its supporters, as the group’s mobilized various Indigenous insurgents, including Mayas in Yucatán; Zapotecs and Mixtecs in Oaxaca; Nahuas, Olutecos, Téeneks, and Totonacas in Veracruz; Tarahumara in Chihuahua; Purépecha in Michoacán; Mayo and Yaqui tribes in Sonora; as well as

⁴⁶ Enrique Flores Magón, “La cuestión social en Méjico,” *Tierra y Libertad* (Barcelona), March 13, 1912.

⁴⁷ Ricardo Flores Magón, “Para los que ‘dudan,’” *Regeneración* (Los Angeles, CA), June 22, 1912.

⁴⁸ Allan Wells and Gilbert M. Joseph, *Summer of Discontent, Seasons of Upheaval* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution, Vol. 1*, 226.

Cocopah, Kumeyaay-Diegueño, Paipai, and Kiliwa in Baja California, just to name a few.⁴⁹ Much like the variants of anarchism seen in Spain, the PLM's ideological vision emerged as an amalgamation of ideas and practices informed by local, national, and transnational conditions.⁵⁰ Yet it was through their emphasis on Indigenous agency that, while downplaying the large sector of mestizo participants, Mexican anarchists chose to highlight the inequity between the country's populace, the Díaz regime, and capitalist reformists such as Francisco I. Madero. From the republished articles from *Regeneración* and guest editorials from PLM leaders, Spanish readers formulated a specific viewpoint of the Mexican Revolution—one that emphasized the racial and class tensions emanating from the country's most marginalized sectors.

The depiction of the Mexican Revolution as an explicitly Indigenous struggle was not only projected by Mexican anarchists, but by Spaniards as well. In articles published by *Tierra y Libertad*, anarchist organizers called on the Spanish working-class to extend their solidarity toward Mexico's Indigenous masses. One article explicitly encouraged Spaniards not just to support the anarchist

⁴⁹ For more on Indigenous participation in PLM insurrections, see: Roger C. Owen, "Indians and Revolution: The 1911 Revolution of Baja California, Mexico," *Ethnohistory* 10, no. 4 (1963): 373-395; Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working-Class*, 93; Javier Torres Pares, *La revolución sin frontera: El Partido Liberal Mexicano y las relaciones entre el movimiento obrero de México y el de Estados Unidos, 1900-1923* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional de Autónoma de México, 1990), 58-59; Juan Carlos Beas, Manuel Ballesteros and Benjamín Maldonado, *Magonismo y movimiento indígena en México* (Oaxaca: H. Ayuntamiento Constitucional de San Antonio Eloxochitlán, 1997); Karl B. Roth, *Waking the Dictator: Veracruz, the Struggle for Federalism, and the Mexican Revolution, 1870-1927* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2002), 41-77; Heather Fowler-Salamini, "Haciendas, Ranchos, and Indian Communities: New Perspectives on the Agrarian question and Popular Rebellion in Veracruz," *Uliá: Revista de Historia, Sociedad, y Cultura* 1, no. 2 (2003): 202-246; Francie R. Chassen de López, *From Liberal to Revolutionary Oaxaca: The View from the South, Mexico 1867-1911* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 459-493; Devra Anne Weber, "'Different Pasts': Indigenous Pasts, the Partido Liberal Mexicano, and Questions about Reframing Binational Social Movements of the Twentieth Century," *Social Justice* 42, no. 3/4 (2015): 10-28; Justin Akers Chacón, *Radicals in the Barrio: Magonistas, Socialists, Wobblies, and Communists in the Mexican American Working Class* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018), 143-147.

⁵⁰ Marco Antonio Samaniego López, "'...El magonismo no exist': Ricardo Flores Magón," *Estudios de Historia Moderna y contemporánea de México* 49 (2015): 45.

factions of the PLM, but the broader struggle of Indigenous communities to achieve racial and economic emancipation:

The soul of the Mexican Revolution is pure. It is the resurgence of the Indian race that will destroy the tyrannical vestiges of the false civilization, giving anarchists the opportunity to implant the philosophical ideal of complete human freedom. And we, instead of criticizing these struggles, encourage them, and we will help them with our efforts, as we see in this movement a principle of open struggle against everything that exists, where everything legal, everything sacred, and everything established will be destroyed and denied.⁵¹

Spanish anarchists' praise for Latin American revolutionary movements was not a new phenomenon. During the War of Cuban Independence and the "Disaster" of 1898, Spanish anarchists adamantly opposed the conscription of working-class people to fight on behalf of the Spanish Empire. The anarchist militant Vicente García published articles equating the revolutionary violence of Cuban nationalists to Spaniards' struggle against the Spanish state.⁵² García would go on to condemn the imprisonment of Mexican anarchist dissidents by the Díaz regime and U.S. authorities. In one article, García asked his readers: "Knowing these infamies, I ask, 'Why is it that people are so cowardly and do not rebel against so much infamy?' But right away, I immediately add: Can the Spaniard throw the first stone?"⁵³ For Vicente García, anarchists' support for national liberation movements did not infer support for republicanism or the nation-state, but a concerted effort to affirm the will of oppressed people to eradicate despotic regimes.⁵⁴

Spanish Popular Perceptions of Mexican Society

Although ties with Latin American anarchists and radical Spanish immigrants helped many in Spain to contextualize the Mexican Revolution, Mexico and its social upheaval remained elusive to

⁵¹ J. Vidal, "El alma de la revolución mejicana," *Tierra y Libertad* (Barcelona), May 21, 1913.

⁵² Yeoman, *Print Culture and the Formation of the Spanish Anarchist Press*, 98-99.

⁵³ Vicente García, "Fornaro," *Tierra y Libertad* (Barcelona), November 16, 1910.

⁵⁴ Vicente García, "Esas repúblicas," *Tierra y Libertad* (Barcelona), August 3, 1910.

large sectors of Spanish society, including many who later found asylum there. While many were aware of the ongoing Revolution, Spaniards' understanding of the country's spatial, social, and cultural nuances remained largely unclear due to the lack of popular knowledge regarding Spain's former Latin American colonies. The fact that many of the participants of the Spanish Civil War were children during the Revolution's most tumultuous years also played a factor in their unfamiliarity with the country and its people. Rómulo García Salcedo, a communist party member from Valencia, was seventeen years old when he read about of the Mexican Revolution in literary and art publications like *Blanco y Negro* and *La Esfera*. He recalled being exposed to Mexico's political climate, although he only vaguely comprehended the history and culture of the country. Decades later, he jokingly reflected that upon arriving to Mexico, he presumed that he and other exiles may be relocated to Texas, seemingly unaware that Texas had seceded from Mexico over a hundred years earlier. More than any specific aspect of the Revolution, he retained memories of the "picturesque" Mexican countryside and depictions of desolate ranches and cowboy shootouts from films.⁵⁵ For many Spaniards, Mexican society was largely defined by depictions made in popular media. Details pertaining to the nation's citizens, history, and its independence struggle, however, remained largely unexamined or understood. Such specificities often became more refined as Spanish youth became increasingly more politically active during the Second Republic.

Anarchists were not the only ones to establish connections to the Mexican Revolution. Other refugees recalled specific instances of the Revolution through their interactions with former participants that had returned to Spain. Lino Sánchez Portela, a communist from Salamanca, first read about Mexico from the *Ilustración Hispanoamericana* when he was a child. His understand of the country's history was developed further when in 1934 after he moved to Asturias to assist a socialist

⁵⁵ INAH-DEH, Interview with Rómulo García Salcedo, conducted by Dolores Pla Brugat (1980), PHO/10/56, 44-45.

physician in opening a medical clinic. In his discussions with the doctor, Sánchez Portela discovered that the doctor spent three years fighting alongside Pancho Villa in the Mexican states of Chihuahua and Torreón.⁵⁶ Unbeknownst to him, Sánchez Portela's awareness of Mexico and its Revolution helped him acclimate to the country that he found himself exiled to just five years later.

Others were exposed to the Revolution by interactions with Mexican revolutionaries seeking to recruit Spaniards to join the social revolution. During the years of the armed insurgency in Mexico, a delegation of Zapatista fighters travelled to Spain to recruit Spanish anarchists to migrate to Mexico and join the Revolution. José Gené, a Catalan anarchist in his mid-twenties at the time of the delegation's arrival, attended a meeting organized for campesinos by the Amigos de México in Sabadell. Born to illiterate campesinos on the outskirts of Barcelona, Gené became an avid reader of republican, socialist, and anarchist literature while a student at the Ateneo Igualadino de la Clase Obrera (Igualadino Atheneum of the Working Class). Following a brief stint as a member of the Partido Federalista (Federalist Party) during his late teens, Gené eventually became an anarchist and even subscribed to the Mexican anarchist newspaper, *Regeneración*.⁵⁷ After listening to the Zapatista delegates lecture on the nature of the Revolution and their conflicts with the Constitutionalists, Gené spoke to the visitors about Ricardo Flores Magón and Mexican radicalism. The prospect of moving to Mexico and joining the struggle attracted Gené and other campesinos. Although Gené recalled a great enthusiasm among his fellow campesinos regarding the prospects of traveling to Mexico, travel restrictions initiated due to the outbreak of the First World War made transoceanic immigration difficult for those with few economic resources.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ INAH-DEH, Interview with Lino Sánchez Portela, conducted by Elena Aub (1979), PHO/10/ESP 6, 8.

⁵⁷ Interview with José Gené, conducted by Concepción Ruíz-Funes (1979), INAH-DEH, PHO/10/11, 1-6.

⁵⁸ Interview with José Gené, 18-22, 210-213.

While many of the refugees that eventually migrated to Mexico in the late 1930s and early 1940s knew little about the receiving nation's history and its recent social revolution prior, those that came from more radical tendencies of the Spanish republican movement learned of Mexico's ongoing social revolution through public demonstrations, newspaper articles, and the testimonies of Spaniards and Mexicans on their experiences in Mexico. For those engaged in radical politics prior to the establishment of the Second Spanish Republic in 1931, news of the Mexican Revolution was a prominent fixture in radical publications throughout the country. Articles, essays, poems, and songs written by Flores Magón and other PLM members were regularly republished in Spanish anarchist newspapers such as *Escuela Moderna* (Valencia), *Solidaridad Obrera* (Barcelona) and *Tierra y Libertad* (Madrid).⁵⁹ Not only did these publications provide first-hand assessments of the ebbs and flows of the most radical sectors of the Revolution, they educated readers of various anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian struggles throughout the world. Such encounters, as remote as they may have been from the day-to-day circumstances of the Revolution, were essential to formulating a radical vision of global politics and struggle.

Despite these early transatlantic connections, Spanish immigration declined significantly during the late 1920s and early 1930s and, as a result, so too did direct contacts between the two countries' anarchist movements. Spanish immigration to Mexico, which already paled in comparison to Spanish migration to other nations in the hemisphere, never rebounded to its Porfirian peak. In fact, the native Spanish-born population shrank. Between the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution and the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas in 1934 there were three major waves of Spanish repatriation. The first occurred following the violent purge of Spanish businessmen and landowners

⁵⁹ Archivo Magón maintains a digital catalog of international newspapers that republished texts written by Ricardo Flores Magón and other members of the PLM. See: "Prensa Española," Archivo Magón, accessed May 24, 2021. <http://archivomagon.net/prensa-espanola/>.

(1914-1917), the second due to the economic and political instability of the Calles presidency (1926-1928), and lastly, as a result of the economic reverberations of the Great Depression in the early 1930s.⁶⁰

Still, even during times of limited interaction, certain political bonds continued to be maintained. In 1925, a group of anarchist exiles affiliated with Los Solidarios (Solidarity), an armed resistance group that emerged in response to the repression of the Spanish anarchist movement during the Primo de Rivera dictatorship (1923-1930), spent time in exile throughout Latin America. During the group's stay in Mexico, Buenaventura Durruti and Francisco Ascaso, two of the most prominent Spanish anarchists of the early twentieth century, sought refuge with organizers from the Confederación General de Trabajadores (General Confederation of Workers, CGT), an anarchist trade union confederation affiliated with the Asociación Internacional de Trabajadores (International Association of Workers, AIT). Upon learning that the CGT lacked financial resources, the Spaniards robbed a Mexico City factory to fund the union's fledgling newspaper and to assist in the establishment of rationalist schools for the union's workers and their children.⁶¹ For Mexican anarchists, the repression of Spanish anarchists prior to the Civil War reflected their own experiences under the Díaz regime and the post-dictatorial administrations of Constitutionalist leaders.⁶² The feeling was mutual and the Solidarios recalled their time in Mexico when responding to the repression of anarchists during the Second Spanish Republic. Following the massacre of CNT members and their families at Casas Viejas in January 1933, Francisco Ascaso wrote an article

⁶⁰ Yankelevich, *¿Deseables o inconvenientes?*, 157-158.

⁶¹ José C. Valades, *Memorias de un joven rebelde: 2a parte* (México: Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa, 1986), 177; Paz, *Durruti in the Spanish Revolution*, 73-75.

⁶² For more on anarchist repression in Spain prior to the Civil War, see: Diego Abad de Santillán, *De Alfonso XIII a Franco: Apuntes de la historia de la España moderna* (Buenos Aires: Tipográfica Editora Argentina, 1974); Robert W. Kern, *Red Years, Black Years: A Political History of Spanish Anarchism* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978), 64-88.

condemning the head of the Assault Guards, Captain Manuel Rojas, for the atrocity.⁶³ In it, Ascaso compared Rojas's behavior to the one's depicted in a mural he saw in Mexico of the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés torturing Aztec nobles for no purpose but to terrorize them. In conclusion, he warned Rojas that his future would follow the tale of "La Noche Triste" or "The Sad Night," which depicts Cortés weeping under a tree in Tacuba after his army had been decimated by the resistance led by Aztec Emperor Cuitláhuac. Ascaso proclaimed, "Hernán Cortés found a tree to hear his cries in Tacuba. If some day you feel the need to cry, look for a tree, Captain, because the men will not hear you."⁶⁴ That Ascaso conjured Indigenous resistance to the Spanish Conquest further attested to Spanish anarchists' strong association to the suffering of Mexican people. Such affective parallels not only served a rhetorical purpose but also formulated an internationalist worldview that rejected racial and class hierarchies through an anti-imperialist vision of extant and future bonds.

Conclusion

The interactions and collaborations between Mexican and Spanish radicals prior to the Spanish Civil War established the precedent for subsequent encounters between the two countries' radical movements. Unlike their affluent compatriots that also came across the Atlantic, Spanish radicals integrated themselves into the struggles of the Mexican working class and peasantry as accomplices in global struggle against capital and the state. In this vein, Mexican revolutionaries and their constituencies formed intimate relations to Spaniards through the day-to-day labor of forming a transnational identity and consciousness. Whether it be in the newspapers they read, the lectures

⁶³ Mintz, *The Anarchists of Casas Viejas*; Tano Ramos, *El caso Casas Viejas: Crónica de una insidia, 1933-1936* (Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, 2012).

⁶⁴ Francisco Ascaso, "Colaboración, ¡Ni aunque no manden, capitán!" *Solidaridad Obrera* (Barcelona), March 3, 1933.

they attended, the picket lines they formed, or the funds they contributed, Mexican collaborations with Spanish radicals established a kinship as much rooted in political ideals as shared cultural linkages. In Spain, revolutionaries looked to Mexico as a model for their own future revolution, one forged by the peasantry and workers and in defiance of centuries of inequality. However, these transnational communitarian traditions directly contradicted the post-Díaz aspirations for immigrants, the citizenry, and the nation. Subsequently, as Spanish radicals formed alliances with Mexico's laboring classes throughout the duration of the Revolution, the burgeoning revolutionary state apparatus sought to counteract such bonds through repression and deportation.

CHAPTER TWO

Racial Regimes and Exile in Revolutionary Mexico

In the summer of 1939, General Antolín Piña Soría published a series of essays in defense of Mexico's decision to grant political asylum to refugees fleeing the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). In the months following the initiative's announcement, critics emanating mostly from the country's upper echelons had published a series public attacks against the policy in newspaper editorials. Far right-wing political organizations rallied in the streets to oppose the exiles' imminent threat to the country's social, political, and biological fabric. Both deployed anti-communist rhetoric and paternalistic declarations of protecting the country's "humble Indians" to charge the government's protection of "Spanish reds" as an implicit attack on the Mexican "race." Rejecting such claims, Piña Soría, a loyal follower of Cárdenas, expressed his support for the president's humanitarian efforts while directly addressing the racial anxieties expressed by those opposed to them:

The refugee should be perceived as a brother, which is not difficult to envision since Mexican *mestizaje* has the antecedent of Spanish blood. We speak the same language, and in general terms, we have the same beliefs, the same customs, and the same ideals. There is no reason to establish distinctions between us. Therefore, the ideal is parity, balance, and proportionality.¹

As part of the Cárdenas administration's incorporation of workers, campesinos, and Indigenous peoples into the growing apparatus of the ruling state, the government upheld policies and practices that prioritized state intervention to resolve social and cultural inequalities. For the president's supporters, the revolutionary nationalist rhetoric of *mestizaje*—racial mixing between Indigenous and Spanish peoples—reconciled concerns regarding the Spanish exiles' impact on Mexican society. As proponents of the refugee initiative claimed, the European refugees' successful assimilation into Mexican society would come as a result of their gradual interweaving into the country's ethnic and cultural milieu. Once Spaniards mixed with Indigenous and mestizo citizens, the sociological and

¹ Antolín Piña Soría, *El presidente Cárdenas y la inmigración de españoles republicanos* (México, D.F.: Impreso en Multigrafos S.C.O.P., 1939), 61.

biological mechanisms of *mexicanidad* (Mexicanness) would resolve any threat the Spanish émigrés may pose as a distinct social and racial entity. This logic stemmed from the Cárdenas government's assertions that Spanish republicans maintained similar aspirations and worldviews as that of the Mexican working-class. Their incorporation into rural, Indigenous communities, the state proposed, contributed to the advancement of *mestizaje* and the reconciliation of the country's "Indian problem."²

For opponents to the policy, the ideological tendencies of the exiled "Spanish reds" embodied yet another attempt by the Cárdenas government to impose radical reforms upon a society still firmly rooted in Hispanic traditions and customs. Rather than upholding the Catholic faith and reverence for Spain as the *madre patria* (mother country) of Mexico, the exiles embodied a direct affront to the social and cultural bonds that historical linked to the two nations. The question for both factions was not if Spanish immigration in and of itself posed an existential threat to Mexican society but rather how the ideological tendencies of émigrés enhanced or hindered two competing worldviews regarding race, class, and national identity in revolutionary Mexico.

This chapter examines the changes in Mexican state policies toward Spanish immigrants from the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution until the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939. As one of the most financially and politically prominent immigrant groups in Mexico, the attitudes of the Spanish colony, as it was known, have been characterized as one of the primary antagonisms for

² For other such erasures in Spain and other Latin American nations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see: Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* (London: Pluto Press, 1997); Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Joshua Goode, *The Impurity of Blood: Defining Race in Spain, 1870-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009); Paulo Drinot, *The Allure of Labor: Workers, Race, and the Making of the Peruvian State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Devyn Spence Benson, *Antiracism in Cuba: The Unfinished Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Lorgia García Peña, *The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nation, and Archives of Contradictions* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Yankelevich, *Los otros*.

many communities leading up to the Mexican Revolution (1906-1940).³ Yet as recent scholarship suggests, the social and political loyalties of émigrés prior to the Spanish Civil War informed the Mexican state's qualifications as to which ethnic groups constituted a desirable immigrant population.⁴ The prestige of the Spanish colony in Mexico also played into the state's vision of *mestizaje* as a revolutionary nationalist project. In their promotion of social and economic modernization, state officials distinguished Spaniards from other foreigners as the most preferable immigrant group for racial miscegenation. Foreign colonization initiatives were in turn informed by the purported linguistic, cultural, and "spiritual" ties between Mexicans and Spaniards—bonds that emerged paradoxically, according to both supporters and opponents of Spanish immigration, as a result of Spain's centuries-long colonial rule over Mexico.

By tracing the trajectory of Mexico's policies regarding voluntary and involuntary immigration, this chapter situates the Cárdenas refugee relocation initiative as an integral aspect of the administration's racial regime. I define racial regimes as the structural deployment of language, practices, and ideas by nation-states to construct a sense of collective racial identity for citizens and non-citizens alike. Racial regimes represent the temporal articulation of state power within a racialized capitalist and liberal society. Like in other parts of Latin America during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, constructions of race in Mexico were intimately tied to

³ Tomás Pérez Vejo, "La conspiración gachupina en 'El Hijo del Ahuizote,'" *Historia Mexicana* 54, no. 5 (2005): 1105-1153; Alicia Gil Lázaro, "Hispanofobia en el norte de México durante la revolución Mexicana," in *Xenofobia y xenofilia en la historia de México: Siglos XIX y XX: Homenaje a Moisés González-Navarro*, ed. Delia Salazar Anaya (México, D.F.: INAH, 2006), 105-133; Dolores Pla Brugat, "Ser español en México para bien y para mal," in *Xenofobia y xenofilia en la historia de México*, 135-158; Pablo Yankelevich, "Hispanofobia y revolución: Españoles expulsados de México, 1911-1940," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 86, no. 1 (2006): 29-59.

⁴ Moreno Lázaro, "La otra España:" 109-156; Alicia Gil Lázaro, "La repatriación gratuita de inmigrantes españoles durante la revolución mexicana, 1910-1920," *Historia Mexicana* 60, no. 2 (2010): 1019-1075.

one's class position.⁵ Racial identities were not fixed solely on physiological or cultural characteristics, but also by the ways in which one's behaviors reflected those of a model citizen. As a result, ideology served as a critical marker of desirability. While Spaniards benefited from the Mexican elites' visions of Europeans as the most racially desirable immigrants, their political activities established equally important criteria from which they were scrutinized as contributors to their adopted society.

Both before and during Mexico's decades-long social revolution, state officials and intellectuals weighed the advantages and risks of foreign immigration on the basis on the émigrés' contribution to the state's racial and economic modernization efforts. Whereas other racial minorities were restricted entry into the country based on racialized notions of assimilability, Spaniards' political ideals informed notions of racial desirability as much as the color of their skin.⁶ Through an analysis of Mexican immigration policies toward radical Spanish émigrés in the early twentieth century, this chapter demonstrates how political ideology informed state notions of social degeneration, along with ancestral, psychological, and physiological attributes. I argue that the immigration policies and officials during the Cárdenas administration reinforced earlier concerns regarding the ideological proclivities of refugees fleeing the Spanish Civil War and how their interaction with Mexican citizens jeopardized the government's racial and economic modernization

⁵ Allen Wells, *Tropical Zion: General Trujillo, FDR, and the Jews of Sosúa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Drinot, *The Allure of Labor*; David Sartorius, *Ever Faithful: Race, Loyalty, and the Ends of Empire in Spanish Cuba* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Barbara Weinstein, *The Color of Modernity: São Paulo and the Making of Race and Nation in Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Paulo Fontes, *Migration and the Making of Industrial São Paulo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

⁶ For studies of other cases of immigration and racial discrimination in Mexico, see: Pablo Yankelevich, ed. *Inmigración y racismo: Contribuciones a la historia de los extranjeros en México* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 2015); Yankelevich, *¿Deseables o inconvenientes?*; Selfa A. Chew, *Uprooting Community: Japanese Americans, World War II, and the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015); Chang, *Chino*; Julian Lim, *Porous Borders: Multiracial Migrations and the Law in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Jerry García, *Looking like the Enemy: Japanese Mexicans, the Mexican State, and US Hegemony, 1897-1945* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018).

endeavors. As a result, Mexican and Spanish Republican officials excluded many of the most vulnerable refugees from receiving asylum and continued to monitor those granted exile as they integrated into Mexican society.

Spanish Immigration and the Origins of the Mexican Revolution

Prior to the Mexican Revolution, Spaniards embodied the nation's vision of foreign progenitors of economic and racial modernization. As part of the Land and Colonization Law of 1883, Spanish immigrants—along with U.S. American (particularly Mexican American), European, Chinese, and Guatemalan immigrants—were encouraged to voluntarily establish homesteads (*colonos*) in rural, unpopulated regions to solidify state borders as well as to modernize the country's agricultural production.⁷ Many of the initiatives ultimately failed, as most immigrants instead settled in urban and industrial centers where they became prominent merchants. Although the number of Spanish immigrants to Mexico never rose to the numbers of other Latin American countries, the population's ability to integrate into Mexican society endowed them a great deal of social and political clout.⁸ At the behest of Porfirio Díaz's technocratic advisors, the *científicos*, the 1908 Immigration Law relaxed customs restrictions to allure foreign investment for infrastructural development.⁹ The new law not only detailed the criteria for whom the Mexican government wished

⁷ For more on the immigration law and foreign colonization initiatives during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see: Moisés González Navarro, *La colonización en México, 1877-1910* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1960); Luis Aboites Aguilar, *Norte precario: Poblamiento y colonización en México, 1760-1940* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1995); José Angel Hernández, *Mexican American Colonization in Nineteenth-Century Mexico: A History of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Buchenau, "Small Numbers, Great Impact:" 23-49; Rebecca Janzen, *Liminal Sovereignty: Mennonites and Mormons in Mexican Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018).

⁸ According to David Scott FitzGerald and David Cook-Martín, 92% of all transoceanic migration from Europe to the Americas prior to World War II was destined for the United States, Argentina, Canada, Brazil, and Cuba. See: David Scott FitzGerald and David Cook-Martín, "Elegir a la población: Leyes de inmigración y racismo," in *Inmigración y racismo*, 35.

⁹ Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, Vol. 1, 21-23.

to bring into the country, but also whom it intended to restrict. Following an outbreak of the Bubonic Plague in 1903 that Mexican authorities attributed to Chinese and Japanese immigrants, the 1908 Immigration Law conflated the physiological conditions, ethics, and political affinities of immigrants as markers of racial inferiority. Included among those restricted from entering the country were individuals with physical and mental disabilities, the elderly, beggars, prostitutes, and anarchists. Nidia Cisneros Chávez notes that the 1908 law attempted to “monitor the borders for foreigners that endangered Mexican society in terms of health, work, morality, and who threaten the stability of the state, as in the case of anarchists.”¹⁰ Unlike physiological characteristics, political ideologies were less detectable, granting émigrés with radical political views some leeway in evading immigration officials. However, as will be discussed below, immigrants that openly espoused their political beliefs were subject to reprisal and deportation.

Mexico’s Revolutionary Nationalist Projects: *Mestizaje* and Immigration, 1906-1936

Despite Spanish immigrants’ participation in various political factions, Spanish anarchist émigrés were regularly characterized as threats to national security and order by revolutionary administrations. Both before and after the removal of Díaz in 1911, deportation was used as a mechanism to stifle Spanish immigrants’ participation in organized labor and revolutionary political movements. This technique proved particularly effective in Mexico City and the Huasteca region, where most Spanish immigrants lived and labored.¹¹ Andrés Sanz Coy, for example, was deported in 1906 by the Díaz regime for his participation in the Partido Liberal Mexicano and was refused

¹⁰ Nidia Cisneros Chávez, “El Departamento de Migración. Usos del control social de extranjeros en México,” *Antropología. Boletín Oficial del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia* no. 101 (2016): 40.

¹¹ Jonathan C. Brown, *Oil and Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 353-354; Daniela Spenser, *Stumbling Its Way Through Mexico: The Early Years of the Communist International* (Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 2011), 99-107; Santiago, *Ecology of Oil*, 244; Victor I. Jifets and Jaime Irving Reynoso, “Del Frente Unico a clase contra clase: comunistas y agraristas en el México posrevolucionario, 1919-1930,” *Revista Izquierdas* no. 19 (2014): 36.

reentry into the country in 1912 under the administration of President Francisco I. Madero due to his ties with the Flores Magón brothers, and for being a “propagator of socialistic ideas.” Madero also expelled Robustiano Rueda and Liborio Badillo, both of whom were accused of “trafficking the sale of arms to foment disturbances in the Republic.”¹² Similar claims were used against labor organizers as well. Under the regime of Victoriano Huerta, Spanish labor organizers affiliated with the Casa del Obrero Mundial were expelled in May 1913, accused by the government of being “assiduous propagandists” that aspired to destroy all that signified “order, government, and property.”¹³

Deportation was used not only to depose of radical émigrés, but also Spanish immigrants seen as social and economic threats to the newly established Constitutionalist government. Following the enactment of Article 33 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution, immigration officials deported 32% of Spanish immigrants due to their “exalted positions in economic and cultural life.”¹⁴ While some deportees were accused of economic speculation and labor grievances, others were charged with behaviors associated to social delinquency, including theft, scams, vagrancy, prostitution, as well as human and drug trafficking.¹⁵ Spanish anarchist and leftist émigrés made up a sizeable portion of deportations, although the vast majority of Spaniards were deported to appease regional elites and middle-class entrepreneurs that saw European immigrants as a threat to their claims to power. The process of state consolidation therefore aimed at the elimination of potential foreign socioeconomic competitors that advanced Spanish export markets as well as those wishing to overthrow capitalism altogether. Such policies remained in place throughout the 1920s and 1930s

¹² Pablo Yankelevich, “El artículo 33 constitucional y las reivindicaciones sociales en el México posrevolucionario,” in *Xenofobia y xenofilia en la historia de México*, 368-369.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Jürgen Buchenau, “The Limits of the Cosmic Race: Immigrant and Nation in Mexico,” in *Immigration and National Identities in Latin America*, eds. Nicola Foote and Michael Goebel (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2014), 81.

¹⁵ Yankelevich, “Hispanofobia y revolución,” 33.

as the post-revolutionary state apparatus attempted to solidify its control. Though no official policies restricted Spaniards from emigrating to Mexico, the political and economic turmoil of the early twentieth century forced many to return to Spain or to seek refuge in neighboring Latin American countries.

As part of the consolidation of state power by Constitutionalist forces and the creation of the Constitution in 1917, revolutionary-era administrations emphasized race, land, and labor as the bedrock of active citizenship and prospective immigration. Government initiatives such as agrarian reform, arbitration of labor disputes, and the expansion of “socialist” public education became emblems of “revolutionary citizenship” as defined, quite paradoxically, by some of the most conservative factions of the Mexican Revolution.¹⁶ New immigration policies were also enacted as a means to regulate the entry of foreigners and to define who constituted a desirable émigré within the country’s new revolutionary context. Yet much like the immigration and colonization laws enacted under the Díaz regime, the policies of the revolutionary-era administrations used physiological, ethical, and ideological attributes as desiderata for admission and reaffirmed racialist constructs of desirability. Western European immigration, although far less common when compared to Mexican American repatriation and Central American immigration, was preferred based on Europeans presumed financial and technical resources. Other racial groups—such as African Americans, Asians, Middle Easterners, and Eastern Europeans—were summarily prohibited based on their alleged inability to assimilate racially within the state’s vision of *mestizaje*.¹⁷ Spaniards, in contrast,

¹⁶ For more on the reforms of the Mexican Revolution, see: Joseph M. Gilbert and Daniel Nugent, eds. *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Kevin Middlebrook, *The Paradox of the Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995); Mary Kay Vaughn, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997); Sarah Osten, *The Revolution’s Wake: The Making of a Political System, 1920-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Baitenmann, *Matters of Justice*.

¹⁷ Yankelevich, *Los otros*, 37.

benefited from what was characterized as the “spiritual” connection with Mexican society and people, which made them the most desirable of all prospective immigrants.¹⁸

Unlike Latin American nations that implemented settler colonial initiatives to Europeanize the population, Mexico’s immigration policies did not seek to whiten the nation based on sharp demographic shifts. Rather, it sought to sustain and proliferate the nation’s mestizo pigmentocracy.¹⁹ Defying the scientific racism instantiated by settler immigration initiatives throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Mexican intellectuals and statesmen argued that racial inequality was not a consequence of Indigenous peoples’ biological inferiority to Europeans, as eugenicists claimed, but rather a result of centuries of social degeneration dating back to colonial times.²⁰ To rectify such social inequities, state initiatives promoted the social, economic, and cultural “advancement” of Indigenous peoples through their incorporation into the mestizo nation.²¹ José Vasconcelos, the head of the Secretary of Public Education during the 1920s and mid-1930s, promoted “constructive miscegenation” to foster a collective cultural and biological identity within Mexico.²² In practice, however, the construction of Mexico’s racial regime was predicated on what Tomás Pérez Vejo has referred to as “internal and external foreigners,” which characterized

¹⁸ Nancy Leys Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 148-149; Rodolfo Stavenhagen, “El indigenismo mexicano: Gestación y ocaso de un proyecto nacional,” in *Raza y política en Hispanoamérica*, eds. Tomás Pérez Vejo and Pablo Yankelevich (Ciudad de México: Bonilla Artigas Editores, 2017), 220.

¹⁹ Carl E. Solberg, *Immigration and Nationalism, Argentina and Chile, 1890-1914* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1970); Sandra McGee Deutsch, “Insecure Whiteness: Jews between Civilization and Barbarism, 1880s-1940s,” in *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina*, eds. Paulina L. Alberto and Eduardo Elena (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 25-52; Mariela Eva Rodríguez, “‘Invisible Indians,’ ‘Degenerate Descendants’: Idiosyncrasies of Mestizaje in Southern Patagonia,” in *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina*, 126-154; Peter Wade, *Degrees of Mixture, Degrees of Freedom: Genomics, Multiculturalism, and Race in Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 200.

²⁰ Rebecca Earle, *The Return of the Native: Indians and Myth-Making in Spanish America, 1810-1930* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 169-183.

²¹ Guillermo Palacios, *La pluma y el arado. Los intelectuales pedagogos y la construcción sociocultural del “problema campesina” en México, 1932-1934* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1999; Earle, *The Return of the Native*, 184-212.

²² Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*, 147.

Indigenous people as a social body that, much like other immigrant communities, needed to enact a repertoire of behaviors and beliefs that reaffirmed mestizo identities, regardless of their biological or racial origins.²³ Native people were therefore expected to shed away characteristics seen as “Indigenous” and to adopt a solidly mestizo identity to conform to the state’s definition of revolutionary citizenship. As a result, revolutionary-era administrations propagated anti-Indigenous polemics while also praising the potential benefits of foreign, predominantly European, migration on Mexico’s mestizo identity. Anthropologist Manuel Gamio suggested that, above all others, Spaniards represented the most likely European immigrant group to assimilate into Mexican customs and practices.²⁴ He claimed that Spaniards were more likely than other European groups to intermix outside their class and race and were thus more assimilable than other national and ethnic groups. Neither Mexican immigration policies nor *indigenista* proponents intended for European settlers to outnumber rural Indigenous populations, an effort that would have been impossible anyway given that Indigenous people constituted a near majority of the country’s population. Rather, they encouraged European assimilation through gradual racial intermixing.²⁵ While some Mexican intellectuals encouraged European immigration as a means to rejuvenate the Mexican race, their efforts to encourage widescale European immigration to Mexico never came to fruition.²⁶ Nevertheless, officials continued to invoke the criteria detailed in Mexican immigration law as the foundation of the state’s broader racial and economic initiatives.

The lack of foreign immigration during the 1920s and 1930s led to the formation of new

²³ Tomás Pérez Vejo, “Extranjeros interiores y exteriores: La raza en la construcción nacional mexicana,” in *Inmigración y racismo*, 89-124.

²⁴ Manuel Gamio, *Forjando patria: Pro-nacionalismo* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2010), 142-143.

²⁵ Yankelevich, *¿Deseables o inconvenientes?*, 33-34; Karin Roseblatt, *The Science and Politics of Race in Mexico and the United States, 1910-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 37-42.

²⁶ Buchenau, “Small Numbers, Great Impact,” 24-31; Roseblatt, *The Science and Politics of Race in Mexico and the United States*, 54.

initiatives to sustain the state's vision of racial and economic development. Under Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas (r. 1934-1940) state policy shifted its efforts to assimilate rural Indigenous and poor mestizo communities into the nation's broader reform projects. In a 1937 interview with *El Nacional* subeditor Raúl Noriega, Cárdenas detailed a new government policy to rectify Mexico's "Indigenous Problem." Framing his comments in the *indigenista* politics of the day, Cárdenas renounced efforts to populate the countryside with foreigners and instead promoted new practices to uplift Indigenous populations through the state's education initiatives and civic projects, "leaving the formation of mestizaje to the free will of sociological conditions."²⁷ The shift in state policy reflected the influence of Mexican economist Gilberto Loyo, whose 1935 study of national demographics suggested that efforts to attract foreign immigrants, especially those from Spain, would only be achieved following the social and economic advancement of the country's most marginalized populations. In doing so, Loyo claimed, Mexico's abundant resources and fertile lands would be as attractive to prospective immigrants as those available in "modern" Western countries.²⁸ As a result, the Cárdenas government used schools, art, tourism, and monuments to promote the revolutionary nationalist visions of *mestizaje* to the nation's Indigenous populations.²⁹

No greater initiative sought to bring Indigenous populations into the national fold as much as Cárdenas's vast expansion of national agrarian reform initiatives and the institutionalization of the ejidal bank, which granted access to over forty-four million acres of land to rural inhabitants.³⁰ As top-down initiatives, these efforts sought to make campesinos legible to the state through the

²⁷ Lázaro Cárdenas, *El problema indígena de México* (México, D.F.: Departamento de Asuntos Indígenas, 1940), 5.

²⁸ Gilberto Loyo, *La política demográfica de México* (México, D.F.: Secretaría de Prensa y Propaganda, 1935), 372-373.

²⁹ Vaughn, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*; Jennifer Jolly, *Creating Pátzcuaro, Creating Mexico: Art, Tourism, and Nation Building under Lázaro Cárdenas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

³⁰ Alexander W. Dawson, *Indian and Nation in Revolutionary Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004); Earle, *The Return of the Native, 189-190*; Jesús Méndez Reyes, *Capitalizar el campo. Financiamiento y organización rural en México* (Ciudad de México: El Colegio de México, 2017), 151-193.

accrue ment of debt for agricultural machinery and other farming necessities.³¹ Demographic policies prior to the Cárdenas administration did not aspire to incorporate Indigenous customs and practices into the fold of Mexican national identity, but instead, as Pablo Yankelevich argues, enforced a state-building logic affirming that “to govern is to *desindianizar*” (literally, to “de-Indianize”).³² The passing of the 1936 Ley General de Población discursively shifted the state’s focus away from the eradication of indigeneity, it promoted the equally problematic practice of Mexicanization. In particular, the law promoted “ethnic fusion” through the integration of Indigenous groups’ into state-controlled economic and political institutions to improve their “physical, economic, and social contribution” to the Mexican nation.³³ Far from the “free will of sociological conditions,” the 1936 law and other *cardenista* reforms firmly placed the state at the helm of instilling a mestizo national identity upon a population that was characterized as incapable of uplifting itself from social disarray.

Lázaro Cárdenas, the Spanish Civil War, and the Prospects of Foreign Colonization

Beyond the purview of the Cárdenas government, the specter of civil war in Spain reinvigorated interest in foreign colonization as part of Mexico’s revolutionary project. Following the military coup led by General Francisco Franco in July 1936, Mexico extended its support to the Second Spanish Republic as well as the revolutionary factions affiliated with the Spanish Popular Front. With the exception of the Soviet Union, Mexico was the only government to provide financial and material support to the Spanish Republic. Mexican support for both state actors and revolutionary movements differed from that of the Russians. The Soviet Union focused its energies on financially and militarily supporting republican and socialist elements in the Spanish republican

³¹ Nicole Mottier, “The Origins of Mexico’s Banco Nacional de Crédito Ejidal, in Thought and Practice,” *Agricultural History* 93, no. 2 (2019): 288-310.

³² Yankelevich, *Los otros*, 47.

³³ “Ley General de Población,” *Diario Oficial de la Federación* (August 29, 1936), 1. Also cited in Yankelevich, *Los otros*, 48, 55.

government and the Partido Comunista de España (Communist Party of Spain, PCE), accompanied the active repression of revolutionary movements, most specifically Spanish anarchists, anti-Stalinist leftists, and factions of the International Brigades.³⁴ By the fall of 1938, the imminent collapse of the Second Spanish Republic motivated Mexican officials to create formal legal procedures permitting the relocation of political refugees fleeing the Civil War.

The prospects of incorporating thousands of Spanish political refugees into Mexican society reignited earlier modernization initiatives that prioritized the integration of immigrants through what Pablo Yankelevich has referred to as “agrarian colonialism.”³⁵ During the Porfiriato, dozens of colonies were established throughout the country in an effort to stimulate immigration to Mexico, to populate regions along the borders of Guatemala and the United States for agricultural industrialization, and to encourage racial intermixing between foreigners and local Indigenous communities. Most of these initiatives, largely developed without the knowledge or input of local communities, failed to achieve their intended goals. The Italian colonies of Nueva Italia and Lombardía in Michoacán, for instance, initially prospered in rice production, but fell into conflict with local campesinos that fought to maintain their subsistence plots for much of the early twentieth century.³⁶ Campesinos in the northern state of Chihuahua similarly protested the Mexican government’s decision to provide Mennonites the rights to lands they had been squatting on since throughout the armed stage of the Mexican Revolution.³⁷ While preference was mostly given to Europe émigrés, Japanese immigrants were also encouraged to establish colonies due to their

³⁴ Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

³⁵ Pablo Yankelevich, “Mexico for the Mexicans: Immigration, National Sovereignty, and the Promotion of Mestizaje,” *The Americas* 63, no. 3 (2012): 408.

³⁶ Ilia Alvarado and Pedro S. Urquijo, “La ‘espantosa odisea’ italiana en la Hacienda Lombardía. Una fuente documental sobre las Haciendas Cusi en Tierra Caliente de Michoacán, 1914,” *Tzintzun: Revista de Estudios Históricos* no. 67 (2018): 274-297.

³⁷ Martha E. Will, “The Mennonite Colonization of Chihuahua: Reflections of Competing Visions,” *The Americas* 53, no. 3 (1997): 360.

nation's rapid modernization industrialization.³⁸ In 1897, Japanese immigrants established the Unamoto colony in the Soconusco of Chiapas with the intended purpose of contributing the region's coffee industry. While the colonization endeavor succeeded in establishing a permanent Japanese population in the region, it failed to produce profitable business ventures in part due to the colonists' unfamiliarity with the harvesting methods of the region and their lack of integration within existing coffee-producing communities.³⁹ What is more, the initiative also did not produce the intended integration of immigrant laborers through racial intermixing with local native communities. As a result of the racial animosities and class tensions that existed among both social groups, rural colonization efforts proved largely unsuccessful in fulfilling the state's aspirations to encourage economic and racial development.

Despite the failure of earlier attempts, the successful integration of small groups of Spaniards during the Spanish Civil War tested the waters of a large-scale migration endeavor. Throughout his tenure as president, Cárdenas established a precedent for granting Spaniards' asylum in response to Nationalist aerial bombardments of civilian populations. His administration funded the establishment of an orphanage for approximately 500 Spanish children, later known as the "Niños de Morelia," in his home state and political base of Michoacán in 1937.⁴⁰ The following year Mexico established La Casa de España, later renamed El Colegio de México, to employ exiled Spanish artists, writers, and academics.⁴¹ Later that same year, Cárdenas notified his Ambassador in Spain, Adalberto Tejeda, that Mexico planned to provide asylum for up to 60,000 Spaniards, regardless of their political affiliation. In an effort to curtail conservative protests against the refugee initiative, the

³⁸ García, *Looking Like the Enemy*, 18-19.

³⁹ Ibid., 24-26.

⁴⁰ Dolores Pla Brugat, *Los niños de Morelia: Un estudio sobre los primeros refugiados españoles en México* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1985).

⁴¹ Fagen, *Exiles and Citizens*, 27-30; Clara E. Lida, José Antonio Matesanz, and Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, eds. *La Casa de España y el Colegio de México: Memoria, 1938-2000* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 2000).

Cárdenas administration stressed Spaniards' prospective contribution to the modernization of national industries. Moreover, it deployed the rhetoric of *mestizaje*, emphasizing Spaniards' assimilability to Mexican society and culture, as well as the assumed benefits that could come with their intermixing with rural Indigenous populations.

The newspaper *El Nacional* responded to Interior Secretary Ignacio García Téllez's announcement from 8 April 1938 that President Cárdenas intended to provide political asylum for political refugees fleeing Spain, heralding the prospective benefits of Spanish immigration to the country's agrarian reforms. The editorial echoed García Téllez's statements supporting Spanish immigration, claiming that, upon arrival, Spaniards would exchange "the arms of combat for the instruments of farming" and "help our lands bear fruit, identifying with the productive effort of Mexican campesinos."⁴² Agricultural specialists and technicians were also encouraged to come to Mexico to teach at the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (National Polytechnic Institute, IPN) and other rural schools to assist students in "the progressive transformation of agriculture and industry." The principles of Cárdenas's gesture, the editorial claimed, demonstrated a continuation of Mexico's tradition of sheltering those persecuted for their political convictions. The gesture also correlated with national interests, "to enrich the human heritage of [Mexico's] nationality with assimilable elements that, far from establishing undesirable situations of economic competition, strengthen our labor force and serve to complement our productive forces and cultural values." The editorial further suggested that the proposed initiative could rectify the country's longstanding struggle against foreign economic exploitation: "Mexico's future does not need parasitic or competitive immigration...[but] healthy reinforcements of analogous social doctrine, knowledge, and experience." It concluded by arguing that Spaniards would represent the most desirable immigrant

⁴² Informa sobre declaraciones presidenciales relativas a la inmigración de españoles republicanos, (April 16, 1938), Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia-Comité Técnico de Ayuda a los Republicanos Españoles (hereafter BNAH-CTARE), Caja 213, Expediente 6449.

settlers if they intermixed with the country's Indigenous population.⁴³

With over a half million people displaced by the Spanish Civil War and with the prospects of receiving tens of thousands of these as political refugees in a short period of time, the act of admitting and relocating asylum seekers on a mass scale was an entirely new phenomenon for Mexico. Asylum seekers also faced a litany of bureaucratic obstacles before being formally permitted to relocate and settle in Mexico. To mitigate the various legal and financial obstacles that confronted asylum seekers, representatives from the recently deposed Spanish Republican government of Juan Negrín worked closely with the Cárdenas administration to navigate or to eliminate the bureaucratic red tape required for refugee resettlement. Gilberto Bosques, Mexico's General Consul in France, supported lifting of visa fees for exiles and requested that the Mexican Secretary of Foreign Relations, Eduardo Hay, exempt asylum seekers from paying the fee considering their lack of financial resources.⁴⁴ Beyond entry, the legal residency of the refugees posed an even greater hurdle for the Mexican and Spanish Republican governments. While approval of all asylum requests was at the discretion of Mexico's Secretary of the Interior, petitions to establish refugee settlements were to be handled by the country's various subdirectories of power, which included the Secretariat of Agriculture and Promotion, the Department of Labor, the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs, the Department of Immigration of the Secretariat of the Interior, and the Advisory Council of Population.⁴⁵ What is more, the 1917 Constitution restricted foreigners from owning land located near all sea and land borders, and required the Mexican state to approve other forms of property ownership. To complicate matters even further, federal funds could not be used to support the refugee initiative despite Mexico's material and financial support for republican forces in Spain.

⁴³ "Editorial: México, refugio de los leales de España," *El Nacional* (Mexico City), April 10, 1938.

⁴⁴ Asunto: Sobre bases para la entrada de españoles republicanos a México (February 21, 1939), Archivo Histórico - Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (hereafter AHSRE), "Exilio Español" (January 1939-August 1939), Expediente 44-11/513.2, 47/370.

⁴⁵ Gleizer, *Unwelcome Exiles*, 87-88.

As late as February 1939, Mexican officials were unable to provide an estimate on how many asylum seekers would be permitted entry.⁴⁶ By April 1, 1939, the Negrín government, which had relocated to Paris, established the Servicio de Evacuación de Refugiados Españoles (Spanish Refugees Evacuation Service, SERE) to coordinate the temporary settlement and relocation of displaced Spaniards in concentration camps located in Southern France, while a second entity based in Mexico, the Comité Técnico de Ayuda a los Republicanos Españoles (Technical Committee to Aid Spanish Republicans, CTARE), created in late June 1939, coordinated the resettlement projects in Mexico. The executive council of the SERE consisted of representatives from the Negrín government, as well as individual representatives from eleven political and labor representatives that comprised the Popular Front government.⁴⁷ As the SERE focused on documenting and interviewing prospective asylum recipients in France, the CTARE, led by the former head of the Universidad de Valencia, José Puché, assembled an apolitical body of technicians to coordinate with Mexican officials in finding suitable localities for prospective refugee settlements. Beginning in April 1939, Spanish authorities coordinated their endeavors with an intersectoral committee comprised of representatives from Mexico's Secretariats of the Interior, National Defense, Communications, Agriculture, Health, and the Agrarian Department. Despite these binational efforts, no coherent plan existed to facilitate the settlement of refugees. As CTARE coordinators were dispatched to every state in Mexico to determine the best sites for colonization, neither the Mexican government nor Spanish republican officials established a concrete process to settle the thousands of refugees entering the country.⁴⁸ The establishment of refugee settlements, as it turned out, depended on the goodwill of state governors and local representatives voluntarily to designate and distribute parcels

⁴⁶ Narciso Bassols to Diego Martínez Barrios (February 28, 1939), AHSRE, "Exilio Español" (January 1939-August 1939), 370. Patricia Fagen, *Exiles and Citizens*, 33.

⁴⁷ Abdón Mateos, "El gobierno Negrín en el exilio: El Servicio de Evacuación de Refugiados," *Historia del presente* no. 10 (2007): 144.

⁴⁸ Velázquez Hernández, *Empresas y finanzas del exilio*, 48.

of state-owned lands and property.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Cárdenas's support for protecting asylum seekers complemented the country's history of safeguarding individuals fleeing political persecution, a policy stipulated in the 1936 General Law of Population.⁵⁰

The Mexican government's adaptation of colonization laws for the benefit of Spanish refugees was not offered to other displaced European immigrants. Jewish refugees, for instance, faced insurmountable odds in receiving asylum or land from the Mexican government, despite Lázaro Cárdenas's support for their relocation.⁵¹ To incentivize the initiative, state officials suggested that lands could be sold to Jewish refugees for one hundred times their market price, thus making the financial benefit outweigh the alleged negative repercussions of providing the group refuge.⁵² On October 26, 1939, Secretary of Foreign Relations Eduardo Hay wrote to Interior Secretary García Téllez to oppose the initiative, citing recent failed attempts to establish settlements for foreigners in other parts of Latin America. Hay specifically referred to the colonization history of German immigrants in São Paulo, Brazil, who refused to assimilate and even attempted to establish a separate republic.⁵³ Hay also expressed concerns that Jewish settlers would abandon their rural colonies to seek out specific forms of work, "such as commerce, finances, etc.," or create an insular colony that rejected assimilation into Mexican society, as had occurred with Italian immigrants in Michoacán and French immigrants in Puebla.⁵⁴ The governor's and secretary's suggestions both contrasted with their interest in providing repatriated Mexican citizens from the United States free access to lands

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Gleizer, *Unwelcome Exiles*, 85-86.

⁵¹ Ibid., 159.

⁵² Ibid., 160.

⁵³ Eduardo Hay to Ignacio García Téllez (October 26, 1939), Archivo General de la Nación-Lázaro Cárdenas del Río (hereafter AGN-LCR), Caja 908, Expediente 546.6/212-16. For more on the German colony in São Paulo, see: Weinstein, *The Color Modernity*.

⁵⁴ Eduardo Hay to Ignacio García Téllez (October 26, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 908, Expediente 546.6/212-16.

and resources.⁵⁵ Above all, Hay and other officials stressed their concerns that, on the basis of the Jews' asylum status, the Mexican government would not be able to deport them under the provisions of Constitutional Article 33 since no country would accept them, subsequently rendering them wards of the state.⁵⁶ Despite these apprehensions, the Advisory Council on Population approved the prospective settlement of 1,500 foreign families and an equal number of repatriated families in the township of Huimanguillo, Tabasco, largely out of the hope of providing much needed economic resources for the state. Following a wave of criticism from anti-Semitic groups such as the Nationalist Association of the United States of Mexico, however, the government postponed the endeavor altogether.⁵⁷ As officials claimed that their reservations were rooted in fears of opposition from the public, their efforts to discredit the prospects of Jewish assimilation based on race, customs, and language highlight the perseverance of anti-Semitism throughout the Mexican Revolution.⁵⁸

In stark contrast, government officials' support for the relocation of Spanish refugees was widely heralded as a worthwhile endeavor, despite its legal and monetary obstacles. Prior to the arrival of the first wave of Spanish refugees in June 1939, García Téllez reached out to state governors in an effort to coordinate the arrivals' resettlement throughout the country. The governors' responses, however, varied based on their relationship to Cárdenas's broader political initiatives. The recently appointed Governor of Veracruz, Fernando Casas Alemán, notified President Cárdenas that he intended to cooperate with the Interior Secretary's coordinated efforts

⁵⁵ Eduardo Hay to Ignacio García Téllez (October 26, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 908, Expediente 546.6/212-16. For more on proposed colonies for repatriated Mexicans, see: Alanís Enciso, *They Should Stay There*.

⁵⁶ Eduardo Hay to Ignacio García Téllez (October 26, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 908, Expediente 546.6/212-16.

⁵⁷ For more on the proposed Jewish colony in Tabasco, see: Glazier, *Unwelcome Exiles*, 158-165.

⁵⁸ Claudio Lomnitz, "Anti-Semitism and the Ideology of the Mexican Revolution," *Representations* 110, no. 1 (2010): 1-28; Pablo Yankelevich, "Judeofobia y revolución en México," in *Inmigración y racismo*, 195-234.

with CTARE officials to the resettle refugees. He further supported the right of refugees to work in the state and established an intersectoral commission of personnel from the Mixed Agrarian Commission as well as the Secretariat of Agriculture and Husbandry to determine the most efficient means to meet the government's initiative.⁵⁹ Casas's support came as no surprise; as a close ally to his predecessor and future Mexican president, Miguel Alemán Valdés, Casas continued the previous governor's support of the Spanish refugees, establishing a processing center for the CTARE in the abandoned Fortaleza de San Carlos in Perote, Veracruz. Casas also supported the establishment of various shelters and food kitchens in the port of Veracruz that were to accommodate exiles awaiting deployment to their final destinations in the country.⁶⁰

Secretary García Téllez continued to request aid from state governors throughout the summer, as more refugees were expected to arrive. On July 7, 1939, the day on which refugees onboard the *Ipanema* were to disembark in the port of Veracruz, García Téllez sent an urgent telegram to twenty-one governors on behalf of President Cárdenas, requesting their support and assistance in the resettlement of the new arrivals. García Téllez asked that governors coordinate with the CTARE to settle the exiles based on each state's respective economic and population needs. Taking into account the governors' presumed support for the president's initiative and to fulfill their duty of providing "humanitarian protection to the defenders of Spanish republican democracy," García Téllez expected the governors to comply with the request and send representatives to Veracruz to assist the relocation efforts.⁶¹ While governors from Chihuahua, Coahuila, Michoacán,

⁵⁹ Telegram from Fernando Casas Alemán to Lázaro Cárdenas (June 12, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 908, Expediente 546.6/212-14.

⁶⁰ With the outbreak of World War II and the cessation of all binational maritime expeditions, the facilities of the Fortaleza de San Carlos were used as a concentration camp to house detained European and Japanese immigrants suspected of working as spies for Axis forces. See: Carlos Inclán Fuentes, *Perote y los nazis: Las políticas de control y vigilancia del estado mexicano a los ciudadanos alemanes durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial, 1939-1946* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2014).

⁶¹ Telegram from Andres Landa y Piña to Director General de Población (July 7, 1939), BNAH-

Guanajuato, and Chiapas expressed their support for the initiative, others were more reluctant.⁶²

Governor Humberto Canto Echeverría of Yucatán wrote to Cárdenas the following day to explain his state's inability to assist in the nationwide colonization endeavor. With over 50,000 of the state's residents recently leaving the state, approximately 12% of its population, and over 2,000 families living without access to subsistence farms, Canto Echeverría notified the President that the state government could not provide any means of financial or material support for the Spanish refugees. What is more, the failure of the agrarian reform in Yucatán kept salaries as low as one peso per day for work on henequen plantations, the state's monoculture crop.⁶³ Although other states supporting the government's colonization initiative also faced similar hardships at the tail-end of the Cárdenas administration, their loyalty to the government took precedence over economic and political obstacles.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates the aims and limitations of the Cárdenas government's Spanish refugee initiative. Far from the "juggernaut" depicted by revisionist historians, the Mexican state was comprised of various actors with diverse motives and ambitions loosely aligned under the banner of Cardenismo.⁶⁴ Much like the administrations before it, the Cárdenas government envisioned Spanish émigrés as harbingers of economic and racial change. As such, immigration policies reinforced the

CTARE, Caja 209, Expediente 6442.

⁶² Telegrams from Governors to Cárdenas (April 28, 1939-July 8, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 908, Expediente 546.6/212-14.

⁶³ Telegram from Humberto Canto to Lázaro Cárdenas (July 8, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 908, Expediente 546.6/212-14. For more on Yucatan's conflicts during the Cárdenas administration, see: Ben Fallaw, *Cárdenas Compromised: The Failure of Reform in Postrevolutionary Yucatán* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

⁶⁴ For more on the historiographical debates regarding Cárdenas's significance to the Mexican Revolution, see: Alan Knight, "Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26:1 (1994): 73-107.

revolutionary nationalist rhetoric of *mestizaje* while excluding prospective immigrants and exiles deemed incapable of assimilating to Mexican culture. These exclusions, however, included Spaniards whose political ideals were seen as threats to the nation, just as previous waves of Spanish immigration were also heavily policed based on their political and labor activities. As ethnic minorities were categorized, policed, and deported based on the state's determinations of their desirability, so too were Spanish political refugees, who were expected—more so than other immigrant groups—to exemplify the ideals and ambitions of the Mexican state.

However, the policies enacted under the Cárdenas government posed a political conundrum. On the one hand, the Cárdenas government emphatically supported the relocation of all Spaniards, regardless of their political affiliations. On the other hand, representatives of the president obstructed his efforts and instead utilized longstanding xenophobic tropes to exclude large sectors of some of the most vulnerable political asylum-seekers. As in previous administrations, the presumed threat of Spaniards' political ideals posed new concerns regarding the successful assimilation of political refugees into Mexican society. These anxieties led both countries' state officials to discriminate against those deemed “undesirable” based on their political affiliations. As will be seen throughout this study, these negative attributes were often defined through the broader lens of anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism. Spaniards' political tendencies, more so than their race, informed the state's criteria as to their potential contribution or threat to the proliferation of the mestizo race.

CHAPTER THREE

Mexican Popular Opinion on the Spanish Civil War and the Asylum Initiative

The Cárdenas government's support for the Second Spanish Republic elicited various responses from the Mexican public. For some, the effort represented an affront to Mexico's "Hispanic" culture and traditions, leading them to emphatically to support the Nationalist military uprising. For others, it vindicated the continuation of revolutionary-era policies through Popular Front politics and internationalist humanitarianism. During a rally celebrating Mexico's independence from Spain in September 1938, Hernán Laborde, General Secretary of the Partido Comunista Mexicano implored the country's proletariat not to see Spain's workers and campesinos as the same as those that exploited their ancestors during colonial times. Rather, he argued, Spain's laboring classes also fought a similar struggle as Mexicans seeking their independence:

[...It] is necessary to remember, comrades, that this mass uprising of the Mexican people was not and could not be a struggle against the Spanish people. It was instead against the reactionary Spain of Carlos V, of Felipe II, of Torquemada, of Félix María Calleja. The Spain which fought the Mexican people then was not the Spain of Negrín, it was the Spain of Franco and of all the current agents of fascism in Spain.¹

Much like the distinctions made by the Cárdenas government, Laborde and other Mexican leftists emphasized Mexico's and Spain's bonds through their population's historical struggles for freedom and democracy. While some scholars have noted that left-wing intellectuals in Spain and the Americas attributed such ties to a spiritual and genetic connection based on a shared racial identity, Mexican popular support for the Spanish republic and the refugees the Civil War produced rarely articulated such ethno-nationalist sentiments in their calls of solidarity toward the Spanish republic.²

¹ Hernán Laborde, "La revolución de la independencia" (September 16, 1938), Archivo Centro de Estudios del Movimiento de Obrero y Socialista (hereafter Archivo CEMOS), Fondo PCM, Caja 12, Clave 10, Expediente 26, 9.

² Sebastiaan Faber's analysis also blurs the ideological convictions of Latin American *hispanistas*, citing intellectuals who had little to no connection to left-wing social movements nor working-class organizations. As this chapter will explain, such distinctions were important for Mexicans and Spanish exiles as traditions of fraternity were often defined in material and ideological relations as

Rather than articulating “the existence of a transatlantic Hispanic family, community, or *raza*,” as Pike and Faber describe, Mexicans’ distinction between Spaniards as those that constituted the Popular Front and *gachupines*—a pejorative phrase used to depict Spaniards since colonial times—as adherents to Franco and fascism, problematizes the notion that Mexicans believed in a single “Hispanic” identity.³ Such distinctions were present not only in speeches of left-wing party leaders, but in the very demands and actions of Mexico’s and Spain’s laboring classes throughout the duration of the Civil War and in anticipation of the mass exodus of political refugees from Spain in the summer of 1939.

This chapter focuses on the ways in which popular support for the Spanish exiles emerged among Mexico’s laboring classes, often with little or no assistance from formal political institutions and organizations affiliated to the Cárdenas government or Mexico’s Popular Front.⁴ By focusing on these incidents of community solidarity, we will see that popular opposition to the refugee project paled in comparison to the efforts made by ordinary Mexican citizens to mobilize and support those fleeing persecution in Spain. At the national and local level, supporters of the government’s Spanish refugee initiative linked the ongoing civil conflict in Spain to local efforts to enact revolutionary reforms. Beyond humanitarianism, many Mexicans that advocated for the asylum-seekers perceived the initiative as a continuation of the reforms begun by the Cárdenas government. As Mexican

much as they were in relation to cultural identities. See: Sebastiaan Faber, “Contradiction of Left-Wing *hispanismo*: The Case of Spanish Republicans in Exile,” *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 3, no. 2 (2002): 165-185.

³ Frederick B. Pike, *Hispanismo, 1898-1936: Spanish Liberals and Conservatives and Their Relations with Spanish America* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971), 1; Faber, “Contradictions of Left-Wing ‘Hispanismo’,” 169.

⁴ This is in part due to the relative size and influence of both organizations. The Partido Comunista Mexicano, for instance, was comprised of only 9,000 members in 1936 and grew to approximately 25,000 by 1939. While the CTM maintained 3,500 organizational affiliates and a million members, the organization was marred by factionalism, unruly local leadership, and increasingly militant constituents. See: Lear, *Picturing the Proletariat*, 164-165; Daniela Spenser, *In Combat: The Life of Lombardo Toledano* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2020), 107-130.

peasants and workers navigated and challenged the parameters of *cardenista* reforms, they accepted or rejected Spanish exiles depending on their historical relationship to land, radical thought, and the Mexican state. For many workers and campesinos, Spanish political refugees embodied the ideals that had led them to initiate their own country's social revolution. As Mexican state officials accepted Spanish asylum-seekers as a means to encourage racial and economic modernization, Mexican radicals formulated their own notions of the refugees as accomplices in fomenting global revolution and as contributors to the decades-long radical tradition that had emerged between the two countries' laboring classes.

Initial Support for the Second Spanish Republic in Mexico

Popular support for the Spanish republican cause first came as a response to the aerial bombardments of civilians perpetrated by Nationalist forces and their Italian and German allies. In 1936 the Comité de Ayuda a los Niños del Pueblo Español (Aid Committee for the Children of the Spanish People, CANPE) was co-founded by the wives of Mexican diplomats and politicians, including First Lady Amalia Solórzano de Cárdenas, Carmela Gil de Vázquez Vela, and Matilde Rodríguez Cabo de Múgica. Along with assisting the government in housing the Niños de Morelia, the organization raised money and resources for a group of children to be granted refuge in Mexico for the duration of the Civil War. Through newspapers, posters, and the CANPE's quarterly bulletin, *Ayuda!*, Mexicans learned of the devastating bombardments of Spanish cities and towns, as well as the scores of children maimed and killed as a result. In response, an outpouring of donations of more than 84,000 pesos were sent to the CANPE throughout 1937. The committee received over 200 donations from diverse segments of Mexican society, including oil workers from Veracruz, miners in Chihuahua, schoolteachers in Guanajuato, Jewish immigrants affiliated with the Israelite

Anti-fascist Committee “Gesbir”, and ejido communities in Veracruz.⁵ As the war continued on, so too did Mexicans’ efforts to support the Spanish republican cause from abroad.



Figure 1: (Above Left) Cover of *Ayuda!*, no. 4, November-December 1937. Photo Inscription: “They are not guilty. Let’s protect them!” (Above Right) Photo of First Lady Amalia Solórzano de Cárdenas with “Niños de Morelia”. (Above Center) Crowds welcoming the “Niños de Morelia” in Morelia, Michoacán, 1937.⁶

⁵ “Relación número 2. Movimiento general de fondos desde febrero 22 a la fecha,” *Ayuda!: Boletín del Comité de Ayuda a los Niños del Pueblo Español*, no. 2 (1937): 12-15; “Relación número 3. Movimiento general de fondos de 28 de abril a 20 de julio de 1937,” *Ayuda!: Boletín del Comité de Ayuda a los Niños del Pueblo Español*, no. 3 (1937): 28-30; “Relación número 4. Movimiento general de fondos de 21 de julio a 15 de octubre de 1937,” *Ayuda!: Boletín del Comité de Ayuda a los Niños del Pueblo Español*, no. 4 (1937): 26-29.

⁶ *Ayuda!: Boletín del Comité de Ayuda a los Niños del Pueblo Español*, no. 4 (1937), 1; *Ayuda!: Boletín del Comité de Ayuda a los Niños del Pueblo Español*, no. 3 (1937), 11, 20.

Mexican labor unions and campesino organizations throughout the country contributed their wages and other resources to support republican and revolutionary forces throughout the duration of the Spanish Civil War. On December 9, 1938, the Federación de Obreros y Campesinos (FOC) local in Tulacingo, Hidalgo convened an extraordinary meeting of its membership to form a local chapter of the Spanish anarchist humanitarian aid organization, the Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista (International Antifascist Solidarity), to organize public demonstrations, conferences, bookfairs, and fundraisers in support of the Spanish republican and revolutionary movements fighting against Franco and his fascist allies. In a letter to Spanish Ambassador Félix Gordón Ordás, the FOC expressed its intention to organize a local chapter of the SIA to “support our class siblings that struggle for their freedom.”⁷ Members of the Partido Comunista Mexicano also donated six pesos every three months to support Spanish republican relief efforts.⁸ In November 1938, the party’s women’s commission contributed 2,200 pesos to house Spanish children, hoping to raise 9,000 pesos by the following January. The PCM national committee as well as the party’s Pro-Defense of Republican Spain and Women’s committees also donated 60,000 pieces of clothing worth upwards of 16,000 pesos to children in Spain.⁹ Mexican teachers working with Spanish children at Escuela España-México in Morelia, Michoacán established a local PCM cell which contributed quotas and donations from festivals and fundraisers to support the Spanish republican cause. According to the account book of the PCM’s Michoacán local, 21% of the local’s state income came from organizers at the Escuela España-México between February 1938 and February 1939.¹⁰ Spanish relief efforts also led to collaborations between pro-republican groups throughout Mexico. For example, the

⁷ José Loredó Aparicio to Félix Gordón Ordás (December 3, 1938), Fundación Universitaria Española – Archivo de Félix Gordón Ordás (México) (hereafter FUE-AFGO), 11/1/2.

⁸ “Hernán Laborde da su ayuda a la España Leal,” *La Voz de México* (Mexico City), January 4, 1939.

⁹ “Adelante en la ayuda a España,” *La Voz de México*, January 3, 1939.

¹⁰ Michoacán PCM Local Financial Revenue Book (February 1938-February 1939), Archivo CEMOS, Fondo PCM Locales, Caja 15, Expediente 5.

Michoacán branch of Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista donated its sales of Spanish anarchist literature to support the political activities of anti-fascist groups in Mazatlán. As depicted in the photograph below, copies of the Federación Anarquista Ibérica's newspaper, *Tierra y Libertad*, were among the reading materials sold to Mexican audiences as part of the SIA's traveling exhibitions.



Figure 2: (Left) Festival organized by the Solidaridad Internacional Antifascist (International Antifascist Solidarity, SIA) in Mexico, 1937. (Right) Banner reads: “The Michoacán Antifascist Group synthesizes with this cultural embassy its solidarity with the Mazatleco People. International Antifascist Solidarity (SIA).”¹¹

Popular relief efforts served a multifaceted purpose. For those unfamiliar with the Spanish Civil War, local events provided everyday citizens the opportunity to discuss international affairs with their families and neighbors, disseminate news through political literature and by word of mouth, and address their ties to the Spanish working class and peasantry in relation to their own social and political conditions. At the international level, these coordinated efforts reflected the broader significance of the Spanish Civil War to communities thousands of miles away from the conflict. Nationally, popular relief initiatives made up the bulk of Mexican solidarity efforts toward the Spanish Republic. What made these endeavors even more impressive was the fact that most of

¹¹ “Festival” (1937), International Institute of Social History - Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (hereafter IISH-CNT) Photograph Collection, BG A54/729; “Anti-Fascist Protest” (1937), IISH-CNT Photograph Collection, BG A54/728.

the events were organized with little to no coordination with national labor federations or political organizations. At their very core, Mexican relief efforts emerged from below, with rank-and-file members donating their time, resources, and wages to assist those displaced by the Civil War.

Community Fundraising for Spanish Exiles

On November 22, 1938, the women's section of the Trabajadores de la Enseñanza de la República Mexicana (Mexican Education Workers) wrote to the Spanish Embassy requesting news regarding the Civil War. The Embassy's *chargé d'affaires*, José Loredó Aparicio, responded that the situation in Spain had worsened tremendously, with the civilian population running out of food, depleted access to potable water, and nearly three million evacuees fleeing from territories recently conquered by Franco's forces. As news spread of Nationalist military advances and the growing need for provisions to sustain the growing influx of refugees fleeing across the Pyrenees into France, Mexicans responded by raising funds and other resources for the last remaining holdouts of Spanish republican resistance and those seeking refuge in French concentration camps. On December 26, 1938, the Federation of Workers in the state of Guerrero sent word to the Spanish Embassy of a rally in Acapulco which intended to encourage local communities to participate in solidarity efforts for Republican Spain.¹² Support also came through food and clothing donations sent to Spain's civilian population devastated by Nationalist aerial bombardments and blockades. In January 1939, the Federación de Organismos de Ayuda a la República Española (Federation of Organizations to Aid Republican Spain, FOARE) assisted in the transfer of nearly approximately 580 pounds of corn and financial donations from the Escuela Campesino Regional of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero. "The conduct of the campesinos of Ayotzinapa," one journalist wrote, "should be emulated by the

¹² "Asunto: Sobre mitin de Federación de Trabajadores de Guerrero en Acapulco para ayudar a España," (December 30, 1938), FUE-AFGO, Caja 11, Expediente 1.

campesinos of the country within their respective federal entities to contribute similar amounts to give to the heroic Spanish people.”¹³ The local committee of the PCM in Ixcatepec, Veracruz also contributed approximately 660 pounds of corn to the relief effort, with neighboring ejidos offering equal amounts in other cereals and beans. By February 1939, the FOARE had sent over 100 tons of grain to the last holdouts of Republican Spain.¹⁴

Between July and November 1938, the Spanish Embassy in Mexico City received nearly 1,000 pesos in donations collected by Mexican union locals. Following the news of Franco’s military advances, voluntary donations sent to the Embassy increased dramatically. In November 1938 alone, the Spanish Embassy received nearly 4,000 pesos from the members of multiple union locals and campesino leagues—an amount all the more impressive considering that the average minimum wage in Mexico was only two pesos per day.¹⁵ And while the Cárdenas government was unable to utilize state funds to support the growing refugee population, in January 1939 all employees of the administration contributed a day’s pay to the FOARE’s fundraising efforts for Spanish refugee children, amounting to 30,000 pesos.¹⁶ According to historian Aurelio Velázquez Hernández, the contributions donated by Mexican workers and their affiliated unions and organizations amounted to a third of all the funds raised for the Spanish republicans. Most of these funds were allocated to feeding, sheltering, clothing, and relocating asylum-seekers as they made their way through France and eventually to Mexico.¹⁷

Mexican women were especially active in contributing to Spanish republican relief efforts. In particular, the women’s association of the national teachers’ union and the *escuelas normales* (normal schools, or rural teachers colleges) coordinated informational meetings for their members and the

¹³ “Los campesinos dan su aportación a la España Republicana,” *La Voz de México*, January 22, 1939.

¹⁴ “Los comunistas de Ixcatepec Colectan Cereales para España,” *La Voz de México*, January 7, 1939.

¹⁵ Receipts from November 1938; FUE-AFGO, Caja 11, Expediente 1.

¹⁶ “\$30,000 para la España Leal,” *La Voz de México*, January 2, 1939.

¹⁷ Velázquez Hernández, *Empresas y finanzas del exilio*, 47.

public, hosted dance fundraisers, and even engaged in physical altercations with anti-immigrant and fascist organizations that attempted to disrupt their events.¹⁸ Lectures and rallies organized by Mexican women stressed the importance of transnational solidarity between their compatriots and women in Spain. In mid-September 1938, Spanish communist Margarita Nelken served as the guest of honor at a banquet organized by “the revolutionary women of Mexico.” During her ongoing tour to raise awareness of the Spanish conflict in the Americas, Nelken and her Mexican compatriots praised the Spanish republican struggle and called on all women to unite in defiance of war and fascism.¹⁹ Nelken was also the guest of honor at the PCM’s Independence Day rally on 15 September at the Arena México, where she and other delegates from Spain spoke to the thousands of men and women in attendance.²⁰



Figure 3: Women textile workers protesting at an antifascism rally.²¹

¹⁸ “Asunto: Sobre clausura de cursos de la Esucela Normal de Maestros, y entrega de donativos para España” (November 14, 1938), FUE-AFGO, Caja 11, Expediente 1; Octaviano Campos Salas and Dolores Uribe T. to José Loredo Aparicio (November 22, 1938), FUE-AFGO, Caja 11, Expediente 1; Antonio Arellano to José Loredo Aparicio (December 3, 1938), FUE-AFGO, Caja 11, Expediente 1.

¹⁹ “Solemente juramento de unidad femenil,” *La Voz de México*, September 15, 1938.

²⁰ “El mitin comunista en la Arena “México” el Día de la Patria,” *La Voz de México*, September 16, 1938.

²¹ “Obreras textiles en una manifestación antifascista en México,” Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Acervo Histórico Diplomático; David Jorge “México ante la España en guerra y en exilio,” *El País* (Madrid), October 13, 2020.

In their publications and campaigns, women and their affiliated organizations stressed the significance of motherhood in the ongoing fight to defend Republican Spain. As described by Jocelyn Olcott in her study of *machismo* and the gendering of citizenship during the Mexican Revolution, Mexican women's support for the mothers and children of the Spanish Republic corresponded to state and radical notions of revolutionary femininity. "*Abnegación*—selflessness, martyrdom, self-sacrifice, an erasure of self and the negation of one's outward existence," Olcott argues, "became nearly synonymous with idealized Mexican femininity and motherhood."²² María de los Angeles Azcárate de Chávez López, one of the cofounders of the CANPE, implored Mexican women to uphold their Catholic values and to contribute to the humanitarian aid being sent to children displaced by the Civil War. Azcárate's appeal to Catholic mothers contrasted the more militant anti-clericalism promoted by other popular sectors that supported President Cárdenas and the Spanish republicans.²³ Her efforts to correlate religious piety with political solidarity contrasted the many pro-Nationalist proclamations emanating from the Mexican Catholic Church.²⁴ By appealing to women's motherhood, Azcárate humanized the women and children of Spain as deeply connected to Mexican motherhood. Along with reaching out to Mexican women, Azcárate also

²² Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 15-16.

²³ For more on women, Catholicism, and anti-clericalism in Revolutionary Mexico, see: Marjorie Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire: Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán Peasants, and the Redemption of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Matthew Butler, ed. *Faith and Impiety in Revolutionary Mexico* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Stephen J.C. Andes, "A Catholic Alternative to Revolution: The Survival of Social Catholicism in Postrevolutionary Mexico," *The Americas* 68, no. 4 (2012): 529-562; Ben Fallaw, "The Seduction of Revolution: Anticlerical Campaigns against Confession in Mexico, 1914-1935," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 45 (2013): 91-120;

²⁴ Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *Hispanismo y Falanque: Los sueños imperiales de la derecha española y México* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992); Jean Meyer, *El sinarquismo, el cardenismo, y la iglesia, 1937-1947* (México, D.F.: Tusquets Editores, 2003); Beatriz Urías Horcasitas, "Una pasión antirevolucionaria: El conservadurismo hispanófilo mexicano, 1920-1960," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 72, no. 4 (2010): 599-628; Giuliana Chamedes, *A Twentieth-Century Crusade: The Vatican's Battle to Remake Christian Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019), 167-196.

called on Spanish immigrant women living in Mexico to support their “sisters of race” in Spain by contributing to the protection of their children, arguing that “above all political ideas and human ambitions, is the salvation of children.”²⁵ Although women’s support for the Spanish republican cause was a regular topic of newspaper articles and rally speeches, writers and orators rarely addressed the similarities between Mexican and Spanish women’s social and political education.²⁶ Mexican women’s engagement in fundraisers, rallies, and other public engagements filled these gaps by addressing the plight of the Spanish republic through the lens of revolutionary motherhood.

Mexicans abroad also demonstrated their support for the Mexican government’s protection of Spanish refugees and international volunteers. Prior to the arrival of the refugees, the Cárdenas administration and the Spanish republican government received hundreds of letters of support from Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans living in the United States. In March 1939, community groups throughout Southern California voiced their support for their home country’s humanitarian endeavors by writing petitions of support to President Cárdenas. Upon hearing that the Mexican government would provide asylum for foreign volunteers that fought in Spain, one hundred and

²⁵ “Mujeres de México: Ayudemos a España,” *La Voz de México*, January 29, 1939.

²⁶ “Mujeres antifascistas de España,” *La Voz de México*, September 25, 1938; For more on women’s political activities during the Mexican Revolution, see: Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico*; Stephanie J. Smith, *Gender and the Mexican Revolution: Yucatán Women and the Realities of Patriarchy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Stephanie J. Smith, *The Power and Politics of Art in Revolutionary Mexico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 52-87; Rosa María Valles Ruíz, *El discurso en mujer moderna: Primera revista feminista del siglo XX en México, 1915-1919* (Pachuca: Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo, 2017). For more on women’s political activities in early twentieth-century Spain and the Spanish Civil War, see: Mary Nash, *Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War* (Denver: Arden Press, 1995); Temma Kaplan, “Redressing the Balance: Gendered Acts of Justice around the Mining Community of Río Tinto in 1939,” in *Constructing Spanish Womanhood: Female Identity in Modern Spain*, eds. Victore Lorée Enders and Pamela Beth Radcliff (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 283-300; Pamela Beth Radcliff, “Women’s Politics: Consumer Riots in Twentieth-Century Spain,” in *Constructing Spanish Womanhood*, 301-324; Martha A. Ackelsberg, *Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and The Struggle for the Emancipation of Women* (Oakland: AK Press, 2005); Linhard, *Fearless Women in the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War*; Inmaculada Simón Juárez, *Mujer: Asociaciones y sindicatos: España, 1875-1939* (Alcorcón: Sanz y Torres, 2014); Raquel Vázquez Ramil, *La mujer en la segunda república Española* (Tres Cantos: Akal, 2014).

ninety Mexicans and Mexican Americans residing in Southern California sent signed letters expressing their solidarity with “the true international volunteers” in Spain, while admonishing the propaganda and slander of “the Mexican press and the reactionaries.” Citing what they referred to as the “degeneration of the free press,” the petitioners condemned the proliferation of pro-Nationalist coverage in Mexico’s most prominent newspapers, which they accused of purposefully misleading “many good Mexicans” to oppose the Second Spanish Republic and the International Brigades.²⁷

The addresses of the signatories demonstrated the high level of coordination between residents from the Inland Empire, the San Gabriel Valley, and Los Angeles, who recruited family members and neighbors to sign the petitions. One signatory, María de los Angeles Muñoz of Los Angeles, wrote a postscript on her petition expressing her opposition to protecting Spaniards with fascist sympathies, requesting that President Cárdenas “not allow anyone who resembles the traitor Franco to raise their head in our homeland.”²⁸ Another signatory, Jesús Figueroa of La Habra, in Southern California, included two dollars with his letter to be donated to the relief efforts.²⁹ Much like compatriots in Mexico, Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans in the United States also organized a series of fundraisers to support Spanish refugee initiatives. In coordination with the CNT’s Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista, Mexican-descended peoples, Spanish émigrés, and other Latinas/os throughout the United States organized fundraisers and accumulated material goods for Spain.³⁰ In

²⁷ Tomás Vasquez to Lázaro Cárdenas (March 15, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 907, Expediente 546.6/200.

²⁸ María de los Ángeles Muñoz to Lázaro Cárdenas (March 7, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 907, Expediente 546.6/200.

²⁹ Jesús Figueroa to Lázaro Cárdenas (February 25, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 907, Expediente 546.6/200.

³⁰ Aldo A. Lauria-Santiago, “Puerto Rican Workers and the Struggle for Decent Lives in New York City, 1910s-1970s,” in *City of Workers, City of Struggle: How Labor Movements Changed New York*, ed. Joshua B. Freeman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 120-121; Michel Otayek, “Keepsakes of the Revolution: Transnational Networks and the U.S. Circulation of Anarchist Propaganda during the Spanish Civil War,” in *Writing Revolution: Hispanic Anarchism in the United States*, eds. Christopher J. Castañeda and Montse Feu (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 227-244; Montse Feu, *Fighting Fascist Spain: Worker Protest from the Printing Press* (Urbana: University of Illinois

Belvedere, California, the Club de Madres Mexicanas (Mexican Mothers Club) and the Logia #10 “Porfirio Díaz” de la Sociedad Progresista Mexicana (“Porfirio Díaz” Lodge #10 of the Mexican Progressive Society) raised nearly US \$80 for Spanish orphans.³¹ José García of Stockton sent US \$10 to the Spanish republican embassy in Mexico City to be donated to the Comité de Ayuda a los Republicanos Españoles (Aid Committee for Spanish Republicans, CTARE).³² Considering the minimum salary of workers in the United States was \$4 for an eight-hour workday in 1939, the donations were significant contributions coming from working-class individuals.

Visualizing Solidarity: Mexican Media Culture during the Spanish Civil War

As the amount of fundraising conducted by Mexican workers and campesinos demonstrates, communities throughout the country mobilized to support Spanish republican and revolutionary forces in a variety of ways. The formulation of Mexican popular opinion on the Spanish Civil War was in part a result of state and non-state efforts to disseminate the latest information regarding the conflict and its resultant refugee crisis. From the most rural enclaves to industrial centers, Mexican citizens saw and heard of the Spanish conflict through various forms of media. Although few Mexicans experienced the Civil War firsthand, the country’s population was inundated with visuals and printed coverage of the conflict.³³ In downtown Mexico City, department store windows displayed maps with flags detailing the daily military advances on Spain’s various battlefronts.³⁴ Visual and aural propaganda led Mexican citizens to formulate articulate and deeply personal

Press, 2020); Cristina Pérez Jiménez, “‘Silencio en la Casa’: Political Silence and Cultural Conflict between Hispanists and Hispanics in New York during the Spanish Civil War,” *Revista Hispánica Moderna* 74, no. 1 (2021): 81-95.

³¹ *El Antifascista: Portavoz de los Antifascistas en la Costa del Pacífico y Oeste de EE.UU.* (Los Angeles), November 15, 1938.

³² José García to José Loredó Aparicio (7 November 1938), FUE-AFGO, Caja 11, Expediente 1.

³³ Michael W. Jackson, *Fallen Sparrows: The International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1994), 77-78.

³⁴ Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 71.

connections to the conflict in Spain while correlating its significance to their struggles for social and political reform. Although scholars such as Mario Ojeda Revah have questioned the degree to which the country's largely illiterate masses engaged with such materials, others have noted that, even in the most desolate regions, non-literate persons regularly received news through literate community members reading newspaper articles aloud in public spaces, work sites, and other places of congregation. Moreover, the use of visual media throughout the 1930s and 1940s was a critical means for state and non-state actors to engage with the country's working class and campesino communities.³⁵ A wide array of media resources provided literate and illiterate citizens news of not just local, but global events that then informed the policies and actions of labor unions, agrarian leagues, and communities as a whole.

Along with extensive coverage in the printed press, news of the Iberian conflict was broadly disseminated through the growing medium of radio broadcasting. State-subsidized radio broadcasts such as *El oído del mundo* gave listeners daily updates on the progress of the war.³⁶ As Margarita Mendoza-López argues, the radio became “an almost indispensable element in the daily life of millions of residents of large cities,” granting the growing industrial working class new opportunities to learn of local, national, and global affairs.³⁷ Radio broadcasts also informed the country's peasantry of state initiatives such as the Cárdenas government's support for republican and revolutionary forces in Spain.³⁸ Following the Secretaría de Educación Pública's (Secretariat of Public Education, SEP) distribution of thousands of radio receivers to rural communities during the

³⁵ Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 158; For more on popular consciousness formation and art during the Spanish Civil War, see: Monica Rankin, *¡México, la patria!: Propaganda and Production during World War II* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 25-38; Lear, *Picturing the Proletariat*, 211-260.

³⁶ Margarita Mendoza-López, “Radio y televisión,” in *El exilio español en México, 1939-1982* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1982), 650.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 651.

³⁸ Sonia Robles, *Mexican Waves: Radio Broadcasting Along Mexico's Northern Border, 1930-1950* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2019), 71-93.

1920s and 1930s, illiterate campesinos gained access to state-sponsored news reports that provided updates on national and international affairs, including the proposed resettlement of Spanish refugees throughout the Mexican countryside. As J. Justin Castro argues that “[despite] the many ongoing problems of creating a state-radio listenership in the countryside,” such as villages’ access to electricity, “the SEP built a closer relationship between the federal government and a number of communities.”³⁹ Radio broadcasting also granted non-state actors the opportunity to share their specific analysis of the Spanish conflict and the state’s asylum initiative. In an interview for the Partido Comunista Mexicano’s *La hora del pueblo* (*The Hour of the People*) broadcast on the ruling Partido de la Revolución Mexicana’s (Party of the Mexican Revolution, PRM) XEFO and XEUZ stations, the PCM’s General Secretary Hernán Laborde implored the Mexican proletariat to support the state’s refugee initiative:

[...The] Mexican people must cordially open their territory and hearts to help them find a second homeland here, to heal their wounds, to comfort their spirits and to prepare. Those in this country that oppose their admission are the same ones who would gladly help Franco, Hitler, and Mussolini conquer Mexico. We must do everything we can to awaken the conscience of the Mexican people, so that they fulfill their duty to their Spanish brothers and help the government of General Cárdenas to accommodate the largest number of refugees possible in our territory.⁴⁰

Although this specific interview was not broadcast, it was reprinted in the party’s newspaper, *La Voz de México*, and similar calls for solidarity with the Spanish republicans were broadcast on a nearly daily basis.⁴¹

Along with radio news, the visual culture of the Spanish Civil War also shaped Mexican

³⁹ J. Justin Castro, *Radio in Revolution: Wireless Technology and State Power in Mexico, 1897-1938* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 165-206, 176.

⁴⁰ “Hernán Laborde y el momento actual,” *La Voz de México* (Mexico City), June 4, 1939, Archivo CEMOS, Fondo PCM, Caja 13, Clave 11, Expediente 4.

⁴¹ Broadcast information and the republication of speeches can be found in most of the copies of *La Voz de México* between 1938 and 1939. See also: Powell, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 121; Mendoza-López, “Radio y television,” 649-660.

popular opinion. Throughout the duration of the Civil War, labor unions and agrarian leagues received thousands of political posters, pictures, and drawings distributed by the Cárdenas government and the Spanish Embassy. Mexican artists such as muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros (one of the hundreds of Mexicans who volunteered to fight for the Spanish Republican army) as well as those affiliated with the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists, LEAR) and the Taller de Gráfica Popular (People's Graphic Workshop, TGP) also produced pieces of art that connected the Spanish struggle to Mexico's political climate. As John Lear notes, the production of such art was not done within a vacuum, but in constant dialogue with labor unions, radical political groups, and other worker-based movements.⁴² Visual depictions of the Spanish Civil War were therefore read within and through the social and political conditions of the moment.

In much of the visual media produced by the Mexican Left, artists criticized racial and class inequalities in Mexican society through the lens of the Spanish Civil War. Working-class artist and TGP collective member José Chávez Morado produced a series of lithographs that placed the conflicts of the Civil War in relation to social injustices in Mexico. In 1938, Chávez Morado created posters for the CTM's "Week of Help to Spain" campaign, inviting Mexican workers to a fundraiser organized by the Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Enseñanza de la República Mexicana (Union of Teaching Workers of the Mexican Republic) to support various relief efforts in Republican Spain.⁴³ Along with campaign-specific posters, Chávez Morado printed a number of lithographs condemning pro-Francoist elements in Mexico. One series entitled "La risa del pueblo" ("The Laughter of the People") accused Spanish immigrants and the Mexican press of distorting news on the Iberian conflict to conjure support for the Nationalists and their Axis allies. In a poster entitled, "Con su

⁴² Lear, *Picturing the Proletariat*, 211-260.

⁴³ "Semana de ayuda a España," 1938, José Chávez Morado Collection (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art).

música a otra parte” (“Take your music somewhere else”), Chávez Morado condemned mainstream newspapers for coordinating pro-Nationalist coverage of the war on behalf of the country’s Spanish immigrant community. The lithograph depicted a “*gachupín*” blowing into a trumpet symbolizing the “Free Press,” with the names of various daily newspapers going up the neck of the bell. From the trumpet’s bell emerged the snarling face of *La Prensa* editor Miguel Ordorica, a well-known opponent of Lázaro Cárdenas.⁴⁴ With the words “provocation,” “slander,” “insults,” and “lies” spewing from his mouth, Morado depicted Ordorica with a swastika earring, further implicating the editor and daily newspapers such as *Últimas Noticias*, *Novedades*, *La Prensa*, *Excélsior*, and *Universal* as fascist sympathizers. Below the portrait, a poem lambasted the “fake news” of the mainstream media:

The so-called “free press”
Which is neither free nor press
The *gachupines* pay [the press]
And [it] writes what they think.

Venancio from the canteen
And Don Paco the bread maker
Rob us in fine form
To buy off the “journalists.”

But you will see
How the *gachupes* shake
When we ring them
Sons of bitches (*jijos*) of the “free press!”⁴⁵

At the center of the Mexican Left’s ire, the “*gachupín*” visually and conceptually embodied the class disparities caused by exploitative foreigners. Yet the political art of artists such as Chávez Morado also disavowed sweeping generalizations of entire immigrant groups. In one particularly well-disseminated poster, Chávez Morado took aim explicitly at Spanish émigrés that defended the

⁴⁴ Pablo Piccato, *A History of Infamy: Crime, Truth, and Justice in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 70.

⁴⁵ ““La Risa del Pueblo.” Con su música a otra parte,” 1939, José Chávez Morado Collection (New York, Mexico City: Artists Rights Society/SOMAAP, 2018).

Francoist insurrection. “This is the culprit!,” the poster exclaimed above a depiction of a cross-armed Spaniard donned with a Basque *boina* and a cigar hanging from the corner of his mouth. “Like all the other *gachupín* loan sharks,” the poster accused Spanish merchants in Mexico of deliberately raising the prices of basic goods such as bread, tortillas, and fabrics, as well as the adulteration of milk and wine. The poster further accused Spanish immigrants of “continually circumventing the rights of Mexican workers,” which culminated in a series of bread strikes in Mexico City.⁴⁶ Rather than accuse all Spanish people of such behaviors, the poster distinguished Spaniards from *gachupines*, suggesting that Mexicans were willing to “swap 10,000 *GACHUPÍN* loan sharks for 10,000 SPANISH intellectuals, writers, industrialists, and workers.” The poster’s indictments concluded by explicitly defining the meaning of the terms “Spaniard” and “*Gachupín*,” proclaiming, “Spaniard means patriot republican. *Gachupín* means Francoist traitor.”⁴⁷



Figure 4: (Left) “La risa del pueblo: Con su música a otra parte” (1939). (Right) “La risa del pueblo: ¡Este es el culpable!”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ For more on labor conflicts at Spanish-owned bakeries, see: Weis, *Bakers & Basques*.

⁴⁷ “La risa del pueblo: ¡Este es el culpable!,” AGN-DGIPS, Caja 321, Expediente 64.

⁴⁸ “La risa del pueblo: Con su música a otra parte,” José Chávez Morado Collection (New York, Mexico City: Artists Rights Society/SOMAAP, 2018); “La risa del pueblo: ¡Este es el culpable!,” AGN-DGIPS, Caja 321, Expediente 64.

The distinction between Spaniards and “*gachupines*” became a regular facet of the political speeches and broadcasts of the Mexican Left as they attempted to galvanize support for Loyalist factions.⁴⁹ It in turn encouraged Mexicans to rethink their relationships to “real” Spaniards outside of the Hispanophobic rhetoric of the country’s nationalist movements and instead proposed an alternative internationalist vision that emphasized Spaniards’ ideological proclivities, rather than race, as the primary determinant for their praise or ire.

Popular support for the Spanish republicans and the subsequent refugee initiative was also the focal point of nationwide travel film exhibitions. In early 1938, the Mexican Secretaría de Educación Pública and the Spanish Popular Front’s propaganda initiative the Sociedad de Amigos de España (Society of Friends of Spain) organized a screening of the documentary *España Republicana* at Mexico City’s Palacio de Bellas Artes in collaboration with the Spanish Embassy. Following the screening’s success, the two organizations funded a traveling film exhibition and lecture tour with the film’s director Fernando Sanboa to share his personal experiences in wartime Spain with rural communities throughout Mexico. The tour also included photo and political poster exhibits, short plays organized by local union workers, visits to schools, union locals, and military barracks, as well as lectures and conferences held at large theatres and in public spaces.⁵⁰

The first leg of the tour began in the state of Chiapas, which was seen by organizers as a crucial site to raise awareness and support for the Spanish republican cause. The Spanish Embassy’s financial secretary, José Loredó Aparicio, claimed, “Perhaps out of all the states of our territory, Chiapas has been one of the most forgotten.” Chiapas’s geographical isolation and lack of infrastructural ties to the rest of the country, Aparicio claimed, left the state vulnerable to foreign

⁴⁹ Pla Brugat, *Els exiliats catalans*, 205.

⁵⁰ Annex to Dispatch #292, Aparicio to Gordón Ordás (July 26, 1938), FUE-AFGO, Caja 3, Expediente 1, MEX/3.1.66/1; Annex to Dispatch #292, Aparicio to Gordón Ordás (July 26, 1938), FUE-AFGO, Caja 3, Expediente 1, MEX/3.1.66/5.

exploitation and kept the state economically, socially, culturally, and politically underdeveloped.⁵¹

Casey Marina Lurtz suggests in her study of the coffee export economy of Chiapas that the sporadic nature of foreign investment in the region left many parts of the state underdeveloped. This small exporting class of foreigners vied for economic power as local Indigenous coffee growers maintained their place within the coffee market through the exploitation of commonly-held lands.⁵²

The state governor Efraín A. Gutiérrez, a former Zapatista insurgent and loyal supporter of President Cárdenas, was also engulfed in violent skirmishes with military strongmen in the region. Following confrontations with landowners and local elites, Gutiérrez mobilized large sectors of the state's workers and campesinos into hundreds of labor unions and teachers' federations. This also included supporting a large sector of the state's Indigenous population affiliated with the Departamento de Acción Social, Cultura, y Protección Indígena (Department of Indigenous Social Action, Culture, and Protection) and the Sindicato de Trabajadores Indígenas (Indigenous Workers' Union, STI).⁵³ Although the state government maintained a loyal popular base, political conditions remained volatile, with sporadic clashes between supporters of Gutiérrez and factions loyal to former governor General Alberto Pineda.⁵⁴ More pressing was the strong political and economic presence in the state of German, Italian, and Spanish immigrants with known ties to Nazi and fascist movements in Europe. As Stephen Lewis notes, local *chiapaneco* elites warned officials in Mexico City that Soconusco was "controlled by German and Spanish latifundistas and capitalists, by Nazis and the Spanish Falange, who either own the land directly or loan money at usurious rates."⁵⁵ Although it

⁵¹ Aparicio to Gordón Ordás (July 26, 1938), FUE-AFGO, Caja 3, Expediente 1, MEX/3.1.66/1.

⁵² Casey Marina Lurtz, *From the Grounds Up: Building an Export Economy in Southern Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).

⁵³ Stephen E. Lewis, "Efraín Gutiérrez of Chiapas: The Revolutionary Bureaucrat," in *State Governors in the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1952: Portraits in Conflict, Courage, and Corruption*, eds. Jürgen Buchenau and William H. Beezley (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 143-146.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 146-148.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 148-149.

is unclear whether the decision to bring the film exhibition to Chiapas was an effort to determine the strength of Cardenista support in the state, the tour quickly brought local political tensions to a head.

The tour's first stop began with a ten-day exhibition in Tuxtla Gutiérrez. According to Sanboa, the events attracted over 15,000 attendees, close to 80% of the city's population, as well as numerous *ejido* and student delegations from nearby villages and municipalities. The exhibition opened with a rally hosted at the Teatro Babasa, concluding late into the night with a public rendition of the Mexican national anthem and a youth choir's rendition of the Spanish Republic's "Himno de Riego." Each film documented a different facet of the war, including an overall synopsis of the war's current conditions; the rise of the revolutionary militias in July 1936; footage of the coordinated aerial bombardments of civilian populations by Spanish Nationalists and their support from Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany; the role of foreign intervention in the conflict; and the creation of the Popular Spanish Army. To accommodate the large crowds, organizers hosted five morning screenings in the theater accompanied by a conference in which local community members spoke about the Spanish conflict's relevance to the Mexican people. Between presentations, guest lectures were organized at five local schools and three union locals. To accommodate the large crowds of spectators, city officials donated projectors and sound equipment to allow the films to be screened outdoors. Each night brought approximately 3,000 attendees, with 5,000 attending the final screening as the event concluded with the beginning of the city's annual commercial fair.⁵⁶ During the exhibitions, droves of union workers marched through the cities' streets with their union's banners, posters expressing support for the Loyalist factions, and salutations to Republic Spain.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Annex to Dispatch #292, Aparicio to Gordón Ordás (July 26, 1938), FUE-AFGO, Caja 3, Expediente 1, MEX/3.1.66/3.

⁵⁷ Annex to Dispatch #292, Aparicio to Gordón Ordás (July 26, 1938), FUE-AFGO, Caja 3, Expediente 1, MEX/3.1.66/2.

Sanboa described the attendees' role in the festivities: "Night after night, events were held at the Exhibition premises where, through a conveniently installed microphone, I spoke on various aspects of the Spanish war as well as national problems, highlighting the benefits of the current Mexican policy." Audience members then voiced their own views about the Iberian conflict and its connections to Mexico's ongoing political turmoil. In his report to the Embassy, Sanboa noted that "the direct interventions made by the public in front of the microphone were undoubtedly the most valuable and interesting parts of these events."⁵⁸

The connections between Spain's democratic crisis and local political conflicts were not lost on the exhibition's attendees. As the tour made its way to the Soconusco region located near the state's southern border with Guatemala, the animosity between local communities and foreign landowners spilled out into public spaces. In Tapachula, approximately 370 kilometers south of the state capital, over 18,000 spectators attended the tour's film exhibition, including members of thirty-five labor union locals and student groups.⁵⁹ Attendance for the 9:00 p.m. screenings formed long queues outside the Teatro Figueroa, with scores of attendees waiting in line for up to two hours. The lines grew so long that by 8:00 p.m., over half of the town's population was amassed outside the venue. Many attendees arrived alongside their union and campesino delegations with banners and signs expressing their support for Republican Spain. During the screening, crowds flooded into the aisles and halls of the theatre, growing over three times the venue's capacity. To accommodate the massive audience still waiting outside the theater, exhibition organizers installed a microphone on the balcony of the municipal palace for crowds to listen to orators speak about the Spanish conflict. Throughout the speeches, shouts of "¡Viva la República de España!" rang in the air, along with condemnations of Francisco Franco and the recent military uprising against the Cárdenas

⁵⁸ Annex to Dispatch #292, Aparicio to Gordón Ordás (July 26, 1938), FUE-AFGO, Caja 3, Expediente 1, MEX/3.1.66/3.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

government organized by General Saturnino Cedillo.⁶⁰ As the speeches concluded, over 10,000 attendees paraded through Tapachula's streets, stopping only to protest outside of the residences of German and Spanish immigrants they accused of being fascist sympathizers. The crowd then returned to the theater, where exhibition organizers set up a projector to screen the film on the wall of the town's central market, replaying the film multiple times so that the thousands of onlookers had an opportunity to watch it.

Whether the mass crowds congregated solely due to their passionate support for the Spanish Republic or the entertainment value of the tour itself is unclear. Nonetheless, locals responded with jubilant excitement at each stop of the tour. Similar open-air presentations were conducted in the neighboring community of Tuxtla Chico, which drew over 2,000 people, as well as in Comitán, which had approximately 5,000 attendees for three screenings at the Teatro Belisario Domínguez. The exhibition's stops in smaller localities brought similar sized crowds from neighboring hamlets. Three screenings were conducted in Chiapa de Corzo saw approximately 3,000 attendees. The tour's four screenings and conference discussions in San Cristobal de las Casas, the home base of the governor's opponent General Pineda, brought out 7,000 spectators. Sanboa reflected on the energy exuded by the crowds in his report to the Spanish embassy, "[At] all of the [screenings], a profound emotion was felt. These screenings were presented for thousands of campesinos wearing palm hats and rebozos—the attire of the great indigenous family—which brought a great deal of excitement to the theaters and the public plazas where the films were shown."⁶¹ Curious onlookers would stop Sanboa throughout the tour to inquire about the Spanish conflict and its implications for local and

⁶⁰ For more on the Cedillo uprising, see: Dudley Ankersen, *Agrarian Warlord: Saturnino Cedillo and the Mexican Revolution in San Luis Potosí* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984); Romana Falcón, *Revolución y caciquismo: San Luis Potosí, 1910-1938* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1984); Alicia Gojman de Backal, "Los camisas doradas en la época de Lázaro Cárdenas," *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 20, no. 39/40 (1995): 39-64.

⁶¹ Annex to Dispatch #292, Aparicio to Gordón Ordás (July 26, 1938), FUE-AFGO, Caja 3, Expediente 1, MEX/3.1.66/4.

global affairs. Sanboa recalled:

Their questions were always sincere and profound, with [attendees] asking about the situation of the Spanish people in the war and the causes of our national problems [in Spain]. The respectful and emotional silence of multitudes that intensely watched the Spanish drama unfold on the screen right before their eyes only broke when, during dramatic parts, the anguish promoted utter shouts against those that caused such horrors and genuine shouts of enthusiasm for the magnificent parades of the great Spanish Popular Army.⁶²

Spanning the entire month of April and parts of May, over 50,000 people attended the twenty-eight film screenings throughout the state of Chiapas. As a result, new chapters of the Sociedad de Amigos de España were founded by attendees moved to act in support of the Spanish republican cause. In Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Sanboa noted that the first chapter was established by an “indigenous woman of advanced age.”⁶³ Exhibition organizers took note of the predominantly Indigenous attendees and reinforced the state’s paternalistic practice of using political education initiatives as a means to rectify the country’s “Indian problem.” Even as clashes broke out between supporters of Governor and General Pineda during May Day protests, the exhibition’s organizers decided to continue their tour schedule and screen the film at four Indigenous community centers and boarding schools located throughout the city.⁶⁴ Hundreds of Indigenous Tzotzil residents of the neighboring village of San Juan Chamula also attended the events. In his report to the Embassy, Sanboa commented on the exhibition’s importance to the local native communities in San Cristobal de las Casas. “[This] city is surely one of the most socially backward in the state, although on all occasions, the quota of the theatre was insufficient. At the end of the events, the public stood shouting *vivas* to the Spanish Republic while condemning fascism.”⁶⁵ Sanboa’s reflections on

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Annex to Dispatch #292, Aparicio to Gordón Ordás (July 26, 1938), FUE-AFGO, Caja 3, Expediente 1, MEX/3.1.66/5.

⁶⁴ Lewis, “Efraín Gutiérrez of Chiapas,” 146-147.

⁶⁵ Annex to Dispatch #292, Aparicio to Gordón Ordás (July 26, 1938), FUE-AFGO, Caja 3, Expediente 1, MEX/3.1.66/3.

Indigenous peoples' participation reflected the paternalistic relationship between the popular classes and the Mexican state, downplaying the crowds' comprehension of the Spanish conflict and the parallels it had to their own struggles. Local campesino and labor groups held a deep resentment toward Spanish and German landowners and merchants, who maintained the exploitative *enganche* labor system.⁶⁶ Literally meaning "hooked," the *enganche* system forced workers to labor for little to no wages through deceptive contracts constructed to benefit the employer. The fact that protests of workers and native groups coalesced at the same time as the exhibition further suggests that local communities did indeed see the Iberian conflict as embodying acts of a broader defense of popular democracy.

Following the exhibition's success, Secretaría de Educación Gonzalo Vázquez Vela proposed that Sanboa organize a second leg of the tour to visit the states of Puebla, Querétaro, and Guanajuato. The tour would be comprised of an even larger repertoire of films relating to the Spanish conflict, as well as similar documentaries produced on Mexico's national crises, including the recent nationalization of foreign petroleum companies. Learning from the Chiapas tour, Vázquez Vela also recommended that Sanboa be accompanied by a film operator, sound crew, and additional personnel to assist in the construction of the expositions.⁶⁷ The tour route reflected an intentional effort to thwart misinformation emanating from the national press as well as prominent regional opposition movements such as the Unión Nacional Sinarquista (National Synarchist Union, UNS), a quasi-fascist organization popular among peasants in the former *cristero* strongholds that rejected the secular leftist reforms initiated under the Cárdenas government, including its support for the Second Spanish Republic.⁶⁸ In September 1938, the tour hosted its exhibition at the Escuela

⁶⁶ Lurtz, *From the Grounds Up*, 111-112; Lewis, "Efraín Gutiérrez of Chiapas," 148-150.

⁶⁷ Annex to Dispatch #292, Aparicio to Gordón Ordás (26 July 1938), FUE-AFGO, Caja 3, Expediente 1, MEX/3.1.66/6.

⁶⁸ Meyer, *El sinarquismo, el cardenismo y la iglesia: 1937-1947*; Héctor Hernández García de León, *Historia política del sinarquismo, 1934-1944* (México, D.F.: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2004).

España-México, the orphanage that housed the Niños de Morelia. Along with the tour's film and poster exhibitions, the stop included the sale of products created by the students, the proceeds of which were to be donated back to relief efforts in Spain.⁶⁹

The various forms of media utilized by state and non-state actors to educate Mexico's laboring classes effectively galvanized popular support for the Spanish republican cause. Even in the most remote sectors of Mexican society, citizens had various means to educate themselves and their communities about the Civil War and its repercussions outside of Spain. While previous studies have utilized national newspaper articles to deemphasize the amount of popular support for Spanish republicans and asylum seekers, the archival collections in Mexico and Spain demonstrate the wide array of popular media expositions and propaganda aimed specifically at working people. While the attendance at mass meetings may have been partially explained as a natural interest of artistic spectacles in small, rural communities, the reactions of the onlookers—namely, those that targeted “fascist sympathizers” during such events—suggests a deeper level of political engagement that would subsequently inform popular responses to the Spanish refugee initiative proposed by Lázaro Cárdenas.

⁶⁹ “Exposición en la Escuela de España-México,” *La Voz de México*, September 28, 1938.



Figure 5: Mural of political art and images from Spain displayed at an arts exhibition in the foyer of the Teatro Juárez in the city of Guanajuato. According to *La Voz de México*, 15,000 people attended the exhibition.⁷⁰

Two Mexicos, Two Spains: Right-Wing Opposition to the Spanish Exiles

In contrast to those that actively supported the refugee initiative, certain sectors of Mexican society adamantly rejected the prospect of admitting “Spanish reds.” Characterized as godless communists by critics of the state’s asylum efforts, the refugees represented yet another attack against the country’s conservative traditions and Hispanic cultural values by the Cárdenas government.⁷¹ Such criticisms also displayed the ways some sectors of Mexican society correlated their opposition to revolutionary reforms to the aspirations of the Spanish Nationalist uprising. Indeed, the outbreak of civil war in Spain paralleled a number of threats to Mexico’s revolutionary-era state administrations, which consolidated into viable threats to state power during the Cárdenas administration. In the wake of the recent Cristero Wars (1926-1929, 1934-1936), the military uprising of Saturnino Cedillo in 1938, and the growing violence revolving around the 1940 presidential race, Cárdenas’s support for the Second Spanish Republic and his subsequent refugee initiative reinvigorated debates over the racial, economic, and ideological consequences of the

⁷⁰ *La Voz de México*, October 19, 1938.

⁷¹ Pérez Montfort, *Hispanismo y Falange*, 133; Pla Brugat, “Un río español de sangre roja,” 39-40.

Revolution.⁷² The Spanish Civil War and its subsequent refugee crisis thus created yet another battleground for which Cárdenas's political endeavors served as a focal point of popular contestation.

Much in the same way that internationalists built upon Mexico's and Spain's transnational communitarian traditions, so too did those that opposed the refugee initiative. As has been noted in several studies of transatlantic right-wing connections between Latin America and Spain, the refugee initiative represented an affront to the efforts made by opponents of the Mexican government's secular and "socialist" initiatives to affirm Spain's hegemonic influence in the Western Hemisphere.⁷³ While some peasant-based movements, such as the Unión Nacional Sinarquista, criticized the government's refugee initiative, opposition to the endeavor largely emanated from the upper echelons of Mexican society. Middle-class and elite Mexican citizens, for example, actively voiced their opposition to the Spanish exile initiative through public demonstrations, petitions to state officials, and in the formation of political alliances with far-right organizations.

Although opponents to the government's asylum initiative made up a small fraction of the Mexican populace, their criticisms shed light into the complex political climate in which the Mexican government and its supporters navigated prior to the arrival of thousands of political asylum seekers

⁷² For more on opposition to Cárdenas, see: Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire*; John W. Sherman, *The Mexican Right: The End of Revolutionary Reform, 1929-1940* (Westport: Praeger, 1997); Aaron Navarro, *Political Intelligence and the Creation of Modern Mexico, 1938-1954* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

⁷³ Pérez Montfort, *Hispanismo y Falange*; Clara E. Lida, ed., *México y España en el primer franquismo, 1939-1950: Rupturas formales, relaciones oficiosas* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 2001); Isabel Jara Hinojosa, *De Franco a Pinochet. El Proyecto cultural franquista en Chile, 1936-1980* (Santiago de Chile: Universidad de Chile, 2006); Kirsten Weld, "The Spanish Civil War and the Construction of a Reactionary Historical Consciousness in Augusto Pinochet's Chile," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 98, no. 1 (2018): 77-115; António Costa Pinto and Federico Finchelstein, eds. *Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Europe and Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2019); Kirsten Weld, "The Other Door: Spain and the Guatemalan Counterrevolution, 1944-54," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 51, no. 2 (2019): 307-331; Daniel G. Kressel, "The 'Argentina Franco?': The Regime of Juan Carlos Onganía and Its Ideological Dialogue with Francoist Spain, 1966-1970," *The Americas* 78, no. 1 (2021): 89-117.

in the summer of 1939. Counteracting the efforts made by proponents of the Spanish refugee program, critics sent petitions, organized protests, and published condemnations warning fellow Mexicans of the forthcoming “invasion” of “Spanish reds.” Despite their incendiary accusations, opponents to the initiative did not fully reject the notion of Spanish immigration, nor the prospects of Spaniards’ assimilation into the nation’s social milieu. Their protests focused instead on the ideological convictions of the exiles as detrimental to Mexico’s social, cultural, and political fabric. José Trueba Olivares, a leader of the UNS, frequently juxtaposed Mexico’s conflicts to those in Spain. In his publications for the newspaper *El Sinarquista*, Trueba Olivares suggested that there existed two Mexicos: the official country proposed in the government’s initiatives and policies, versus the “real” country, comprised of its rural, religious majority that maintained Hispanic cultural and religious traditions:

When the first Spanish refugees arrived in Mexico, they brought in their mind the assurance that they were arriving to a Red country. And when they arrived to our country, they raised their clenched fists and sang the Internationale. They believed that [by doing so] they would win the sympathy of the people. Why? Because these Spaniards have been fooled; because they have [conflated] the government of Mexico, supporter and sympathizer of Azaña, with the *pueblo* of Mexico, supporter and sympathizer of Franco. And [therein lies] their fatal disappointment: instead of winning [the Mexican people’s] sympathy, they instead won the hatred and hostility of everyone.⁷⁴

Echoing the political rhetoric in Spain, groups such as the *sinarquistas* framed their political struggle as a dialectical tension between “two Mexicos.” Just as Nationalists and Loyalist factions across the Atlantic alluded to the existence of “two Spains,” Mexican far-right movements expressed their objection to the Spanish refugee initiative as a struggle rooted in the historic defense of Catholic traditions against the modernization and secularization of society.

Since the Spanish Civil War reflected many of the fissures within Mexican society, the

⁷⁴ “Palabras del Sr. Lic. José Trueba Olivares” (October 14, 1939), Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia–Archivo de Unión Nacional Sinarquista (hereafter BNAH-UNS), Rollo 28.

initiative to grant Spanish republicans' asylum was politically dangerous for the Cárdenas administration and the newly established Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (Party of the Mexican Revolution). Religious freedom, rural and urban divides, labor rights, education, and agrarian reform were all conflicts that instigated both the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War.⁷⁵ Although some studies have suggested that opposition to the refugee initiative emanated largely out of the country's working class and peasant communities, an examination of dozens of letters sent to President Cárdenas prior to the arrival of Spanish exiles indicates that most of these objections originated from the country's various far-right political organizations. Nonetheless, criticisms from those that opposed the refugees' arrival demonstrate the ways that class, race, and power relations influenced Mexican citizens' perceptions of not just national politics, but global conflicts as well.

But just as the supporters of the refugee initiative sought to expand upon the two countries' history of transnational communitarian traditions, those that opposed the government's humanitarian efforts also invoked the notion of a Mexican collective cultural and spiritual identity that aligned with those fighting to overthrow the Second Spanish Republic. In particular, the growing influence of fascism in Mexico during the 1930s represented a clear rejection of the Cárdenas administration's left-leaning policy initiatives, such as the national agrarian reform, secular education, radical labor organizing, and the nationalization of key industries.⁷⁶ Shortly after the onset of the Civil War, Spanish leftist and anarchist groups also initiated mass expropriations of lands and

⁷⁵ For surveys of cultural conflicts within the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War, see: Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent, eds. *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Chris Ealham and Michael Richards, eds. *The Splintering of Spain: Cultural History and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁷⁶ Friedrich Katz, "Violence and Terror in the Mexican and Russian Revolutions," in *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America's Long Cold War*, eds. Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 58-61; Alan Knight, "The End of the Mexican Revolution? From Cárdenas to Avila Camacho, 1937-1941," in *Dictablanda*, 47-69.

factories, an affront to both the forces of the military coup, and the republican government's slow but steady social and economic reforms.⁷⁷ The Cárdenas government's open support of both republican and revolutionary factions in Spain exacerbated the tensions within Mexico between the state and the country's conservative sectors.

Just as the Cárdenas government and popular movements in Mexico expressed their support for the Spanish Popular Front, far-right elements in Mexico applauded the military uprising of Francisco Franco and his fascist supporters in the paramilitary political party, the Falange Española de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista (Spanish Phalanx of the Councils of the National Syndicalist Offensive, FE de las JONS).⁷⁸ During and after the Civil War, Franco utilized the Falange to disseminate propaganda and to establish political networks with the far-right in Latin America. In the eyes of Cárdenas and his supporters, the Falange's activities in Mexico posed a legitimate threat to the post-revolutionary state's foreign and domestic political endeavors. Not only did the movement gain widespread support of Spanish immigrants that lived in the country prior to the civil war, but its promotion of *hispanidad*, an imperialist ideology that strived to revitalize Spain's economic and cultural influence in Latin America, counteracted the internationalism of the Mexican and Spanish Popular Fronts. In its call to preserve traditional social hierarchies, the centrality of the Catholic Church in public and political life, and a paternalistic corporatist economy, the Falange and its Mexican supporters adamantly rejected the Cárdenas government's refugee colonization initiatives as an affront to God and Hispanic cultural hegemony.

⁷⁷ Richard Maddox, "Revolutionary Anticlericalism and Hegemonic Processes in an Andalusian Town," *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 1 (1995): 125-143; Julian Casanova, *Anarchism, the Republic, and Civil War in Spain, 1931-1939* (London: Routledge, 2005); Richard Purkiss, *Democracy, Trade Unions, and Political Violence in Spain* (Brighton: Sussex University Press, 2011).

⁷⁸ Stanley G. Payne, *Falange: A History of Spanish Fascism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961); Pérez Montfort, *Hispanismo y Falange*; Ismael Saz Campos, *Fascismo y franquismo* (València: Universitat de València, 2004); José Antonio Parejo Fernández, "Fascismo rural, control social y colaboración ciudadana. Datos y propuestas para el caso español," *Historia Social* no. 71 (2011): 143-159.

Francoist Sympathizers in Mexico

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s Spanish fascism saturated the political discourses of the Mexican Right. Among the country's peasantry, the *sinarquista* movement opposed the government's humanitarian effort on the premise of defending Mexico's "Hispanic" values from "godless" Spanish republicans.⁷⁹ Founded in 1937, by 1939 the UNS was comprised of approximately 90,000 members and 102 local committees throughout the country, most of which were located in regions sympathetic to the *Cristiada* insurgencies (1926-1928, 1934-1936). At its peak in 1943, UNS membership skyrocketed to a half million.⁸⁰ The UNS promoted an ardent anti-communist patriarchal nationalism that took direct influence from the clerical fascism of the Falange Española.⁸¹ The UNS emphasized Mexico's racial and spiritual bonds with Spain, calling on its supporters to support the Franco military uprising, and worked closely with Falange agents in Mexico.⁸² In an assembly speech, *sinarquista* leader Rubén Mangas Alfaro bemoaned the eradication of Mexico's "racial personality," an identity he attributed to the country's Spanish colonial heritage:

We, who have a lot of Spanish [blood] in our veins, who speak the same language, that, since we were little, felt very close...to Spain, we must take from the example that the mother country gives us. We must feel intimately united, profoundly linked. We have to feel, more than ever, like brothers, the children of a single mother. We must defend her—her traditions, her sentiments—we have to defend her with our own life, if necessary.⁸³

⁷⁹ For more on the use of colonial discourses in support and opposition to the Spanish refugee initiative, see: Piña Soria, *El presidente Cárdenas y la inmigración de españoles republicanos*, 61; Pérez Montfort, *Hispanismo y Falange*, 127-139.

⁸⁰ Haim Avni, "Cárdenas, México y los refugiados, 1938-1940," *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe* 3, no. 1 (1992): 13.

⁸¹ Mario Gill, *El sinarquismo, su origen, su esencia su misión* (México: Comité de Defensa de la Revolución, 1944); Meyer, *El sinarquismo, el cardenismo y la iglesia*; García de León, *Historia política del sinarquismo*; Ben Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 101-156; Brice Calsapeu Losfeld, "No todo lo que brilla es oro: Apuntes sobre la naturaleza del sinarquismo mexicano," *Tzintzun: Revista de Estudios Históricos* no. 61 (2015): 130-162.

⁸² Rankin, *¡México, la patria!*, 35.

⁸³ "Palabras del Sr. Rubén Mangas Alfaro" (October 14, 1939), BNAH-UNS, Rollo 28.

Mangas's gendered reverence to Francoist Spain complemented the UNS's efforts to organize against the threats of communism, secularization, and social modernization. Of particular importance was the role of women in galvanizing their male family members to defend their traditions and values. Again, Mangas looked to Spain as an exemplary model that Mexican women should emulate:

The history of Mexico, written with the blood of martyrs and heroes, is a history that speaks to us only of ignominies, betrayals, and disgusting infringements. There we have on the pages [of our history] the heroic examples of Mexican women: Anti-communist women, following the example of the women of Spain. I will tell you that the day is not far away when, in every Mexican home, there will be a mother, a daughter, a girlfriend, that can say with plain satisfaction: "I, as a Mexican woman, I have done my duty."⁸⁴

For *sinarquistas*, women's defense of the Mexican nation and its Hispanic traditions paralleled the Falange Española's efforts to mobilize women in Spain. While *sinarquista* women regularly asserted their political independence from the organization's male leadership, they remained steadfast in the group's dedication to God, family, and country, albeit with more emphasis on the home than the men of the organization.⁸⁵ Similar commitments were expected of the women affiliated with the Falange's *Sección Feminina* (Feminine Section), which, as Kathleen Richmond describes, "was designed to underline the importance of the family, reinforce patriarchal authority, and bring rudimentary welfare and health care to the population at large."⁸⁶ In both movements, women's participation sought to promote traditional values and patriarchal gender norms.

While the UNS represented a largely campesino base that abstained from electoral politics, the founding of the Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party, PAN) in 1939 sought to

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Kristina A. Boyland, "Gendering the Faithful and Altering the Nation: Mexican Catholic Women's Activism, 1917-1940," in *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico*, eds. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 214.

⁸⁶ Kathleen Richmond, *Women and Spanish Fascism: The Women's Section of the Falange, 1934-1959* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 15.

challenge Cárdenas's policies at the ballot box. Much like the *sinarquistas*, the PAN's leadership situated *hispanidad* at the heart of Mexican national identity. The party's founder, Efraín González Luna, and first president, Manuel Gómez Morín, glorified Spanish colonization as an integral aspect of Mexico's "Hispanic essence," yet maintained discretion in making public expressions of support with the Franco regime and its affiliated agents in Latin America.⁸⁷ Fears of violating Article 33 of the Mexican Constitution often stifled direct affiliations between the Falange and the Mexican right, though their respective vocal support for strengthening the "spiritual" ties between Spain and its former colonies was often affirmed quite openly. In September 1939, the newspaper *Excelsior* published the Falange's political manifesto in its entirety.⁸⁸ Despite their attempts at discretion, public displays of support for the Francoist uprising placed many sectors of the Mexican right onto the radar of the Mexican secret police. As a result, the activities of Falange operatives became a primary investigative target of Mexico's growing political intelligence apparatus.

Community Petitions Against Spanish Refugees & Foreign Volunteers

In the weeks before the arrival of the first Spanish refugees, President Lázaro Cárdenas received a series of telegrams protesting the government's support for Spanish republican exiles. Most protests against the government's efforts came from conservative unions and far-right political organizations speaking on behalf of their middle-class and upper-class supporters. Labor associations affiliated with the Confederación Regional de Obreros Mexicanos (Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers, CROM) actively rejected the government's refugee initiative, labeling exiles as "communist fugitives" and "invaders."⁸⁹ CROM union officials' petitions against

⁸⁷ Francisco Joel Guzmán Anguiano, "Efraín González Luna y Manuel Gómez Morín ante la España franquista y el exilio republicano a México, 1939-1945," *Inflexiones: Revista de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades* 1, no. 2 (2018): 139.

⁸⁸ Rankin, ¡México, la patria!, 33.

⁸⁹ José Ramírez, Juan Bermudez, Francisco Trujillo, and other signatories to Lázaro Cárdenas (June

the refugees framed their opposition based on the potential threat that an influx of Spaniards would have on the racial composition of the Mexican work force.⁹⁰ Following the arrival of the first vessel of refugees, representatives speaking on behalf of “campesino groups” from Coscomatepec, Veracruz claimed the introduction of “communist foreigners” to be anti-patriotic and a humiliation to the nation’s sovereignty, demanding that the exiles be immediately expelled from the country.⁹¹ Similar condemnations came from union officials in Tlaxcala, who organized protests against the government’s efforts to protect “Spanish militants.”⁹² While some of the petitions certainly arose from deep-seated concerns about Mexicans losing their jobs, labor leaders from the CTM and the CNC worked diligently to counteract misinformation circulated through reactionary news publications and within the labor movement. CTM leaders organized meetings with union workers to dispel any rumors that the refugees threatened their livelihoods and actively sought to draw solidarity between Mexican workers and their “Spanish brothers.”⁹³

The Cárdenas administration’s reception of non-Spanish volunteers that fought in Spain was especially contentious. In October 1938, the Spanish Republican government requested that the Mexican government safeguard foreign volunteers that participated in the International Brigades who were then persecuted by their home countries due to their involvement in the Civil War. The proposal immediately drew condemnation from Mexico’s right-wing and nationalist factions.⁹⁴ The loudest protests to the non-Spanish volunteers’ arrival came from right-wing groups sympathetic to the presidential opposition candidate, Juan Andreu Almazán, an ardent critic of the government’s

24, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 907, Expediente 546.6/200.

⁹⁰ AGN-LCR, Caja 907, Expediente 546.6/200, 212-215, 217-219.

⁹¹ Miguel Domíquez, Adrian Merina, and other signatories to Lázaro Cárdenas (June 20, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 907, Expediente 546.6/200.

⁹² Benito P. García to Lázaro Cárdenas (July 4, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 907, Expediente 546.6/200, 212-215.

⁹³ Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 195.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 189-190.

refugee initiative.⁹⁵ On January 23, 1939, the XEW radio broadcast reported that the Vanguardia Nacionalista Mexicana (Mexican Nationalist Vanguard), a party that regularly espoused anti-Semitic and anti-communist sentiments, intended to organize a protest at the Port of Veracruz, “to publicly display their discontent regarding the entry of 1,500 foreigners, who fought in favor of Azaña in Republican Spain, into our country.”⁹⁶ The following day, the station reported that an intercepted message from the Partido Comunista de España’s General Secretary, José Díaz, claimed that 300 members of the Soviet secret police, or Cheka, would also be provided asylum to “help our comrades in Mexico” by disrupting the upcoming 1940 presidential elections. The station further noted that the right-wing party, the Frente Constitucional Democrático Mexicano (Mexican Democratic Constitutional Front), was organizing a protest against the émigrés’ arrival. Claims of Soviet interference in Mexican politics proved to focus more on allegations of the Cárdenas government’s alleged communist ambitions than on any tangible threat since diplomatic relations between Mexico and the Soviet Union had been severed for years and would not be reestablished until Mexico’s entrance into World War II in 1942.⁹⁷ In spite of this, Mexican intelligence officials determined that the allegations of a Soviet conspiracy were too dangerous to be publicly disseminated. In his notes of the radio transcript, one intelligence agent notified his superior that the accusation would “be suppressed in the radio broadcast.”⁹⁸ The following day, the station reported

⁹⁵ “Boletín proporcionado por la XEW” (January 23-25, 1939), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 31, Expediente 11, 10-15. For more on the far-right support for Franco in Mexico, see: Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 109.

⁹⁶ “Boletín proporcionado por la XEW a las 17.50 horas” (January 23, 1939), DGIPS, Caja 31, Expediente 11, 10; Glazier, *Unwelcome Exiles*, 234.

⁹⁷ Diplomatic ties between Mexico and the Soviet Union had been severed in 1930 following a series of escalations by Comintern agents in Mexico, which included a conspiracy to overthrow the Calles government. Formal ties between the two countries would only be reestablished in November 1942 as a gesture of goodwill and collaboration among Ally forces in World War II. See: Daniela Spenser, *The Impossible Triangle: Mexico, Soviet Russia, and the United States in the 1920s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 160-169; Jones, *The War Has Brought Peace to Mexico*, 108-109.

⁹⁸ “Boletín de la XEW. Proporcionada a las 14 horas” (January 24, 1939), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 31, Expediente 11, 11.

that government officials ensured that all foreign asylum-seekers would be naturalized as Mexican citizens as soon as they fulfilled their duties as colonists and cultivated the lands allocated to them by the state. Undeterred by the government's assurances, members of the Vanguardia Nacionalista notified journalists that they intended to send a "strong brigade" of local campesinos to protest the asylum-seekers' disembarkation.⁹⁹

Others objecting to the hosting of non-Spanish combatants in the Civil War claimed that their opposition to asylum for International Brigade volunteers was based on a scarcity of jobs and resources for Mexican citizens. In a letter to President Cárdenas, Adalberto Abascal, a member of the clandestine Unión de Católicos Mexicanos (Union of Mexican Catholics) and father of *sinarquista* leader Salvador Abascal, expressed his concern that the foreign volunteers posed a "terrible and irreparable detriment" to campesinos and workers, alleging that state-backed labor unions under the CTM planned to recruit the refugees as members of their locals to displace native-born citizens.¹⁰⁰ Carmen Calero, the Secretary of the Unión Femenil Nacionalista (Nationalist Women's Union), wrote to the President to request that the funds used to support the foreign volunteers instead go to the educational needs of the approximately 50,000 Mexican children that did not have access to schools.¹⁰¹ President Albino Frías and Secretary Raúl González of the Frente Constitucional Democrático Mexicano in Mineral de Maguarichic, Chihuahua, notified Cárdenas that their organization had recently passed a resolution unanimously in opposition to the government's protection of the "International Brigade of Communist Mercenaries," demanding that the

⁹⁹ "Información XEW. Proporcionada a las 18.45 horas" (January 25, 1939), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 31, Expediente 11, 15.

¹⁰⁰ Adalberto Abascal to Lázaro Cárdenas (January 31, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 907, Expediente 546.6/200, 607; Yves Solis, "Secret Archives, Secret Societies: New Perspectives on Mexico's Cristero Rebellion from the Vatican Secret Archives," in *Local Church: Global Church: Catholic Activism in Latin American from Rerum Novarum to Vatican II*, eds. Stephen J.C. Andes and Julia G. Young (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 124.

¹⁰¹ Carmen Calero to Lázaro Cárdenas (January 27, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 907, Expediente 546.6/200, 687.

government rescind its asylum initiative to “prevent those bad elements from mixing with the Mexican family.”¹⁰²

Some critics accused the government of prioritizing the relocation of Spanish refugees over repatriated Mexicans arriving from the United States. The employment crisis produced by the Great Depression led U.S. immigration officials and policy makers actively to seek the deportation of Mexican immigrants, leading to mass roundups and deportations during the first half of the decade. Though specific figures are unknown, scholars suggest that between 1929 and 1935 U.S. immigration agents deported approximately 82,000 Mexicans.¹⁰³ Throughout the decade, 1.6 million Mexican returned to Mexico, with approximately 400,000 participating in repatriation programs organized by the Mexican and U.S. governments.¹⁰⁴ Historian Fernando Saúl Alanís Enciso suggests that, in the wake of mass return migration to Mexico, the government’s critics rejected the proposed refugee colonization efforts on the basis that land and resources should be allocated to repatriated Mexican citizens and their families instead.¹⁰⁵ Upon further scrutiny, however, I argue that opponents of the refugee initiative focused more on the ideological predilections of specific political actors rather than their concerns for repatriated Mexicans. Some Mexicans abroad did indeed oppose the refugee initiative and perceived the government’s efforts as a betrayal of the workers and campesinos that fought for revolutionary reform. In one letter to Cárdenas, seventeen Mexicans living in Los Angeles wrote emphatically to protest the proposed initiative to grant foreign combatants and Spanish exiles lands to colonize. The signatories claimed that the initiative nullified the sacrifices of their compatriots that fought and died during the Mexican Revolution. Unlike other

¹⁰² Albino Frías and Raúl González to Lázaro Cárdenas (January 24, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 907, Expediente 546.6/200, 692.

¹⁰³ Laura D. Gutiérrez, “‘Trains of Misery’: Repatriate Voices and Responses in Northern Mexico during the Great Depression,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 39, no. 4 (2020): 16.

¹⁰⁴ Kelly Lytle Hernández, “Mexican Immigration to the United States,” *OAH Magazine of History* 23, no. 4 (2009): 25-26.

¹⁰⁵ Alanís Enciso, *They Should Stay There*, 134.

opponents of Spanish refugees, the letter writers stressed their support for the advances made by the President for the Mexican proletariat and the expansion of his national agrarian reform. Rather, the cosignatories objected to the plan to provide foreign “adventurers” lands to colonize “while thousands of us wait abroad for the day in which it is possible to return to our dear country without aggravating the great problems which your government is so valiantly and worthily fighting at the moment.”¹⁰⁶ For these men, the Revolution’s success would only come when the rallying cry “Mexico for the Mexicans” was upheld in practice, and the nation was liberated from “the fatal influence that Europeans have exercised over our homeland from 1521 to today.”¹⁰⁷ Similar views were shared by some in Mexico, such as Faustino Peña, the president of the Comisariado Ejido de Tierra Blanca in Veracruz, who objected to providing asylum for refugees and instead suggested favoring the migration of Mexicans “suffering” in the United States.”¹⁰⁸

Further scrutiny of the Cárdenas government’s colonization efforts reveals little evidence of a preference toward Spaniards over Mexican Americans. Efforts to settle repatriated Mexicans, much like the Spanish refugee initiative, were marred with inconsistencies due to differing opinions on property allocations, a lack of financial resources, and the ambivalence of Mexican-descended people in the United States to repatriate themselves to a country still embroiled in political and economic conflicts. As demonstrated throughout this study, Mexican officials’ perceptions of Spaniards as prospective settlers faced an ambivalent response similar to those aimed at repatriated Mexicans. In both instances, state officials deployed racial and economic reasoning to validate their support or their opposition to colonization initiatives. Both endeavors, however, were viewed by Cárdenas and the head of the Departamento de Migración, Manuel Gamio, as beneficial to the

¹⁰⁶ Cosignatories to Lázaro Cárdenas (February 14, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 907, Expediente 546.6/200, 348.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Faustino Peña to Lázaro Cárdenas (February 9, 1939), AGN-CLR, Caja 907, Expediente 546.6/200, 357.

“Mexican race.”¹⁰⁹ What is more, the Cárdenas government provided financial opportunities for repatriated Mexicans that were not available to Spanish refugees. Unlike the financial investments of Mexican repatriation colonies, which were funded and organized directly by the Mexican government, all transportation costs, machinery, and property purchases for Spanish and foreign asylum-seekers were paid for by the Spanish republican government-in-exile or through voluntary donations made by Mexican citizens and foreign contributors.¹¹⁰ Lastly, many Mexicans refused to repatriate themselves or simply abandoned the agricultural colonies due to lack of infrastructure, cultural alienation, mixed-status family networks, political opposition, or better economic opportunities available in the United States.¹¹¹ Although plans to naturalize Spanish refugees would eventually be offered after the first wave of arrivals, efforts to change federal law to allow all Mexican citizens to maintain their national allegiance abroad never came to fruition.¹¹² However, recent studies contend that many Mexicans in the United States were in fact granted dual citizenship

¹⁰⁹ “Departamento Autónomo de Prensa y Publicidad. Información. Boletín 87, Se inician los trabajos a la repatriación de mexicanos residentes en Estados Unidos” (April 13, 1939), AHSRE, “Exilio Español” (January 1939-August 1939), 82; Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 179.

¹¹⁰ As part of Cárdenas’s agrarian reform, Mexican repatriates and Spanish exiles were eligible to obtain credit through the Banco Nacional del Crédito Ejidal to modernize their farming machinery and cultivation methods with amortized loans and allowed them to avoid using their properties as collateral. Moreover, the preference of Mexican repatriates over other foreign minorities proliferated existing racial inequalities toward Chinese immigrants living in northern Mexico. However, the cost of transportation and establishing the Spanish refugee colonies were the responsibility of the Spanish republican government. See: Francisco Trejo to Francisco Nungaia and Fructuoso Lara (August 10, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 209, Expediente 6442, 14; Banco Nacional de Crédito Ejidal to Secretaría de Gobernación (August 15, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 209, Expediente 6442, 17. Everardo Escárcega López, *Historia de la cuestión agraria mexicana: El cardenismo, un parteaguas histórico en el proceso agrario nacional, 1934-1940* (México, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1990), 195; Verónica Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California: Land, Identity, and Politics on the Mexican Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 74-78.

¹¹¹ Alanís Enciso, *They Should Stay There*, 101-126; Hernández, “Mexican Immigration to the United States:” 26; Brian Gratton and Emily Merchant, “Immigration, Repatriation, and Deportation: The Mexican-Origin Population in the United States, 1920-1950,” *The International Migration Review* 47, no. 4 (2013): 952; Balderrama and Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal*, 184.

¹¹² Balderrama and Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal*, 178.

based on petitions to Mexican consulates.¹¹³ Allegations that Cárdenas preferred Spanish exiles over Mexican nationals, while a common criticism from right-wing opponents, never manifested itself in the exclusion of repatriates.

The historical legacy of colonial exploitation inflicted by Spanish immigrants led some of Cárdenas's supporters to also oppose the refugee initiative. On May 27, 1939, the lawyer and *agrarista* leader Román Badillo wrote to the president expressing his concerns regarding the government's refugee relocation initiative. "If I were an enemy of your regime," he clarified, "I would not deal with the matter that I am writing to you about because I would join the voice of those who exclaim...(that you) will be worse than the traitors who brought the French to Mexico!" He clarified that his opposition stemmed not from Hispanophobia, "because of the fact that, as a Mestizo, I have Spanish blood in my veins," but rather from the ongoing social ills caused by the Spanish immigrant population already present in Mexico. "Among the 50,000 Spaniards [in Mexico] there are many poisoners in the cantinas, hoarders of Mexican grains—harvested from Mexican soils and cultivated by Mexican sweat—who sell them to us at starvation prices" and those "who enrich themselves by exploiting Mexican women." Badillo accused such "undesirables" as "the evil of Mexico and the shame of Spain." Speaking as a campesino and former hacienda peon who "felt and suffered from the foot of many soulless Spanish administrators on my spine," he warned of the potential threats the refugees posed to the country's marginalized classes. He continued:

I know from the experience of my flesh that the Spaniard is a cruel master, a donkey driver...and we [Mexicans] have been the asses. The Spaniard has never dug the soil of Mexico to enrich it, only to take advantage of its fruits and we [Mexicans] have been the ones who have sown and cultivated it with hard work and with wages of twenty-five and thirty cents.

Political refugees would be no different, as "men without faith, without hope, and without morals,"

¹¹³ Romeo Guzman, "Migrant Parents, Mexican-Americans, and Transnational Citizenship, 1920s to 1940s" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2017), 86-100.

Badillo exclaimed, “they will not help in elevating our masses...the bandits do not believe in redemption or the progress of the humble.”

Badillo also saw the refugees as a threat to the racial fabric of the Mexican nation. “The racial superiority of the Spaniards over the Mexicans is physical and mental and is, above all, a result of the Spaniards conquering Mexico.” He continued by claiming that Spaniards, regardless of their political affiliations, would feel superior to Mexicans and would “try to subjugate and humiliate people, exploit us, and invalidate our revolutionary conquests.” While Badillo acknowledged that much of the country’s native population supported the refugee initiative, he rejected the idea that this approval was based on their own ideological convictions. Rather, it was their loyalty to the Cárdenas government that dictated their behaviors. He explained:

It does not surprise me that men of the Indian race are silent, and even defend this aforementioned invasion [of Spanish refugees]. If they support you [Cárdenas], it is because they are emasculated and castrated, which makes the offense even worse towards you: [the Indians] consider you a master, not a friend, and [their support for you] is out of fear of upsetting their master (despite the fact that you are actually a friend and not a master).

Badillo was either unaware or didn’t believe that the refugees constituted a different socioeconomic demographic than the Spanish immigrants that arrived before them. He praised the Spanish laboring classes in the same breath as he condemned the Spanish merchants and landowners that he remembered so bitterly.

I respect the Spanish worker who wears overalls and, with calloused hands, teaches Mexicans [useful skills] in their factories.... I respect the farmer who, with dirt, dust, and sweat, works our fields and teaches our campesinos better ways to cultivate the homeland. But, of the 50,000 Spaniards that we have, these form a small percentage.

In contrast to the *indigenista* intellectuals of the era, Badillo’s views were informed by European and U.S. views of eugenics which suggested that mixed race and Indigenous people were inferior to white Europeans. Moreover, his condemnation of the exiles as being “without morals” and “outlaws” suggests that for Badillo, one’s origins, not one’s politics or class identity, dictated their

behavior and impact on society. It is in this vein of thought that Badillo concluded his letter with a warning to Cárdenas: “In this matter, do not be guided by the ideals of other people, but solely by the ideals of your race.”¹¹⁴

Conclusion

The political underpinnings of Mexican opposition to the Spanish refugees reflected a greater phenomenon that would continue to permeate throughout Latin American society decades after the end of the exiles’ arrival. As Kirsten Weld reveals in her study of the memory of the Spanish Civil War in Latin America, the conflict and its consequences “served as a living metaphor for those who disagreed, passionately, about how to organize societies” and all at once as an “inspiration, moral lesson, usable past, and cautionary tale.”¹¹⁵ For supporters and proponents alike, the government’s refugee initiative exacerbated, exaggerated, aggravated the existing tensions within Mexican society, most specifically the purpose and direction of the Mexican Revolution. What is more, both supporters and critics of Cárdenas’s asylum policies invoked a shared historical relationship between Mexicans and Spaniards that divided based on their respective ideological affinities. Just as the dissemination of ideas and people led to new affinities and collaborations between Mexican and Spanish revolutionaries prior to the end of the Civil War, those that opposed their radical endeavors also established their own transnational communitarian tradition—one that upheld a cultural reverence for Spanish cultural and economic dominance in the Americas and would serve as the basis of many far-right political movements to come.

This chapter has demonstrated the vast array of opinions held by Mexicans regarding the

¹¹⁴ Román Badillo to Lázaro Cárdenas (May 27, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 907, Expediente 546.6/200, 254-255.

¹¹⁵ Weld, “The Spanish Civil War and the Construction of a Reactionary Historical Consciousness in Augusto Pinochet’s Chile:” 80-81.

Spanish refugee initiative. Nearly half of all the Spanish asylum seekers that would come to Mexico would arrive in the summer of 1939 and soon be encountering a society that had been deeply connected to their struggle. Though many community requests went unfulfilled or unanswered, they demonstrated how much the Spanish Civil War shaped the daily lives of Mexican citizens. Moreover, they proposed a community-based solution to one of the first instances of mass transoceanic migration of political exiles in world history. Mexican communities utilized an array of tactics to sustain their solidarity with Spanish republicans and revolutionaries, and proposed initiatives to expand hard fought revolutionary reforms. In doing so, they fortified and built upon political traditions that spanned decades, all the while looking to future collaborations as a means to reconfigure their social, economic, cultural, and political conditions by integrating Spanish refugees into their communities and onto their lands.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ambassadors of the Revolution: Anarchist Diplomacy during the Spanish Civil War

On July 17, 1936, General Francisco Franco led a military uprising against the democratically elected Second Spanish Republic, resulting in a three-year civil war that ravaged every corner of the country. The Nationalist forces' attack against the Republic also galvanized the country's militant worker and peasant movements to initiate a full-on revolution while simultaneously fending off the military coup. Democratic governments chose non-intervention over defending Europe's youngest democratic experiment in hopes of staving off a world war. With the exception of the Soviet Union, Mexico was the only country in the world to come to the diplomatic aid of the Republican government.

Throughout the Spanish Civil War, republicans and anarchists alike celebrated Mexico's gestures of diplomatic solidarity, forming a rare consensus during a conflict marred by sectarian divisions. At May Day celebrations in Aragón in 1937, civilians and combatants proclaimed Mexico as Spain's closest ally. The Aragón defense council's newspaper, *Nuevo Aragón*, covered the celebrations for over a week after they took place, reiterating the class and racial bonds that united the Mexican and Spanish people. Along with depictions of Mexican revolutionaries such as Emiliano Zapata and cartoon renderings of Mexican campesinos in the newspaper, the editors of *Nuevo Aragón* explicitly compared themselves to Mexico's marginalized native population. One front-page article proudly proclaimed that "the *aragoneses* are the 'Indians' of Spain" based on their "simplicity," "energy," and "tenacious love for the truth."¹ Although Mexican diplomatic and Spanish revolutionaries regularly espoused racial codifiers to articulate the country's ties to one another, such radical evocations were broadly associated with various forms of social conflicts that

¹ "Aragón abraza a Méjico," *Nuevo Aragón* (Caspe), May 1, 1937.

defined “race” based on social group’s lineage of struggle, exploitation, and, in revolutionary moments, emancipation.²



Figure 6: (Left) Cover of *Nuevo Aragón* (May 1, 1937). (Right) “España y Méjico” cartoon in *Nuevo Aragón* (May 1, 1937). Subheading reads: “Rejoice, little brother! The sun rises for everyone!”³

Whereas previous studies of Mexico’s interventions in the Spanish Civil War have focused on the diplomatic and humanitarian significance of the country’s financial support for the Second Republic, little has been said of the relationship between Spain’s anarchist movement and the Cárdenas government.⁴ There are a number of reasons for the lack of historical examination; first, with the

² CLR James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989); James Sandos, *Rebellion in the Borderlands: Anarchism and the Plan of San Diego, 1904-1923* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992); Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*; Cindy Forester, *The Time of Freedom: Campesino Workers in Guatemala’s October Revolution* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001); Laurent DuBois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Brooke Larson, *Trials of Nation Making: Liberalism, Race, and Ethnicity in the Andes, 1810-1910* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Marc Becker, “Mariátegui, the Comintern, and the Indigenous Question in Latin America,” *Science & Society* 70, no. 4 (2006): 450-479; James E. Sanders, *The Vanguard of the Atlantic World: Creating Modernity, Nation, and Democracy in Nineteenth Century Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Benson, *Antiracism in Cuba*; Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation*.

³ “Aragón abraza a Méjico,” *Nuevo Aragón*, May 1, 1937; “España y Méjico,” *Nuevo Aragón*, May 1, 1937.

⁴ Smith, *Mexico and the Spanish Republicans*; Fagen, *Exiles and Citizens*; Powell, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*; José Antonio Matesanz, *Las raíces del exilio: México ante la guerra civil española, 1936-1939*

exception of Abdón Mateos's study of the Indalecio Prieto's ties to the Cárdenas government during and after the Civil War, few studies acknowledge any persistent interactions between revolutionary factions and the Mexican state during the duration of conflict.⁵ Second, much of the documentation of left-wing factions during the Civil War had been confiscated or destroyed by Nationalist forces. However, anarchist factions sent their collections for safekeeping at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam near the end of the Civil War, thus preserving some archival remnants. Lastly, the sheer paradox of an anarchist organization reaching out for support from a foreign national government seems to defy conventional readings of the Spanish libertarian movement. By placing archival documents located in Spain, the Netherlands, and Mexico in conversation with one another, this chapter provides an assessment of Spain's anarchist movement—namely, the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labor, CNT) and the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (Iberian Anarchist Federation, FAI)—and its efforts to galvanize Mexican support both within Spain and through propaganda campaigns in Mexico.

As ambassadors of the Spanish Revolution, CNT representatives embarked on domestic and international campaigns to build relations with the Mexican people and the Cárdenas government. Anarchist groups' willingness to reach out to a sitting government administration reflects the unique circumstances of both countries' social revolutions. The CNT saw similar openings and—for the first time ever in Spanish history—appointed government ministers within the coalitional governments of Francisco Largo Caballero and Juan Negrín at different points of the Civil War. Although seen as an act of betrayal from some of its more militant members, the decision reflected

(México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1999); Agustín Sánchez Andrés and Pedro Pérez Herrero, *Historia de las relaciones entre España y México, 1821-2014* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2015), 155-170; Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*.

⁵ Abdón Mateos, *De la guerra civil al exilio: Los republicanos españoles y México, Indalecio Prieto y Lázaro Cárdenas* (Madrid: Fundación Indalecio Prieto, 2005).

the great lengths anarchists undertook to ward off the specter of fascism in Spain.

Mexico was not just an important ally because of its government's military aid for the Popular Front; of note here is the Cárdenas government's backing of radical agrarian reforms and its ability to forge strong loyalties with working class and campesino organizations that remained only tangentially influenced by the Partido Comunista Mexicano.⁶ Revolutionaries in Spain viewed Cárdenas's initiatives as a genuine gesture to follow the demands of the nation's laboring classes. As part of their diplomatic endeavors, the Spanish anarchists deployed a discursive strategy that promoted an alternative historical connection linking Spain's laboring classes to its former colonial territories. By emphasizing a collective experience of exploitation at the hands of Spanish nobles and capitalists, anarchists promoted an explicitly anti-colonial and internationalist worldview when expressing to Spain's former colonial subjects in the Americas. In doing so, they extended their support for the Cárdenas government while also attempting to rebuild Mexico's anti-authoritarian tradition, which had been severely neglected following years of repression and disorder.

However, as this chapter demonstrates, the task of developing an anti-colonial and internationalist worldview proved far more complicated than mere salutations to global social revolution. As evident in the perceptions of revolutionaries before and during the Spanish Civil War, Spanish radicals' understandings of racial and class solidarity were articulated explicitly from the point of view of a population unfamiliar with many of the social and cultural nuances of Mexican society. A clear distinction subsequently emerged between the discursive character of the anarchist movement within Spain and the views of its delegates that travelled to Mexico. While Spanish radicals regularly lambasted the racial inequalities created by centuries of colonialism, they often did not fully comprehend the ways in which race and racism permeated not only Mexican society, but

⁶ Barry Carr, "El Partido Comunista y la movilización agraria en la Laguna, 1920-1940: ¿Una alianza obrero-campesina?" *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 51, no. 2 (1989): 115-149.

their own. In demonstrating the complex ways in which Spanish anarchists imagined race, class, and revolution in relation to Mexico, this chapter contributes to a growing body of literature that has examined the constructions of race during the Spanish Civil War.⁷ Whereas some scholars have characterized the views of certain sectors of the Spanish anarchist movement as nationalistic or, as Martin Baxmeyer claims, directly replicating the racist tropes espoused by Spanish fascists, this chapter demonstrates the ways that Spanish anarchists distinguished between notions of national and racial difference through an explicitly internationalist worldview.⁸ I thus seek to provide a more holistic examination of the world Spanish libertarians aspired to build out of the shell of the old.

⁷ Eduardo González Calleja and Fredes Limón Nevado, *La Hispanidad como instrumento de combate: Raza e imperio en la prensa franquista durante la guerra civil española* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Históricos, 1988); Robin D.G. Kelley, “‘This Ain’t Ethiopia, But It’ll Do’: African Americans and the Spanish Civil War,” in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 123-158; Abel Paz, *La cuestión de marruecos y la república española* (Madrid: Fundación de Estudios Libertarios Anselmo Lorenzo, 2000); Javier Domínguez Arribas, *El enemigo judeo-masónico en la propaganda franquista, 1936-1945* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2009); David Featherstone, “Black Internationalism, Subaltern Cosmopolitanism, and the Spatial Politics of Antifascism,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 103, no. 6 (2013): 1406-1420; Isabel Soto, “‘I Knew that Spain Once Belonged to the Moors’: Langston Hughes, Race, and the Spanish Civil War,” *Research in African Literatures* 45, no. 3 (2014): 130-146; Mustafa Kabha, “The Spanish Civil War as Reflected in Contemporary Palestinian Press,” in *Arab Responses to Fascism and Nazism: Attraction and Repulsion*, ed. Israel Gershoni (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 127-137; Lisa Jackson-Schebetta, *Traveler, There Is No Road: Theatre, the Spanish Civil War, and the Decolonial Imagination in the Americas* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2017); Claudia Montero, “El discurso feminista en Chile y las imágenes de la mujer en la República Española,” *Estudios Feministas* 25, no. 2 (2017): 777-801; Margaret Stevens, *Red International and Black Caribbean: Communists in New York City, Mexico, and the West Indies, 1919-1939* (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 211-250; Ali Al Tuma, *Guns, Culture and Moors: Racial Perceptions, Cultural Impact and the Moroccan Participation in the Spanish Civil War* (London: Routledge, 2018); Lambe, *No Barrier Can Contain It*.

⁸ Martin Baxmeyer, “‘Mother Spain, We Love You!’: Nationalism and Racism in Anarchist Literature during the Spanish Civil War,” in *Reassessing the Transnational Turn: Scales of Analysis in Anarchist and Syndicalist Studies*, eds. Constance Bantman and Bert Altena (Oakland: PM Press, 2017), 204. For recent examinations on the role of nationalism among Spanish anarchists, see: Pilar Salomón Chéliz, “Internacionalismo y nación en el anarquismo español anterior a 1914,” in *Estudios sobre nacionalismo y nación en la España contemporánea*, eds. Ismael Saz and Ferran Archilés (Zaragoza: Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2011), 137-168; Morris Brodie, *Transatlantic Anarchism during the Spanish Civil War and Revolution, 1936-1939: Fury Over Spain* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 97-127; Danny Evans, *Revolution and the State: Anarchism in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Chino: AK Press, 2020), 48-51, 146-153.

Mexican Diplomatic Relations with Spanish Anarchists

The Mexican government's first interactions with Spain's revolutionary movements began in August 1936, shortly after the Second Spanish Republic's Ambassador to Mexico, Félix Gordón Ordás, requested material aid to fend off the military coup led by General Francisco Franco. Heeding his request, Cárdenas instructed the Ministry of War and Navy to ship twenty-thousand Remington rifles and twenty-million cartridges to support Republican Spain's defenses.⁹ By November 1936, Mexican weapons had reached anarchist militias in Barcelona, one of the CNT's regional strongholds, by way of Mexican arms purchases in Central America.¹⁰ Moreover, the incorporation of four CNT ministers into the coalition government of Largo Caballero in November provided a diplomatic opening: Spanish anarchists were now in direct dialogue with the Mexican embassy. The CNT's representation in the Republican government (November 1936-May 1937, April 1938-March 1939) did not last the entire duration of the Civil War. Nevertheless, leaders of the confederation quickly established rapport with Mexican diplomats and cultural emissaries and kept those ties throughout the war, despite internal conflicts within the Republican government. In January 1937 General Secretary of the CNT Mariano R. Vázquez wrote to the Mexican Embassy in Valencia to request a meeting with its new ambassador, Ramón P. Denegri to discuss his country's aid for the antifascist cause in Spain.¹¹ Like all of Mexico's diplomats to Spain the approval of anarchists seeking to dramatically reorganize the Spanish countryside. Following the mass relocation of the Spanish republican government to the city of Valencia due to threats of a Nationalist takeover

⁹ Lázaro Cárdenas, *Obras, Tomo 1. Apuntes, 1913-1940* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1972), 354; Letter from José Antonio Arias to the CNT (September 2, 1936), IISH-CNT, 62C.

¹⁰ Mexican shipments of weapons, along with Soviet-purchased arms from Mexico, were regularly sent through alternative ports to avoid detection by Nationalist, German, and Italian forces. See: Paz, *Durruti in the Spanish Revolution*, 578.

¹¹ Mariano R. Vázquez to the Consulate of Mexico (January 20, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C.

of the capital of Madrid, the CNT went so far as to offer the Mexican embassy office space in its Valencian headquarters, a finca expropriated by anarchist militias shortly after the outbreak of the Spanish Revolution in July 1936. Anarchists persisted in their efforts to establish cordial relations with the diplomat and his staff in spite of Denegri's erratic behavior.

Even though thousands of foreign volunteers from Europe and the United States came to the defense of the Spanish Republic and social revolution in Spain, Spanish anarchists benefited more from Mexico's diplomatic and financial support than they lost from the absence of Mexican boots on the ground. Mexico's financial and material aid for republican and revolutionary factions during the Civil War was no small diplomatic gesture. The weapons embargo enacted by the League of Nations and its Non-Intervention Committee disproportionately affected the Loyalists. Franco's forces utilized weapons, materials, and volunteers from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy to advance its military operations throughout Spain with virtually no repercussions from the international community.¹² Mexico, on the other hand, was scrutinized, but the country continued to secretly purchase arms from European countries then to be shipped to the Loyalist fronts.¹³ The Spanish Popular Front government in turn galvanized support for the Spanish republican cause by mobilizing various state and non-state actors and movements through transnational solidarity campaigns between the two countries. The Soviets, fearful that a revolution in Spain would incite a reaction from Nazi Germany, sought to maintain the Spanish republican state as a liberal democratic

¹² David Jorge, *War in Spain: Appeasement, Collective Insecurity, and the Failure of European Democracies against Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 27-45. For more on the German and Italian support for the Nationalist uprising, see: Fernando Schwartz, *La internacionalización de la guerra civil española: Julio de 1936-marzo de 1937* (Barcelona: Ediciones Ariel, 1971), 57-78; Christopher Othen, *Franco's International Brigades: Foreign Volunteers and Fascist Dictators in the Spanish Civil War* (London: Reportage Press, 2008).

¹³ For a thorough analysis of Mexico's material support for the Second Spanish Republic, see: Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 62-133.

ally in the face of European fascist expansion.¹⁴ Subsequently, revolutionary factions such as the CNT, the FAI, and the POUM did not receive aid from the USSR and were frequently subverted within the broader Popular Front coalitions.¹⁵ Mexico, in contrast, maintained diplomatic ties to the most radical sectors of the Spanish Popular Front and dedicated its entire arms industry to producing weapons for Republican Spain.¹⁶ Unlike political and labor groups that wished to sustain Spain's liberal-democratic experiment, anarchist and anti-Stalinist communists worked toward the complete reconfiguration of Spain through a popular-based social revolution. Mexico's aid to revolutionary sectors of the Popular Front legitimized these efforts at a time in which the Republican government condemned the popular uprisings as counterintuitive to the war effort.

Whereas politicians and labor leaders in Mexico pervasively referenced a shared blood lineage between the Mexican and Spanish people, diplomats to Spain instead focused on the mutual class interests that united the two countries. In a confidential report to Secretary of Foreign Relations Eduardo Hay, Ambassador Ramón Denegri stressed the significance of the Spanish Revolution to Mexicans. "It is not because [the Spaniard] speaks the same language [as the Mexican]," he clarified, "nor that he has part of their blood, or that there is a cultural connection." These issues, Denegri argued, reproduced a "Hispano-Americanist lie" of a spiritual connection that ignored the longer historical trajectory that connected the nations' laboring classes:

It is that the people of Spain have been subjected to the same yoke and have been the victims of the same victimizers as the Mexican people. The same aristocratic names whose family's prestige were gained in another era through the atrocities committed against the Indians, or [gained] today through the theft and fraud of

¹⁴ Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism*, 83-108.

¹⁵ Revolutionary organizations included the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labor, CNT), the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (Iberian Anarchist Federation, FAI), the Juventudes Libertarias de España (Libertarian Youth of Spain, JJLL), as well as the anti-Stalinist Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (Workers Party of Marxist Unification, POUM). For more on ideological divides during the Civil War, see: Victor Alba, *Spanish Marxism versus Soviet Communism: A History of the P.O.U.M. in the Spanish Civil War* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2017).

¹⁶ Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 99.

the Mexican people, also appears on the blacklist of those that plunder the Spanish people.¹⁷

Denegri's views reflected the broader shift in Mexican and Spanish relations during the Civil War. To emphasize the significance of the Spanish defense against fascism, diplomats utilized their positions of power to articulate a collective response to the exploitations of capitalism both within and without the confines of racial difference. Such assessments challenged the longstanding *hispanista* rhetoric of Spanish republican and left-wing intellectuals.¹⁸ Mexican diplomats and, as explained below, Spanish anarchists instead sought to frame their societies' relationships through the lens of class solidarity that went beyond a hegemonic impulse emanating from the former colonial metropole.

Revolutionary Visions of Mexico during the Spanish Civil War

With the exception of diplomats and the approximately 330 volunteers that participated in the Civil War, few in Spain had the opportunity to interact with Mexicans in person.¹⁹ Yet even in remote sectors of Spanish society, the solidarity between Mexico and Republican Spain was well known. Octavio Paz, one of Mexico's most popular and controversial literary figures, fondly recalled Spanish campesinos' warmth and fraternity during his visit to rural Valencia in 1937 when the air was air raided by Nationalist forces. Upon realizing that Paz was Mexican, local campesinos, he noted, "went back to their houses in the middle of the bombardment to look for food, and brought us a little bread, a melon, cheese, and wine." "Eating with those peasants during a bombardment,"

¹⁷ Confidential report, Denegri to Eduardo Hay (March 17, 1937), published in Archivo Histórico Diplomático Mexicano, *México y España: Solidaridad y asilo político, 1936-1942* (México, D.F.: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1990), 109.

¹⁸ Faber, "Contradictions of Left-Wing *hispanismo*," 165-185.

¹⁹ Jackson, *Fallen Sparrows*, 77-78.

Paz later recalled, “that’s something that I cannot forget.”²⁰ Although Paz does not clarify how the campesinos learned of Mexico’s affinities to the Spanish Revolution, the widespread dissemination of radical literature on the Mexican Revolution is a likely source. In anarchist strongholds such as Valencia, rationalist schools provided spaces in which local children and adults could learn how to read and write while being exposed to radical literature.²¹ Along with politicizing the rural and urban working class, these alternative education spaces exposed communities to the history of the Mexican Revolution as well as radical reinterpretations of Spain’s relationship with Mexican society.

Spanish revolutionary factions also praised Mexico for its ongoing support of anti-fascist movements in Spain. At mass rallies in the anarchist strongholds of Aragón, Cataluña, and Valencia, revolutionaries regularly articulated their admiration for Mexico through discourses on internationalism and anti-colonialism. Just as anarchists joined the republican coalitional government in an effort to ensure a collective victory against the encroachment of fascism, groups such as the CNT and FAI praised what, from afar, seemed to be the Mexican state’s dedication to worker-led social revolutions. During one tribute organized by the Amigos de México association in Valencia, anarchist and socialist labor confederations adorned the Teatro Principal with banners of praise for Mexico along with their respective flags. The event began with a representative of the Federación Anarquista Ibérica singing the Hymn of the Mexican Republic, further demonstrating the unique affinity that the anti-authoritarian organization expressed toward the Mexican state and Lázaro Cárdenas. Anarchists’ affection toward a sitting head of state, although seemingly paradoxical,

²⁰ Powell, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 108-109.

²¹ Numerous Spanish exiles of various political backgrounds recalled their politicization coming from their exposure to rationalist schools and radical literature. See: Interview with Arturo García Igual, conducted by Marisol Alonso (1981), INAH-DEH, PHO/10/027, 8-9; Interview with Claudio Esteva Fabregat, 21. For more on anarchist and literacy in Spain, see: Martha A. Ackelsberg, “It Takes More than A Village!: Transnational Travels of Spanish Anarchism in Argentina and Cuba,” *International Journal of Iberian Studies* 29, no. 3 (2016): 207-208.

signified a deeper recognition among many Spaniards that Cárdenas openly advocated the expansion of radical social and economic reforms both in Mexico and throughout the world.

Public events such as the one organized by the Amigos de México also provided spaces for which Spanish workers and campesinos could articulate their own notions of internationalist solidarity with the Mexican working class. At the event in Valencia, a Spanish campesino by the name of J. Giménez Igualada spoke on the brotherhood between Mexicans and Spaniards. He emphasized that the bonds between the two countries' laboring masses were not only forged by blood, "but through ties between those who seek to love [each other] across borders."²² Giménez also underscored the two nation's respective revolutions as a form of popular reconciliation over the historical trauma of colonialism: "From the fanatic and conquering Spain, Mexico has a sad memory which must be forgotten. The Spanish worker was not responsible for the blunders committed by their infamous leaders during these shameful times in the history of the proletariat." Instead, Giménez encouraged Spaniards to emulate those that resisted foreign subjugation. His speech praised the resistance of the last Aztec emperor, Cuauhtémoc, various Mexican independence leaders, and most specifically, the Spanish guerrilla leader Francisco Javier Mina, "who after fighting against the Napoleonic invasion in Spain went to Mexico and gave his life for the freedom of that oppressed people." Giménez concluded his speech by affirming Spain's commitment to building future bonds to Mexico that rejected the errors of their compatriots during colonial rule. "Spain has a debt to Mexico, a debt of blood. The blood of their children that was spilt by vandalic adventurers[.] Friends, brothers of Mexico, we must all be Spaniards who fight against imperialist barbarism and ancestral nepotism."²³

Delegates and participants made similar statements during the Council of Aragón's 1937

²² "Un cariñoso acto de fraternidad a Méjico," *Nuevo Aragón*, April 16, 1937.

²³ "Asociación de 'Amigos de Méjico,'" *Nuevo Aragón*, April 16, 1937.

May Day celebrations dedicated to the Mexican people. Catalan and Aragonese newspapers of all political banners promoted the festivities conducted in the city of Caspe.²⁴ The celebration of Revolutionary Mexico, the first of its kind in Spain, came to fruition through the efforts of the Aragón Regional Defense Council. Although the anarcho-syndicalist CNT dominated much of eastern Aragón, communist and socialist factions joined in the festivities to praise one of Spain's most trusted foreign allies. Various battalions from nearby fronts joined the marching processions to celebrate the Mexican delegation's arrival. Morale remained high among the city's population, despite an early morning aerial bombardment on the city by Nationalist forces. Upon receiving a combat flag from the leftist youth Komosol battalion, the Mexican delegation spoke to thousands of onlookers as Mexican flags draped many of the city's balconies.²⁵ Each member of the Mexican delegation spoke to the crowd, while different representatives of the Popular Front expressed their gratitude for Mexico's ongoing support throughout the war. After a PCE representative led a cry of "Viva Méjico!" with the audience, Mexican Colonel Roberto Calvo Ramírez gave a speech written on behalf of the absent Mexican Ambassador Denegri. The speech applauded the Spanish proletariat's historical ties to Mexico, proclaiming that Mexico's revolutionary consciousness was a result of the international solidarity of the working class and because, as Calvo claimed, Mexicans had "drops of [Spanish] blood" and that "[the Mexican] race has the spirit of your race."²⁶ Calvo described the two countries' histories as following a collective trajectory borne out of the violence of colonialism but vindicated by moments in history when Spaniards aided Mexico's quest for self-

²⁴ "Primer homenaje al glorioso pueblo mejicano," *Nuevo Aragón*, May 5, 1937.

²⁵ The Mexican delegation in Aragón included the poet and embassy representative Jesús Sansón Flores, Colonel Roberto Calvo Ramírez of the Mexican Army, Susana Gamboa on behalf of the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists, LEAR), and student representative of the Juventudes Mexicanas (Mexican Youth) and journalist, Ernesto Madero Vázquez.

²⁶ "El homenaje a Méjico, celebrado ayer es la demostración más elocuente del antifascista aragonés," *Nuevo Aragón*, May 2, 1937.

determination. He continued, “[Although] yesterday the conquistadors and *encomenderos* of Spain brought us chains, slavery, and inquisitions, they also mixed their blood with Indian blood,” citing the first mestizo child born to Hernán Cortés and his Indigenous translator, Malintzin. “Now, Mexico returns rifles, solidarity, and aid so that you can keep fighting for your liberty and prosperity.” Calvo continued by describing Mexicans’ support for the Spanish commoner classes that historically fought against various “foreign” threats:

Mexico returns blood, love, hope, and labor for Spain. Not for the Spain of chains and slavery, but for the Spain that fights, works, and thinks. Not for the Spain of the Austrians or the Bourbons that were never from Spain, but for those who were immortalized in Lepanto and Sagunto, and today in Guernica and Durango. The Spain of the historic *comuneros* of Castile, who in 1520 and 1521 fought and died to conserve the *fueros* and freedoms of the municipalities against the imperial oppression of Carlos V. For the Spain of the Second of May, the glorious date on which initiated the uprising of Madrid and the war of Independence against the Napoleonic invasion. And above all, comrades of Aragón, Mexico is [for] the Spain of this Popular Front, that is writing their magnificent epic with their blood...²⁷



Figure 7: (Left) Cover of *ABC: Diario Republicano de Izquierdas* (May 14, 1937), May Day commemoration to Mexico in Aragón. (Right) Jesús Sansón Flores of the Mexican delegation to Aragón, giving the Spanish republican salute to marching troops on May Day 1937.²⁸

²⁷ “El homenaje a Méjico, celebrado ayer es la demostración más elocuente del antifascista aragonés,” *Nuevo Aragón*, May 2, 1937.

²⁸ *ABC: Diario Republicano de Izquierdas* (Madrid), May 14, 1937; “Del homenaje de Aragón,” *Nuevo Aragón*, May 5, 1937.



Figure 8: (Left) Mexican Coronel Calvo Ramírez receiving the banner of the “Komsomol” Battalion in Aragón. (Right) Photo of May Day celebration in the Plaza de la República in Caspe.²⁹

Spanish anarchists also assessed the two countries’ ties to their shared history of economic exploitation. In January 1938, the CNT’s former minister under the Caballero government Joan Peiró published an article praising the radical agrarian reforms of Lázaro Cárdenas and their historical significance to the Spanish people. “In Mexico, as in Spain, the landowner is the slave master. The priest, arm-in-arm with the landowner, blessed the exploitation that condemned the Indians.” To Peiró and many Spanish anarchists, colonial oppression was simply a different iteration of the same class exploitation experienced by Spain’s laboring classes:

[For Spanish colonizers,] Mexico had to resemble its adoptive mother in every way. The bandit adventurers that conquered Spain left a moral and political heritage. For centuries, they chained the people to the spiritual, economic, political, and social slavery, as is sung about in muted songs throughout Castile, Extremadura, and Andalucía.³⁰

The bipartisan May Day celebration in Aragón proved short lived, since the *homenaje* to Mexico commenced just days before one of the most critical moments of the Civil War and Mexican-

²⁹ “Del homenaje de Aragón a Méjico,” *Nuevo Aragón*, May 4, 1937; “Del homenaje de Aragón a Méjico,” *Nuevo Aragón*, 4 May 1937.

³⁰ Joan Peiró, “Cárdenas,” *Mi Revista* (Barcelona), January 1, 1938.

Spanish relations. Throughout early 1937, tensions between revolutionary and government factions in Spain increasingly polarized the already tenuous ties within the Popular Front. With food scarcity and unemployment ravaging Loyalist holdouts, violent skirmishes broke out between revolutionary factions and pro-government republican and regionalist parties that comprised the Generalitat de Catalunya. By May 3, 1937, seething hostilities exploded throughout Barcelona after the Generalitat's security forces attempted to overtake the central telephone exchange occupied by anarchist militias, leading to deadly clashes between revolutionaries and government forces. The subsequent removal of Caballero as prime minister and the ascension of PSOE moderate Juan Negrín, socialist and communist factions made a pact to actively thwart the social revolutionary experiments organized by anarchist and anti-Stalinist groups throughout the country. In response to what became known as the Barcelona May Days, Negrín ousted the CNT government representatives from their ministerial positions, and the anti-Stalinist POUM was outlawed.³¹

Relations between Mexico and Republican Spain deteriorated at this time due to the Cárdenas government's decision to grant anti-Stalinist revolutionary Leon Trotsky political asylum.³² Trotsky's criticism of the Comintern's actions in Spain only further aggravated the situation. Likewise, the Partido Comunista de España accused Trotsky and his supporters of collaborating with the Nationalists and their fascist allies. While neither the Negrín government nor its Soviet backers were in a position to refuse Mexican diplomatic support, they did seek to counteract Mexico's influence by keeping its representatives at arms-length for the rest of the war. Tensions between the Republican government and Mexico only thawed upon the announcement of Cárdenas's refugee initiative in April 1938. However, the breakdown between the Republican

³¹ For a comprehensive and even-handed assessment of the Barcelona May Days, see: Helen Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War, 1936-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 254-315.

³² Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 94-95.

government and Mexican Embassy inspired new collaborations within the revolutionary elements in Spain excluded by the change in international diplomatic relations. These bonds, however, were not forged without challenges. The contentious and deeply sectarian nature of the Spanish Civil War created uncertainty among revolutionary factions regarding the intentions of both their allies and foes.

Spanish Anarchists and the Mexican Embassy

The hostile political atmosphere not only affected the Popular Front, but also seeped into the CNT's diplomatic affairs with Mexico. While anarchists' and Mexican diplomats' mutual support for one another's broader political objectives fortified their relations, the personal behavior of some diplomats posed some initial obstacles to the groups' official relations. CNT leaders' private correspondence with diplomats at the Mexican embassy as well as with the Mexican government demonstrates the many measures that anarchists took to sustain ties with the Cárdenas government. Shortly after the Republican government relocated from Madrid to Valencia, the CNT offered to house the Mexican Embassy on a property expropriated by anarchist militias, which had since been turned into the headquarters of the CNT, the FAI, and the Juventudes Libertarias. Yet before the organizations could finish moving their offices to make room for the diplomats, the Embassy posted armed Mexican guards around the facility. Ambassador Ramón P. Denegri, a close ally of Cárdenas and one of the proponents of Mexico's agrarian and labor law reforms, had developed a scandalous reputation during his six-month tenure.³³ In particular, he became well known for extorting asylum-

³³ Although the reasons for Denegri's short tenure as Mexico Ambassador to Spain are unknown, Mario Ojeda Revah suggests that he was likely removed due to his extortion and mistreatment of political asylum-seekers. This included an incident in March 1937 when he allowed a mob of discontented workers to forcefully remove four military officers that attempted to flee onboard a vessel of asylum-seekers. By August 1937, Denegri was recalled as ambassador and the embassy's

seekers with Nationalist sympathies, as they asked for asylum at the Mexican Embassy. His treatment of alleged Francoist sympathizers did not cause waves among the anarchists, but his brash behavior—including coming to official events heavily armed with bodyguards—certainly caused concern. The guards' presence exasperated CNT members, and after three weeks, its national secretary Mariano Vázquez asked the Mexican Embassy to remove the guards within 24 hours. Vázquez had desperately hoped to avoid such a confrontation with one of the confederation's most trusted foreign allies.³⁴ Although there is no record of the Embassy's response, the CNT resumed correspondence with Denegri shortly after the incident, suggesting that the issue had been informally resolved.

Anarchists even defended the Mexican ambassadors after they were accused of collaborating with fascist governments. Between December 1937 and July 1938, the Federación Anarquista Ibérica launched an investigation regarding allegations made to the Mexican Senate regarding the country's two previous ambassadors to Spain, General Manuel Pérez Treviño, Ramón P. Denegri, as well as Denegri's secretary Jesús Sansón Flores. While these accusations were certainly concerning, the FAI took an impartial position due to the known political affinities of all the accused. Denegri supported Mexico's decision to provide Leon Trotsky asylum and would later befriend the anti-Stalinist revolutionary Victor Serge upon returning to Mexico.³⁵ Sansón, a fierce advocate of the revolutionary factions throughout Spain, also seemed to be an unlikely suspect to betray his Spanish comrades. Perhaps most egregious were the allegations made against Adalberto Tejeda, given his well-known support for radical political reforms and revolutionary groups during his time as

chargé d'affaires General Leobardo Ruiz shortly took over the roll until a formal replacement could take his place. Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 90-93.

³⁴ Mariano Vázquez to the Ambassador of Mexico in Spain (March 30, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C.

³⁵ Burnett Bolleton, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 203; Victor Serge, *Notebooks, 1936-1937* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2019), 143-144.

governor of Veracruz and as the Mexican ambassador to France.³⁶ The accusers, Rafael García Travesí and Ignacio D. Silvia, claimed Denegri and Sansón Flores provided fascist sympathizers with visas to obtain refuge in Mexico. According to Travesí and Silvia, Tejeda—then about to serve as ambassador to Spain—was a Nazi sympathizer who wanted to organize a fascist takeover during the forthcoming presidential elections in 1940.³⁷ The claims also made headlines in Mexico as former delegates in Paris accused Tejeda and his secretary in France Manuel Escudero of using the Spanish republican government's funds to purchase weapons from German businesses.³⁸

The FAI, while taking the allegations seriously, also acknowledged the possibility that the entire scheme could have been misinformation spread by Stalinist sympathizers in Spain and Mexico to discredit the Cárdenas government's diplomatic representatives in Spain. They also figured that it could have been Stalinists' retaliatory response to the president granting Trotsky asylum.³⁹ In February 1938, Mexico's Barcelona consulate forced the writer Blanca Lydia Trejo to return to Mexico in an effort to appease José Mancisidor, a vocal proponent of the Soviet Union and future head of one of the refugee relief organizations. The consulate also sent away other Mexican communists that accused Trejo of selling Mexican passports to alleged fascists. The accusations emerged after Trejo claimed that Spanish communist leaders were taking part in food pricing

³⁶ Romana Falcón, Soledad García, and María Eugenia Terrones, *La semilla en el surco. Adalberto Tejeda y el radicalismo en Veracruz, 1883-1960* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1986), 373-376; 383-384; Serafín Maldonado Aguirre, *De Tejeda a Cárdenas: El movimiento agrarista en la revolución mexicana, 1920-1934* (Guadalajara: Editorial Universidad de Guadalajara, 1992); Eitan Ginzberg, *Revolutionary Ideology and Political Destiny in Mexico, 1928-1934: Lázaro Cárdenas and Adalberto Tejeda* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2015).

³⁷ Rafael García Travesí and Ignacio D. Silva to the FAI Sección Nacional de Coordinación, Servicio de Información Exterior (December 27, 1937), IISH-FAI, CP-46B.4; Francisco Olaya Morales, *El oro de Negrín* (Móctoles, Ediciones Madre Tierra, 1990), 76.

³⁸ FAI Sección Nacional de Coordinación, Servicio de Información Exterior. "Tejeda es publicamente acusado por su ex-lugarteniente Guzman de la revista gráfica 'Hoy' de Méjico," (no date), IISH-FAI, CP-46B.4.

³⁹ Sección Nacional de Coordinación. Servicio de Información Exterior (July 28, 1938), IISH-FAI, CP 4/17.

speculation.⁴⁰ Although neither Mexican and Spanish national archives, nor the FAI's internal records, make any mention of a verdict on the episode, the matter was seemingly resolved. It is possible that the FAI got word that Tejeda and other diplomats were purchasing weapons from European sellers, including some in Nazi Germany, under the premise that they were for Mexico while they were secretly shipped to assist Loyalist troops in Spain.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the FAI dropped the investigation, and relations between the organization and the Mexican embassy continued on without issue. In September 1938, Tejeda invited the FAI's representative, Federica Montseny, to participate in a commemoration lunch celebrating Mexico's 128th anniversary of Independence from Spain.⁴²

The arrival of Ramón Denegri's successor, Adalberto Tejeda, further solidified anarchists' ties to the Embassy. Upon arriving in Spain in March 1938, Tejeda wasted no time courting Spanish anarchists. On April 27, 1938, CNT representatives took Tejeda on a tour of the newly established Instituto de Puericultura y Maternología "Luisa Michel" ("Louise Michel" Institute of Maternal and Child Care) in Barcelona, a childcare and maternity ward housing with 125 beds. Founded by the Mujeres Libres and local health care unions, the Institute enacted a city-wide health career initiative to provide basic services to Barcelona's working class.⁴³ Tejeda's ties to the Institute continued well beyond his visit. In October 1938, the ambassador relayed a message from Juan Paulís, the director of the Institute, to President Lázaro Cárdenas requesting the Mexican government to establish a new asylum expedition to protect the facility's staff and the children under their care. To fund the endeavor, Paulís proposed that the Spanish Republican government establish a national subscription

⁴⁰ Powell, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 109.

⁴¹ Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 130.

⁴² Adalberto Tejeda to the President of the National Committee of the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (September 14, 1938), IISH-FAI, CP-46B.4; Germinal de Sousa to Adalberto Tejeda (September 16, 1938), IISH-FAI, CP-46B.4.

⁴³ Ackelsberg, *Free Women of Spain*, 164-165.

initiative to ensure that the children received ample food and resources while living in Mexico.

Although the expedition request and subscription initiative never came to fruition, Cárdenas notified his representatives to send food rations to the facility to alleviate some of the Institute's burdens.⁴⁴

Tejeda also visited CNT-controlled spaces on a regular basis. A month after visiting the health institute, Tejeda, his daughter María Elisa Tejeda, and other Mexican officials visited collectivized farms controlled by the CNT to study their advances in communalized agricultural production. The campesinos were obliged to show their Mexican guests that, since the outbreak of the Revolution, over 2,000 hectares of irrigable land had been seized and fieldworkers' salaries went from 10 pesetas a day to 150 pesetas per week. An ardent proponent of radical agrarian initiatives, Tejeda applauded the campesinos in their endeavors.⁴⁵



Figure 9: Adalberto Tejeda visiting the Instituto de Puericultura y Maternología “Luisa Michel” (“Louise Michel” Institute of Maternal and Child Care) in Barcelona (April 27, 1938).⁴⁶

Just three months before Franco's forces captured Barcelona, the local branch of the Amigos de México hosted a week-long celebration in October 1938 to commemorate Mexico's

⁴⁴ Letter from Tejeda to Cárdenas (October 5, 1938), AGN-LCR, Caja 939, Expediente 550/84; Letter from Lic. Godofredo F. Beltrán to Tejeda (November 1, 1938), AGN-LCR, Caja 939, Expediente 550/84.

⁴⁵ “Vista del embajador de Méjico y del delegado extraordinario de aquel gobierno, señor Aguilar, a las colectividades de campesinos de Barcelona,” *Solidaridad Obrera* (May 14, 1938).

⁴⁶ “Instituto de Puericultura y Maternología Louise Michel. Visita del embajador de Méjico, 1938” (Barcelona), April 27, 1938, IISH-CNT Photo Collection, 5331, 5337.

successful struggle for independence against Spain as well as the celebration of Día de la Raza on October 12th. As seen throughout the Civil War, Spaniards flocked to celebrate what would become one of the last major celebrations of the Republic's existence. The Amigos de México, largely consisting of various union locals affiliated with the CNT, hosted multiple rallies and commemorations to mark the occasion, including a speech made by María Elisa Tejeda on behalf of all Mexican women and their solidarity with the Spaniards' social revolution. Residents of Barcelona were undeterred by persistent aerial bombardments and attended the week-long events in droves.

Like other anarchist commemorations of Mexico, the weeklong program highlighted the deep bonds between Mexico and Spanish republicans. In its declaration "to the people of Barcelona," the organization emphasized the two countries' fraternal relationship through the struggle for social revolution and against fascism. It further suggested that Mexico and Spain were composed of "two peoples of the same strong and heroic race, [one] that knows struggle against adversity and always vanquishes its tyrants and its enemies that have tried to impede its progress towards liberty and justice." The brochure went on to claim that the two nations would never succumb to fascism "because their children carry Hispanic blood in their veins."⁴⁷ The festivities ended with an homage to Ambassador Tejeda on behalf of children from the Colonia "México" of Barcelona. Like the CNT's many declarations, such public celebrations of Mexico and its Independence struggle against Spain further emphasized an anti-colonial vision of future relations between the two countries. Just a few months after the event, some of the attendees found themselves seeking asylum in the sister nation whose independence they had celebrated.

⁴⁷ "Semana de México," IISH-CNT, 62C+D.



Figure 10: Cover art and program for “Semana de México” festivities (October 1938).⁴⁸

The rapport between Spanish anarchists and Mexican diplomats greatly contrasted with the interactions between libertarian organizations and other foreign supporters, even those who shared their anarchist ideology. As Morris Brodie demonstrates in his study of transnational anarchist networks during the Spanish Civil War, conflicts between Spaniards and foreign anarchist volunteers—namely those from Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, and the United States—were usually rooted in debates regarding race and nationalism.⁴⁹ In part, these disagreements came out of Spaniards’ sense that anarchists from industrialized nations should and could do more to galvanize arms and volunteers or, at the very least, to mobilize their nation’s labor movements to apply pressure on their respective governments to end their support for non-intervention. However, the Spanish anarchists’ criticisms also indicate their misinterpretation of the scale of their comrades’ influence within these countries. By the late 1930s, the anarchist movements in Germany, the U.S., Great Britain, and Ireland paled in comparison to the Comintern’s influence among these nations’ working-class and labor movements. Although Western countries contributed a large number of the foreign participants of the International Brigades, for anarchists, pressuring their home governments

⁴⁸ “Semana de México,” (October 9-16, 1938), IISH-CNT, 62C; “Programa de la Semana de México. Gran Festival Infantil” (October 9, 1938).

⁴⁹ Brodie, *Transatlantic Anarchism during the Spanish Civil War and Revolution*.

to provide more resources for Spain would have been a daunting task.⁵⁰

Spanish Anarchists in Mexico, 1936-1939

As Spanish anarchists forged relations with Mexico diplomats, the CNT looked to the Americas to garner support for the Spanish Revolution. Both the CNT and the FAI utilized official and popular channels to galvanize support abroad, unlike other Spanish political parties and labor organizations. Interestingly, anarchist groups' decision to establish a propaganda office in Mexico was not the most obvious choice. Whereas other Latin American nations and the United States maintained Spanish immigrant populations that expressed their sympathies with the Popular Front government, Mexico's Spanish colony had the most fervent proponents of the Franco uprising. What the country lacked in a sympathetic immigrant base it made up for in its government's strong support for the Second Spanish Republic and the Spanish Revolution. This was in part due to the anarchists' decision to join the Caballero government in November 1936, which validated the libertarian movement in the eyes of the international Left, particularly among groups outside of the direct control of the Communist International.⁵¹

Although Cárdenas's reforms seemed favorable from afar, Mexico's radical political culture had changed dramatically since the early years of the Mexican Revolution. With the exception of some veterans of the earlier Mexican anarchist movement who remained active in the transnational distribution of radical literature, the country's labor movement had been largely subsumed by state-supported labor entities such as the Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana in the 1920s

⁵⁰ Ibid., 110-116.

⁵¹ The Partido Comunista Mexicano, for instance, spoke favorably of the CNT in its newspapers *El Machete* and *La Voz de México*, despite the party's longstanding animosity toward anarchists and Trotskyists. While the POUM was regularly heralded as a fifth column entity in support of Franco and his fascist allies, the CNT's incorporation into the Caballero government was heralded as a necessary step toward a unified anti-fascist front.

and early 1930s.⁵² This was in part a result of years of state repression and deportation of Spanish organizers, but also due to the growing allure of communism following the success of the Russian Revolution. Nonetheless, the outbreak of revolution in Spain provided a new opportunity for revolutionary militants to throw their weight to the support of a genuine popular uprising which in turn could unite the fractured international anarchist movement. It was within this context that Spanish anarchist groups conceptualized a new propaganda campaign that provided both financial and moral backing for their cause against both fascism and the state.

On August 22, 1936, over 500 left-wing Spanish immigrants living in Mexico convened to establish the Frente Popular Español de México in an effort to raise funds and to encourage their compatriots.⁵³ One of the attendees, José Antonio Ariás, a thirty-four-year-old industrial worker living in Mexico City, soon after wrote to the CNT and the FAI to offer his service as an anarchist representative for the Frente Popular Español de México. Although Ariás had been in Mexico since 1918, he remained an avid reader of *Solidaridad Obrera*, the CNT's newspaper and followed the anarchist movement's development. The outbreak of the Civil War and subsequent revolution motivated Ariás to officially join the two groups and to dedicate his energies to countering the growing influence of pro-Franco propaganda in his adopted country.⁵⁴ A month after Ariás wrote to the organizations, the newly appointed Minister of Health and Social Assistance and CNT/FAI

⁵² For more on transnational anarchist literary networks, see: Alcayaga Sasso, "Librado Rivera y los Hermanos Rojos en el movimiento social y cultural anarquista en Villa Cecilia y Tampico, Tamaulipas;" Jorell A. Meléndez-Badillo, "The Anarchist Imaginary: Max Nettlau and Latin America, 1890-1934," in *Writing Revolution: Hispanic Anarchism in the United States*, eds. Christopher J. Castañeda and Montse Feu (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 175-193. Myrna I. Santiago's study of the shifting political climate of the petroleum labor movement provides an excellent assessment of the changing of ideological tendencies in 1920s and 1930s Mexico. See: Santiago, *The Ecology of Oil*.

⁵³ Matesanz, *Los raíces del exilio*, 90.

⁵⁴ José Antonio Ariás to the FAI (September 1936), IISH-FAI, CP 58.16; Federica Montseny to Ariás (October 2, 1936), IISH-FAI, CP 58.16.

leader Federica Montseny responded to him with encouragement, but the Minister also noted that membership in the FAI was reserved to militants living in the Iberian Peninsula.⁵⁵ Notwithstanding, Montseny encouraged Arías to seek out likeminded individuals in Mexico to help establish an anarchist federation, which could then collaborate directly with the FAI by way of the Asociación Internacional de Trabajadores (International Workers' Association, AIT).⁵⁶ As an anarchist alternative to the Comintern, the AIT was particularly prominent in Europe and South America but lacked representation in Mexico and Central America. The Mexican anarchist movement of the era was composed only of a small assemblage of groups and educational centers throughout the country, and the prospect of a new libertarian federation raised the interest of the remaining anarchist militants.⁵⁷ In turn, the prospect of an allied organization in the AIT proved enticing for the leadership CNT and FAI following a series of clashes with other organizational affiliates from Europe, Chile, and the United States.⁵⁸ The Mexican state's aid for revolutionary factions in Spain as well as the country's longstanding anarchist tradition made it a logical place to build a propaganda apparatus.

Differing from the FAI's strict membership rules, the CNT welcomed the membership of

⁵⁵ In July 1938, the FAI's Secretary of Foreign Relations Jacobo Prince similarly notified Domingo Rivas of the Legión Cultura Contra el Fascismo en el Estado de México that the group could not become members of the FAI due to the specific Iberian focus of the organization. Prince did, however, welcome the organization to reproduce articles from the FAI's newspaper *Tierra y Libertad* in Mexico and encouraged the group to notify the Spaniards of any political developments in Mexico. See: Domingo Rivas to the Directive Committee of the FAI (June 22, 1938), IISH-FAI, CP 58.16; Jacobo Prince to Domingo Rivas (July 27, 1938), IISH-FAI, CP 58.16.

⁵⁶ Federica Montseny to Arías (October 2, 1936), IISH-FAI, CP 58.16.

⁵⁷ In January 1937, Efrén Castrejón of the Centro Racionalista "Tierra y Libertad" wrote to the FAI to receive additional information on a proposed International Anarchist Congress to be held in Madrid. He requested that the Center's representatives serve as Mexican delegates and wished to reach out to other anarchist groups throughout Mexico and Central America that would also be interested in attending the meeting. See: Efrén Castrejón to the FAI (January 25, 1937), IISH-FAI, 58.16.

⁵⁸ Brodie, *Transatlantic Anarchism during the Spanish Civil War and Revolution*, 97-127.

Spaniards abroad and utilized these ties to develop a North American speaking tour to galvanize popular support for the antifascist cause in Spain. One such individual was Manuel Berrondo Martínez. A Barcelona native, Berrondo had moved to Mexico City in 1931 at the age of twenty-four but maintained relations with the CNT. Berrondo's experience living in Mexico made him a viable candidate to conduct the CNT's efforts to galvanize popular support for the Spanish war effort. Soon after the initiation of the campaign, Berrondo sent word back to the confederation's Office of Information and Propaganda with an assessment of the political climate in Mexico. Berrondo was struck by the sympathetic coverage of the Francoist military uprising in the Mexican national press, saving the few prominent left-wing newspapers with ties to Cárdenas's ruling-party. His view of the Spanish immigrant community in Mexico was just as bleak as his assessment of the Spanish republican cause: 90% of the Spaniards in Mexico supported the Nationalists.⁵⁹ With little help from the Spanish consulate in Mexico, Berrondo proposed to his compatriots to look to the United States instead, pointing out that the only pro-revolutionary elements in Mexico were those in the Cárdenas government.⁶⁰ Like many anarcho-syndicalists of the era, Berrondo saw U.S. society's rampant industrial economy as a more suitable space to mobilize aid for the worker's revolution in Spain. What is more, Berrondo bemoaned the fact that Mexico's laboring classes were comprised of predominantly Indigenous people whose "passive character" limited their productivity and lack of class consciousness.⁶¹

Notwithstanding Berrondo's observations, the CNT's Office of Information and

⁵⁹ Cablegram from Manuel Berrondo to Nemesio Galvez (May 13, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C; José Antonio Arías of the Frente Popular Español in Mexico came to a similar assessment of the Spanish colony in Mexico, noting in a letter to the FAI that 90% of Spanish immigrants in Mexico were Francoist sympathizers. See: José Antonio Arías to FAI (May 17, 1937), IISH-FAI, 58.16.

⁶⁰ Cablegrams, Manuel Berrondo to Nemesio Galvez (May 13, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C; For more on Spanish anarchist activities in the United States during and after the Civil War, see: Otayek, "Keepsakes of the Revolution," 227-244; Feu, *Fighting Fascist Spain*.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Propaganda insisted on the initial plan to establish a new anti-fascist committee in Mexico. The CNT suggested that it should be comprised of officials close to the Cárdenas government, delegates from the Mexican and Spanish Popular Fronts, prominent Mexican labor unions, the CNT, and the AIT—the latter two representing Spain.⁶² Berrondo had some initial reservations but eventually saw the plausibility of such a coalition. In May 1937, José Antonio Ariás notified the FAI that the Frente Popular Español in Mexico had coordinated a dozen screenings of the film *España en llamas* (*Spain in Flames*) and collected the equivalent of 125,000 francs through the Comité Pro-Ayuda al Niño Español to purchase clothes for children affected by the war. Moreover, Ariás mentioned that the Frente also supported funding the creation of a newspaper entitled *Regeneración*, named after the periodical established by Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón. The paper would give updates on the war effort in Spain as well as promoting anarchist ideas to a Mexican audience. Through the paper's dissemination, Ariás and Berrondo hoped to solidify ties with anarchist groups throughout the country in the effort to organize a nation-wide Federación Anarquista Mexicana (Mexican Anarchist Federation).⁶³

Race and Racism among Spanish Anarchists

Ariás's optimism abated when he and his compatriots saw few developments after two months. In July of that year, Manuel Berrondo wrote to CNT national secretary Mariano Vázquez requesting \$1,000 to return to Europe, declaring the propaganda campaign an utter disaster. He notified Vázquez that although the Frente Popular Español in Mexico organized a meeting to discuss creating the Asociación Antifascista de México (Antifascist Association of Mexico), Vicente Lombardo Toledano—the head of the CTM and the individual who initially called for the meeting

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ José Antonio Ariás to the FAI (May 17, 1937), IISH-FAI, CP 58.16.

to take place—did not show up due to an ongoing dispute with representatives from other labor unions.⁶⁴ Interpersonal conflicts also derailed the Federación Anarquista del Distrito Federal, the organization that was to serve as the basis for a broader nationwide anarchist federation. Berrondo believed that the lack of funds from the CNT worsened the waning support demonstrated by the Mexican labor movement and the struggling newspaper *Regeneración*. Despite all his efforts, Berrondo felt that the CNT leadership had abandoned him after it ignored his reports for two months. An additional problem, Berrondo sarcastically noted, was that “the President of the Republic [Lázaro Cárdenas] is [seen as] the greatest anarchist in the country” and therefore impervious to criticism by the Mexican Left. The cult of personality surrounding Cárdenas made any criticism or scrutiny of his policies virtually useless, especially for foreign radicals who functioned outside of most of the administration’s apparatuses of popular support, such as the CTM. “You will understand that our ideology cannot achieve consistency in a country where not even the President can manage to form agrarian collectives, where the workers won’t stop killing each other rather than fighting against the capitalist, and where the [labor] leaders—all of whom are lawyers—exploit the bosses and the workers through the Board of Reconciliation and Arbitration.”⁶⁵

Berrondo’s assessment highlighted both the complexities of the Mexican political sphere under Cárdenas and his own prejudices toward Mexican people. On the one hand, Berrondo attributed the paternalistic relationships between Cárdenas, labor leaders such as Lombardo Toledano, and the country’s laboring masses to byproducts of the government’s corporatist incorporation of popular movements. Indeed, the 1931 decision to make the state the primary arbitrator in labor disputes disproportionately favored state-backed labor confederations to the

⁶⁴ Established in February 1936, the CTM was marred by internal infighting between different labor leaders, as well as an ongoing struggle to maintain organizational autonomy from the Partido Comunista Mexicano. See: Spenser, *In Combat*, 107-130.

⁶⁵ Berrondo to Bernardo Pou (July 10, 1937), IISH-FAI, CP 58.16.

detriment of anarchist-leaning labor organizations such as the Confederación General de Trabajadores.⁶⁶

On the other hand, Berrondo's critical judgement of the racial makeup of Mexican society also informed his pessimistic views regarding the revolutionary potential of the country's working class and peasantry. In a letter to the CNT national committee, he opposed making Mexico the primary site of propaganda dissemination in the Americas. From Berrondo's perspective, the workers' general lack of interest in anarchist organizing was compounded by another problem: the country's largely Indigenous population, which he felt lacked the "mental capacity" to formulate proletarian ideals, and that, "the historical process of the Indian race will likely lead to its disappearance." Taking much the same line as other Mexican politicians of the time, Berrondo characterized indigeneity as a social construction based on the grounds of an inherently flawed ethnic trait. Moreover, his Eurocentric worldview ignored the long legacy of Indigenous-led anarchist movements regularly discussed in the Mexican and Spanish radical presses for much of the 1920s and 1930s. Falsely claiming that no revolutionary movements existed in Mexico, Berrondo suggested that the national committee either relay all propaganda requests from the Americas through the CNT's Paris headquarters or move their operations to the Southern Cone. He reasoned that "the racial mixture of [Argentines and Chileans] are very superior to the Mexican, where the Indigenous masses prevail."⁶⁷ Spaniards were not the only ones to articulate such reductive characterizations. Efrén Castrejón, one of the Mexican editors of the new incarnation of *Regeneración*, similarly claimed that the Mexican people "suffer from tropical indolence and moral-economic

⁶⁶ Jorge Basurto, *El proletariado industrial en México, 1850-1930* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1975), 247; Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class*, 172-173; Jeffrey Bortz, "The Genesis of Mexican Labor Relations: federal Labor Policy and the Textile Industry," *The Americas* 51, no. 1 (1995): 44.

⁶⁷ Berrondo to Bernardo Pou (10 July 1937), IISH-FAI, CP 58.16.

insufficiency.”⁶⁸

Berrondo’s racist notions of Mexican society also appeared in the political initiatives proposed by the Federación Anarquista Mexicana del Distrito Federal (Mexican Anarchist Federation of the Federal District, FAMDF). The FAMDF was mostly composed of Spanish anarchist immigrants and a handful of veterans of the Mexican Revolution’s earlier anarchist movements. Whereas the CNT attempted to build relations to Cárdenas’s left-wing bases in Mexico, the FAMDF condemned the government’s agrarian initiatives. In a scathing exposé directed to anarchist organizations through Europe and Latin America, the FAMDF lambasted the effect of the nation’s agrarian reform on Indigenous peoples.⁶⁹ In particular, the authors’ criticized the creation of the Banco Nacional de Crédito Ejidal (National Bank of Ejidal Credit), which financially bankrolled economic ventures for newly establish *ejidos*. In their view, the Ejidal Bank propagated the state’s corporatist economic policies and deterred the radical distribution of lands. “[...]The [Mexican] campesino, the overwhelming majority of which are Indigenous,” the FAMDF claimed, “lacks the calculating and commercial spirit of intensive modern exploitation.” Stressing the organization’s

⁶⁸ Efrén Castrejón to Herrera (February 27, 1938), IISH-FAI, CP 58.16.

⁶⁹ “Reservada. Circular al movimiento anarquista y anarco-sindicalista internacional” (August 28, 1938), IISH-CNT, 72B. The letter exposé was penned by Efrén Castrejón Marín, the Secretary of the FAMDF; Dantón Canut Martorell, a representative of Spanish teachers affiliated with the Spanish CNT living in Mexico; and Héctor Villegas Cammas, a “commissioned informant” from the Chilean branch of the CGT. Born in 1895 in Churumuco, Michoacán, Castrejón initially joined the *villistas* before later becoming acquainted with the PLM organizer Nicolas T. Bernal and the CGT. Dantón Canut Martorell was born in Valencia in 1907 and became a primary school teacher during the early years of the Second Spanish Republic. In May 1937, Canut moved to Mexico as part of the niños de Morelia expedition. In 1938, he would become a professor at the “Heroes Ferrocarriles” worker’s education center of the Universidad Obrera de México. During his time in Mexico, Canut Martorell helped establish and edit the anarchist newspapers *Regeneración* and *Tierra y Libertad*. He eventually went on to establish a children’s holiday colony as part of the normal school of Palmira, Morelos. For more information, see: Ulises Ortega Aguilar, “*Regeneración* y la Federación Anarquista Mexicana” (BA Thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2011), 253; *Amistad: Magazine of American Society of Mexico*, Vol 32 (1969): 36; Cristina Escrivá Moscardó, *El internado-Escuela Durruti, 1937-1939* (Valencia: L’Eixam, 2011).

vision of Indigenous people's inclination toward communist economic practices, it suggested that campesinos naturally "reduce production to their own needs, which are very limited given the cultural backwardness in which they find themselves."⁷⁰ Claims of Indigenous people's proclivity towards communism were neither new nor specific to the Mexican Left. The Peruvian anarchist Manuel González Prada and marxist José Carlos Mariátegui both made similar claims about the Andean region's Indigenous masses and encouraged the idea of building revolutionary movements based on these communistic practices.⁷¹ Much like the Peruvian left, the FAMDF would accuse the Mexican state's modernization initiatives as exploitative of the country's native populations. Where the group differed from thinkers such as Mariátegui was in their belief that industrialization was necessary for native people to become proletarians.⁷² To the FAMDF, the state's economic industrial modernization initiatives were "backward," as they forced native peoples to adapt to an economic model that was not "natural" to their social and cultural dispositions, seemingly reproducing longstanding racist tropes toward the country's Indigenous population.

The FAMDF's criticism of Mexico's agrarian reform primarily focused on the issue that native peoples were forced to engage with state corporatist entities to achieve land restitution. Following the passing of Mexico's 1934 Agrarian Code, the state required that campesinos petition the National Agrarian Commission for endowments and restitutions of communal lands.⁷³ Such policies sought to institutionalize land expropriation through the government and to deter community-based land seizures as promoted by groups such as the FAMDF. Furthermore, the

⁷⁰ "Reservada. Circular al movimiento anarquista y anarco-sindicalista internacional" (August 28, 1938), IISH-CNT, 72B.

⁷¹ Manuel González Prada, *Free Pages and Other Essays: Anarchist Musings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 181-194; José Carlos Mariátegui, *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology*, eds. Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011), 137-172.

⁷² Drinot, *The Allure of Labor*, 46.

⁷³ Manuel Fabila, *Cinco siglos de legislación agraria en México, 1493-1940* (México, D.F.: Los Talleres de Industrial Gráfica, S.A., 1941), 586.

National Agrarian Commission's practice of relocating *ejidatarios* onto newly assigned lands rather than their ancestral properties dispersed communities onto lands with varying degrees of cultivability. The Commission thus created a new heterogeneous social organization based upon the ejidalization process rather than social, cultural, or economic relations. Agrarian officials also did not seek to transform the countryside through communalization as seen in the Soviet Union, but rather through the establishment of new agricultural economies that encouraged the "economic and moral empowerment of the farmworker."⁷⁴ However, the claims that Indigenous cultural and land practices were inherently communalistic overlooked the complex practice of native property ownership dating back to the colonial era. The FAMDF's assertion that Indigenous people lacked the social wherewithal to participate in markets also ignored their ongoing engagement with market systems as well as their relationship to *communitarian*, rather than communal, land tenure practices that did not necessarily eschew forms of private property ownership.⁷⁵ In the view of the Mexican and Spanish anarchists of the FAMDF, the government's agrarian initiatives restricted Indigenous communities from emancipating themselves through communalization. Although the 1934 Agrarian Code tasked the Ejidal Bank's team of engineers to educate Indigenous communities in cooperative land tenure practices, the high rate of illiteracy within these communities meant that few benefited from such endeavors.⁷⁶ Without the "freedom of action" of native people, the FAMDF warned, the

⁷⁴ Méndez Reyes, *Capitalizar el campo*, 182-183.

⁷⁵ Nathan L. Whetten, *Rural Mexico* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948); Frans J. Schryer, *The Rancheros of Pisaflores: The History of a Peasant Bourgeoisie in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980); Emilio Kourí, *A Pueblo Divided: Business, Property, and Community in Papantla, Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); Gabriela Soto Laveaga, *Jungle Laboratories: Mexican Peasants, National Projects, and the Making of the Pill* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Elizabeth Terese Newman, *Biography of a Hacienda: Work and Revolution in Rural Mexico* (University of Arizona Press, 2014); Paula López Caballero and Ariadna Acevedo-Rodrigo, eds. *Beyond Alterity: Destabilizing the Indigenous Other in Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018), 31-106; Baitenmann, *Matters of Justice*.

⁷⁶ Méndez Reyes, *Capitalizar el campo*, 186.

state's claim of being the vanguard of the Mexican Revolution was largely performative, as it did not protect the country's Indigenous population from capitalist exploitation.

Despite its criticisms of the state, the FAMDF also acknowledged its own incapacity to foment social revolution. "In general and above all," the group admitted that it did not hold much sway among the country's laboring classes. Consisting of a few, self-proclaimed "old school" anarchists, the organization was keenly aware of its limitations in providing any serious alternative to the Mexican state's initiatives. While it acknowledged having some popular support in organized labor and rural communities, the contemporary anarchist movement in Mexico by and large existed solely as a pedagogical project based upon news publications.⁷⁷ The FAMDF therefore looked outward in an effort to rekindle Mexico's anarchist tradition. Their letter requested that Spanish and Latin American anarchists, particularly those from Argentina, migrate to Mexico and organize the nation's urban working class and Indigenous peasantry. The group optimistically claimed that in just one to two years' time, the settlement of young revolutionaries would be a surefire way to revitalize Mexico's dormant libertarian movement.⁷⁸ The relocation of South Americans to Mexico was more difficult due to financial constraints and the country's immigration restrictions, however, the state's initiative to provide asylum to Spaniards offered the group a tangible means to rebuild the Mexican anarchist movement with young Spanish militants.

Throughout its existence, the CNT went to great lengths to connect the Spanish proletariat's historical ties to Mexican people of various ethnic backgrounds. Yet its leaders' inconsistent assessments and personal proclivities diverged from this line of practice. More than just overlooking race, their class reductionism created an ideological tension within the anarchist movement. Since

⁷⁷ "Reservada. Circular al movimiento anarquista y anarco-sindicalista internacional" (August 28, 1938), IISH-CNT, 72B.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

the late nineteenth century, Spanish anarchists deviated from orthodox interpretations of proletarianization to include all “disinherited” laborers, including rural workers.⁷⁹ Berrondo’s and Castrejón’s view that Mexican society lacked the proper social, economic, and political conditions to develop class consciousness is predicated upon the deeply racialized notion that Indigenous peoples were unable to mobilize for their own emancipation. Similarly, the FAMDF framed the “Indian question” solely based on the paternalistic relationship between campesinos and the Cárdenas government rather than the aspirations and needs of native communities. Much in the same vein as the anarcho-syndicalists of the Casa del Obrero Mundial (House of the World Worker, COM) during the 1910s, Berrondo and Castrejón characterized campesinos as Indigenous, devout Catholics whom the ruling class manipulated through superstitions and “fanaticism.”⁸⁰ These conclusions actively ignored the important contributions of Indigenous people to pressure the state to expand revolutionary reforms.

Berrondo’s generalizations about Mexican people became a contentious point in developing ties to the country’s urban labor movements. In October 1937, the CNT in Spain received word that Berrondo was at the center of a political scandal following a dispute with the editors of the Mexican CGT’s newspaper, *Alba Roja*. Representatives from the CGT reached out to the CNT’s national secretary, Mariano Vázquez, to notify of Berrondo’s article criticizing the Mexican people’s lack of radical consciousness regarding the Mexican state. The *Regeneración* article, which Berrondo alleged would also be published in the CGT’s *Alba Roja* that same day, lambasted Mexicans’ support for leaders tied to the Catholic Church during the War of Independence, suggesting that this act

⁷⁹ Lida, *Anarquismo y revolución en la España del XIX*; Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology and the Working-Class Movement in Spain, 1868-1898*, 98-116.

⁸⁰ John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 260-261; Anna Ribera Carbó, *La Casa del Obrero Mundial: Anarcosindicalismo y revolución en México* (México, D.F.: INAH, 2010), 109-115.

subsequently legitimated the Church despite its role in repressing the nation's masses.⁸¹ Berrondo's patronizing tone incensed the editors of *Alba Roja*, who subsequently refused to republish the article. The editors went further, writing a scathing critique of the Spaniard and his radical credentials: "Being the redeemer of the working class is not the same as being a pelota player that gets drunk on champagne in the Basque Center," the article charged. "It is not for you to judge those who gave us Independence," it continued, "they have been priests and anarchists, such as yourself." The article concluded by noting that since Berrondo's arrival in the country, the Mexican labor movement had welcomed him and treated him as a respected comrade. "But the hospitality and affection that we offered you does not empower you to judge and insult us as Mexicans. If you do not like how we live in our country, you can go back to Spain and take up arms against Franco rather than insult him from the other side of the ocean."⁸² Berrondo's slight reflected similar contentions emerging between Spanish anarchist organizations and the affiliates with of the Asociación Internacional de Trabajadores, which accused the leaders of the CNT and FAI of bullying other member organizations concerning their alleged lack of support for the Spanish Revolution.⁸³ As representatives of one of the only anarchist social revolutions to have successfully maintained control of large swaths of territory, anarchist delegates from Spain regularly chastised their foreign compatriots for their inability to mobilize larger support for their cause. Berrondo's criticism represented a particularly disrespectful tone toward one of Spain's few diplomatic allies. In an effort to quell the tension between the two labor groups, Mariano Vázquez requested the CGT to send a comprehensive account of the incident and stressed that the CNT did not and would not tolerate

⁸¹ "¡Perdonamel!...", *Regeneración: Periódico Libertario* (Mexico City), August 1, 1937.

⁸² "¡Perdonadme Señor Berrondo!", *Alba Roja* (Mexico City), August 31, 1937.

⁸³ Brodie, *Transatlantic Anarchism during the Spanish Civil War and Revolution*, 109-110; Evans, *Revolution and the State*, 146-153.

“any immorality or behavior on the part of anyone that represents [the CNT] or its activists.”⁸⁴

Though a seemingly petty war of words played out in two obscure radical newspapers, the incident proved to be a significant hurdle for the propaganda initiative set out by the Spanish anarchist movement.

Conflicts and Reconciliations: Spanish Anarchists and the Mexican Left after May 1937

Berrondo’s feud with the CGT soured any interest in the Spanish anarchist movement’s propaganda initiative in Mexico and reflected the broader deterioration of the movement on all fronts.⁸⁵ The eroding alliance of the Popular Front in Spain following the aftermath of the Barcelona May Days, the ousting of the CNT from the Negrín coalition government, and the growing influence of the Soviet Union in Spain all contributed to a growing sectarian divide between those wishing to defend Republican Spain’s last holdouts and those intent on expanding the revolution throughout the country. These tensions made their way across the Atlantic and fueled the flames ignited by Berrondo’s behavior. During an October 1937 commemoration of Mexico’s first national labor confederation, the Casa del Obrero Mundial, audience members heckled Berrondo as he gave a lecture on the history of anarchism, eventually chanting “vivas” for the Spanish Popular Front, the Negrín government, and the Communist Party’s Catalan affiliate.⁸⁶ Just as political divisions were splintering anti-fascist groups in Spain, the ideological divisions of the conflict had made their way into Mexican politics as well.

As the dispute between Berrondo and the CGT unfolded in Mexico, the CNT and FAI decided to send a delegation to Mexico in an effort to further galvanize support for their cause in

⁸⁴ Mariano Vázquez to the CGT (October 11, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C.

⁸⁵ Berrondo to the FAI (August 28, 1937), IISH-FAI, CP 58.16.

⁸⁶ “Bodas de plata de la Casa del Obrero Mundial,” *El Machete* (Mexico City) (August 29, 1937).

Spain. Throughout the month of August 1937, Serafín Aliaga of the CNT, Dr. Felix Marti-Ibañez of the Juventudes Libertarias, and Juan López, the former Minister of Commerce under the Caballero government, comprised a CNT delegation participating in a North American speaking tour, starting with an extensive leg through the United States. By the time the delegation arrived in Mexico in September of 1937, the fallout was too great to ignore. Initial efforts to organize meetings through the CTM went unheeded, with many labor leaders refusing to provide the foreign delegates an opportunity to speak at rallies or conferences.⁸⁷ Despite these setbacks, the group was able to speak at a well-attended rally that the Frente Popular Español de Mexico organized. In an effort to mend relations between the two countries' radical movements, Serafín Aliaga, speaking on behalf of the Juventudes Libertarias de España (Spanish Libertarian Youth, JJLL de España), dedicated his lecture to the two countries' laboring classes' historic exploitation:

Until yesterday, Spain was not ours...it was an industrial colony of the foreigner, a country sunk in the usury of a semi-feudal capitalism, bleeding at the hands of the incompetent bourgeoisie. Today the proletariat knows that the factories are ours. The campesino eagerly defends the [Eastern front] because he knows that the earth is theirs. He says that yesterday's struggle in Mexico to conquer their liberties is today the struggle of the Spanish people. Just as yesterday Mexico did not shed the Spanish spirit, but instead emancipated itself from the feudal castes, just as we cast off the shame of foreign invasion from our soil and fight for our economic and social freedoms.⁸⁸

Juan López followed Aliaga's sentiments by applauding the contributions that Spanish-descended *criollos* played in Mexico's Independence movement:

It is true that colonization brought predatory conquerors and monarchical despotism [to Mexico]. But people of the Spanish race with positive virtues also emigrated to these lands. People with active and entrepreneurial spirits inspired by the French Revolution's principles of liberty. These men that Spain lost, America won.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Aliaga and López to Galvez (October 3, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C.

⁸⁸ "Comité Nacional. La Delegación de la CNT en México" (September 20, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

The presentations caught the attention of the government-friendly newspaper *El Nacional*, and after interviewing the delegates, the paper's correspondents praised the men's representation of the Spanish people. In reports sent to the CNT, López noted that the delegation received a warm reaction from the audience, despite some initial reservations.⁹⁰ An unexpected delay in receiving U.S. visas allowed the delegation to continue their efforts to rebuild ties to the Mexican working class throughout the month of October 1937. Although Vicente Lombardo Toldeano was absent for most of the CNT delegates' tour of country, he quickly organized a meeting with the men after being notified that they had been blacklisted from speaking events organized by the CTM. Much to the surprise of the delegates, Lombardo published a public declaration in various national newspapers expressing his support for the CNT, leading to a surge of requests for the delegation's presence at rallies and conferences.⁹¹ Moreover, Lombardo immediately organized an interview between the CNT delegation and President Lázaro Cárdenas, which Berrondo had failed to do.⁹² Along with these gestures of good will, Lombardo wrote a letter to the National Committee of the CNT to applaud the delegates' articulation of conditions in Spain. He also noted the labor confederation's continued interest in cooperating with the Negrín government, a misunderstanding he alleged was exacerbated by the "bourgeois and reactionary" press coverage of the Spanish conflict.⁹³

⁹⁰ Berrondo also noted the positive response received from the event in his correspondence with the CNT national committee. See: Berrondo to CNT National Committee (September 22, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C.

⁹¹ Serafín Aliaga and Juan López to the Nemesio Galvez (November 5, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C.

⁹² Ibid.; Berrondo to the CNT National Committee (September 22, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C.

⁹³ Serafín Aliaga and Juan López to the Nemesio Galvez (November 5, 1937), IISH-CNT, 62C.

backing of policies of Lázaro Cárdenas's policies and its readmission into the Negrín coalition government in April 1938 further substantiated the anarchists' position as legitimate political actors within the eyes of the Mexican Left. After receiving word from Lombardo Toledano that the Mexican government had legally decreed the expropriation of foreign-owned oil companies, Mariano Vázquez congratulated the CTM leader and applauded President Cárdenas's steadfast opposition to capitalist imperialism.⁹⁷ In July of that year, Lombardo Toledano notified the CNT national committee to notify them that as a result of their warm reception of Bassols, the CNT's Mexico delegates were invited to participate in two forthcoming conferences; the Congress Against Open City Bombardments and the inaugural congress of the Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (Confederation of Latin American Workers, CTAL), the latter of which represented Lombardo Toledano's first efforts to establish an explicitly anti-imperialist labor confederation throughout the Americas.⁹⁸ That a Spanish anarchist labor confederation was invited to attend the CTAL conference suggests that the CNT's propaganda campaign made great strides since its arrival the previous year. Mariano Vázquez responded to Lombardo Toledano to notify him that the two North American delegates, Serafín Aliaga and Dr. Félix Martí-Ibáñez, would serve as representatives of the CNT at the conferences, and concluded his letter thanking the CTM and the Mexican people for their support: "I only regret that Mexico isn't located where France is. If that were the case, we are certain that our conflict would have ended with the victory of the people over the invaders many months ago."⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Vicente Lombardo Toledano to the CNT (March 3, 1938), IISH-CNT, 62C.

⁹⁸ Vicente Lombardo Toledano to the CNT (July 8, 1938), IISH-CNT, 62C.

⁹⁹ Mariano Vázquez to Lombardo Toledano (June 13, 1938), IISH-CNT, 62C.

Conclusion

The CNT's unique relationship with Mexican diplomats and the Mexican Left demonstrated the possibilities and shortcomings of transnational solidarity efforts. Although, as in Spain, the CNT successfully established relations with certain sectors of Mexican society, the ongoing task of reconciling colonial and postcolonial constructions of racial difference through an explicitly class-oriented framework fomented misunderstandings and outright disagreements. Nonetheless, the persistence of some delegates to affirm a shared historical legacy of exploitation between Spaniards and Mexicans speaks to their desire to overcome such differences. Like many other radicals at the time, Mexican and Spanish anarchists regularly perceived racial inequality as a by-product of capitalism rather than a structural regime inherent within modern material relations. As in the cases of Berrondo and the Federación Anarquista Mexicana, these assessments reproduced racialized tropes of productivity and development that had long debilitated organizing efforts in Mexico as well as in other parts of the world. However, the CNT's willingness to enact self-criticism and inquiry also demonstrated an effort to transcend artificial understandings of race and class differences in order to build deeper bonds between its constituents and Spain's former colonies. This became especially apparent when Spanish revolutionaries found themselves face to face with Mexico's structural inequality, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

While scholars such as Brodie and others have claimed that nationalist tendencies within the Spanish anarchist movement provoked xenophobic sentiments towards allies and enemies alike, other political tendencies simultaneously existed that encouraged a radical reinterpretation of national and imperial relationships between working class people. As Spanish anarchists emphasized the particular conflicts the "Spanish race" faced in the wake of the Civil War, European and U.S. anarchists deemed such assessments as a recantation of the Civil War's broader internationalist

significance.¹⁰⁰ The specificities of language and cultural notions of race and nation in the relations between Mexicans and Spaniards suggest that the various factions simply misunderstood the nuances of such terms in their Spanish-speaking countries. Indeed, the particularities of a specific region's social, cultural, economic, and political landscape have always imprinted unique qualities to emancipatory struggles.¹⁰¹ The distinct ways that both Mexicans and Spaniards expressed their solidarity for one another provide an alternative reading of the formulation of nationalism and internationalism in Spain. Such amalgamations posited a radical interpretation of a future classless society that simultaneously reckoned with the Spanish nation's imperialist past. While these visions were not universally accepted, with some Spanish anarchists certain continuing to uphold xenophobic and racist views of non-European people, they do demonstrate how many various notions of difference emerged within the new political realities created during Mexico's and Spain's respective social upheavals.

This chapter sheds light on the difficult and often messy nature of transnational solidarity. In particular, it demonstrates the ways in which Spanish revolutionaries articulated notions of racial solidarity and difference within their depictions of Mexicans in print and in person. What is more, the fact that Spanish anarchists sought the support of left-wing groups beyond those of their own ideological ilk helps us reconsider the sectarian divisions that have long been the focus of studies on the Spanish Civil War. Not only did these relations exhibit an attempt to build coalitions with groups of various political persuasions, but it was in such ideas and actions that a radical reinterpretation of postcolonial relations emerged within the two countries' laboring classes. One that, unbeknownst to all, proved especially important following the ascension of the Franco dictatorship and the collapse of the Second Spanish Republic in April 1939.

¹⁰⁰ Brodie, *Transatlantic Anarchism during the Spanish Civil War and Revolution*, 107.

¹⁰¹ Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*; Stevens, *Red International and Black Caribbean*.

CHAPTER FIVE
Exiles in Transit:
Selection, Restrictions, and Radical Visions of Life in Mexico



Figure 12: Josep Franch-Clapers, “*La Tempesta*” (1939).¹

The gradual collapse of Loyalist defenses and the subsequent rise of the Franco dictatorship in April 1939 forced half a million Spaniards to flee across the Pyrenees. Most of those that fled were temporarily detained in concentration camps in southern France, some for up to six months. For the better part of a year, Mexican officials worked with representatives from the then-exiled government of Juan Negrín and his political opponent Indalecio Prieto to establish two auxiliary initiatives to process the detainees’ requests for asylum. Whereas Negrín’s Servicio de Evacuación de Refugiados Españoles (Spanish Refugees Evacuation Service, SERE) processed exiles from all political backgrounds, Prieto’s Junta de Auxilio a los Republicanos Españoles (Relief Board for Spanish Republicans, JARE) excluded affiliates from the Partido Comunista de España and the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (Basque Nationalist Party, PNV) due to his longstanding tensions with those parties during the Civil War. In summer 1939, 4,660 Spanish refugees boarded three ships—the *Sinaia*, the *Mexique*, and the *Ipanema*—and set sail for Mexico. Between 1936 and 1950,

¹ Josep Franch-Clapers, “*La Tempesta*,” Chalk, 1939, Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya, Barcelona.

approximately 20,482 Spaniards migrated to Mexico, of whom approximately 30% (6,236) arrived in 1939 alone.² Much like their experiences on the front lines, those that arrived on the various expeditions from France were placed in close proximity with compatriots from different parts of Spain, with different lived experiences, and with different political allegiances. Although most exiles came from skilled occupational backgrounds, their aspirations for life in Mexico reflected the proletarian struggle that they had fought for in Spain.

This chapter provides a succinct overview of the social and political demographics of Spaniards granted and excluded from asylum in Mexico. In doing so, I also seek to problematize the decisions made by Mexican and Spanish republican officials to exclude from the selection process many of the exiles affiliated with revolutionary movements. The bureaucratic processing of Spanish refugees based on their affiliations with specific political and labor organizations further divided the Spanish refugee population and subsequently ignored the exiles' multifaceted ideological affinities. As a result, both governments' notions of what constituted a desirable asylum-seeker took precedent over the refugees' specific motives and aspirations to contribution to Mexican society.

Of those that did manage to obtain visas, the voyage to Mexico allotted them time to think about life in Mexico and how they could contribute their skills to the receiving nation. During these expeditions, Spanish refugees of all political affiliations learned about the nature of *cardenista* reforms and strategized on how to intervene in them. Using oral testimonies and newspapers published onboard the first three expeditions from concentration camps in France to Mexico, this chapter assesses how exiles interpreted the initiatives posed by the Cárdenas government. I explain how the exiles' interpretations of *cardenismo* as an ongoing revolutionary program reflected their own notions of the Mexican Revolution and the radical traditions that existed between the two countries.

² Pla Brugat, *Els exiliats catalans*, 157-162.

Although those that received asylum were often not from factions that fought to continue the dramatic alteration of Spanish society during the Civil War, many of the refugees' personal ideals and affinities were connected to these political movements in meaningful ways.

Backgrounds of the Spanish Exile Community

The origins of the Spaniards that obtained asylum in Mexico demonstrated Spain's social and economic diversity. Among those that arrived between 1939 and 1942, the vast majority originated from Catalonia (24.1%), Castilla la Nueva (23.9%), Andalucía (9.2%), the Basque Country (7%), Castilla La Vieja (5.9%), Valencia (5.2%), and Aragón (4.9%).³ While nearly a third of these refugees originated from the cities of Barcelona and Madrid, refugee registers do not fully encapsulate the demographic diversity of the exile population.⁴ From the 1870s through the 1930s, internal migration in Spain from rural to urban enclaves gradually increased as Spaniards migrated to and from agricultural sectors, pre-industrial cities, and industrial centers.⁵ Migrants from Castile made their way to Madrid whereas those from Mediterranean provinces such as Andalucía tended to relocate to Barcelona—all regions that produced the largest portions of the refugee population.⁶ The collapse of traditional markets following the loss of Spain's overseas colonies, immigration to the

³ Approximately a fifth of the remaining refugees came from the following regions: Galicia (3.2%), Murcia (2.1%), León (2%), Extremadura (1.4%), Navarra (0.7%), Canarias (0.4%), Baleares (0.5%), and other provinces (8.8%). See: Plá Brugat, *Els exiliats catalans*, 166-167; Pilar Domínguez Prats, *Voces del exilio: Mujeres españolas en México, 1939-1950* (Madrid: Dirección General de la Mujer, 2004); José Francisco Mejía Flores, "La adscripción política y sindical de los refugiados españoles que se exiliaron en México," (master's thesis, Universidad Nacional de Autónoma de México, 2008), 50.

⁴ In 1940, half of Spain's economic population was dedicated to agriculture, 27.25% in services, and 22.13% in industry. See: Dolores Pla Brugat, "Refugiados españoles en México: Recuento y caracterización," in *Los refugiados españoles y la cultura mexicana: Actas de la segundas jornadas celebradas en El Colegio de México en noviembre de 1996*, eds. James Valender, et. al. (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1996), 431.

⁵ Javier Silvestre, "Internal Migrations in Spain, 1877-1930," *European Review of Economic History* 9, no. 2 (2005): 236-238.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 238.

Americas, the steady pull by industrialized parts of the country following the end of World War I, and the mass movement of combatants and displaced civilians throughout the Civil War also contributed to internal migration cycles.⁷

Spanish refugees also came from a diverse array of occupational backgrounds. While scholarship on the exiles has largely focused on those that came from professional, artistic, and political backgrounds, these sectors only made up a small fraction of the overall refugee population.⁸ According to Dolores Pla Brugat, over half of the refugees that came to Mexico between 1939 and 1944 (51.23%) worked occupations within the primary and secondary economic sectors. Approximately 72% of those from the secondary sector were skilled laborers with experience in agriculture.⁹ It is also important to note that of those on the *Sinaia*, *Mexique*, and *Ipanema*, approximately 18% were under the age of 15, 33% were women, and 63% married.¹⁰ In contrast to the accusations made by opponents of the refugee initiative, approximately 59% of the Spaniards that arrived to Mexico between 1939 and 1944 identified as Catholic and less than 1% as an atheist, although 39% stated that they had no religion.¹¹ The refugees' origins, occupations, religious affiliations, and genders are important aspects to consider when assessing the motives and aspirations of the refugee population in Mexico, and their capacity to integrate themselves into Mexican society. Some scholars have suggested that refugees' propensity to live in urban enclaves

⁷ Plg Brugat, "Refugiados españoles en México," 431; Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War*, 3-13; Silvestre, "Internal Migrations in Spain," 233-265; Phylis Cancilla Martinelli and Ana Varela-Lago, eds. *Hidden Out in the Open: Spanish Migration to the United States, 1875-1930* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2018).

⁸ Clara E. Lida, José Antonio Matesanz, and Josefina Zoaraida Vázquez, eds. *La Casa de España en México: Memoria, 1938-2000* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 2000); Faber, *Exile and Cultural Hegemony*; Aguinaga, *Ensayos sobre la literatura del exilio español*; Juan Ignacio del Cueto Ruiz-Funes, *Arquitectos españoles exiliados en México* (México, D.F.: Bonilla Artigas Editores, 2014).

⁹ Pla Brugat, *Els exiliats catalans*, 24-25.

¹⁰ Ibid., 164.

¹¹ Lida, *Caleidoscopio del exilio*, 44.

was the primary motive for the rapid dissolution of immigrant-based rural agricultural settlements in Mexico.¹² Yet when examining the lived experiences of refugees—thanks largely to interviews conducted by researchers affiliated with the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia during the 1970s and 1980s—we gain a more comprehensive understanding of Spanish exiles’ relationships to a variety of economic and political networks.

The experiences of exiles and their families, particularly those affiliated with leftist and anarchist movements, often transcended rural and urban divides. Antonio Ordóvas Salinas, a CNT member who was born in Barcelona in 1922, was the son of recent migrants from Aragón. His father was an *enganchado* (contracted worker) while his mother labored at home. Ordóvas Salinas would later note that his working-class upbringing informed much of his worldview and politics.¹³ Others who lived on the peripheries of urban centers still maintained ties to rural life. For instance, José Gené was born in the municipality of Igualada, approximately 40 miles west of Barcelona, where his parents worked as dairy farmers. By his late teens, following a compulsory stint in the military, Gené labored as a peon. After relocating to France for a short duration of time, Gené was deported due to his involvement in anarchist circles and as a result returned Igualada. In 1920, Gené eventually settled in Barcelona where he worked in a flour workshop and joined the then clandestine CNT.¹⁴ Whereas working-class and campesino families divided their lives between rural and urban localities, others migrated cityward for educational purposes. Antonio Navarro Pérez, for example, born in 1912 in the village of Almansa in the province of Albacete, lived in a region with a mixed agricultural economy and burgeoning textile factories before migrating to Madrid and studying to

¹² Fagen, *Exiles and Citizens*, 53-54; Avni, “Cárdenas, México, y los refugiados,” 16; Pla Brugat, “Un río español de sangre roja,” 41.

¹³ Interview with Antonio Ordóvas Salinas, conducted by Marisol Alonso (1980), INAH-DEH PHO/10/51, 2-6.

¹⁴ Interview with José Gené, conducted by Concepción Ruiz Funes (1979), INAH-DEH, PHO/10/11.

become an engineer.¹⁵ Although Navarro joined the Communist Party, he noted that the vast majority of the workers from his region affiliated with the anarchists by the time of the Civil War.¹⁶ Exiles from upper-middle class backgrounds often maintained connections to the plight of rural Spanish society. Such was the case of José de Tapia y Bujalance of the province of Córdoba in Andalucía, whose affluent father encouraged him to learn Esperanto and introduced him to anarchism, ran a Freinet school in the village of Montemayor while organizing cooperatives among the region's campesino communities.¹⁷ “Although we did not descend from campesinos, we became campesinos in our sentiments,” Tapia y Bujalance recalled, as the politics of the community shaped the course curriculum at the school.¹⁸ Exiles such as Ricardo Mestre Ventura, another *cenetista* (member of the CNT), grew up in the municipality of Sant Martí Sarroca, approximately 40 miles inland from Barcelona and 20 miles north of the fishing port of Vilanova i la Geltrú. The region around the port supported abundant orchards and textile industries that continued to prosper following the construction of a railroad line paid for by the local “Indian” (*indianos*) community—Spanish immigrants who had returned with money from the Americas.¹⁹

Ideological Affinities as Ledgers of Loyalty: The Refugee Selection Process

Much like the regional composition of the refugee community, varying ideological tendencies complicate our understanding of the political composition of asylum seekers. Future

¹⁵ Interview with Antonio Navarro Pérez, conducted by Enriqueta Tuñón (1979), INAH-DEH, PHO/10/70, 2-10.

¹⁶ Ibid., 16-17.

¹⁷ Interview with José de Tapia y Bujalance, conducted by Concepción Ruiz Funes (1987), INAH-DEH, PHO/10/86, 1-2, 21, 47-48.

¹⁸ Interview with José de Tapia y Bujalance, conducted by Concepción Ruíz Fines (1987), INAH-DEH, PHO/10/86, 56.

¹⁹ Interview with Ricardo Mestre Ventura, conducted by Enrique Sandoval (1988) INAH-DEH, PHO/10/99, 23.

refugees' political consciousness demonstrated a far more diverse tapestry of ideological influences than the affiliations inscribed on their immigration visas. While Spaniards that would seek asylum in Mexico maintained a wide array of experiences and sentiments, the processing of political refugees by the Mexican state often homogenized their lives into specific categories of analysis. As a result, the processing and selection of exiles often reflected the sectarian divisions of the Spanish Civil War.

Although a comprehensive list of all of the refugees' political and labor affiliations does not exist, data pertaining to a subset of exiles that arrived in 1939 has been analyzed by scholars. Of those onboard the *Sinaia*, *Ipanema*, *Mexique*, and individuals that migrated through their own means that year, a sample of visas demonstrates a wide assemblage of the Spanish Left:

Table 1: Political and Labor Affiliation of Visa Recipients (1939).²⁰

Distribución por partidos de los visados otorgados por la Legación Mexicana (1939)										
Partidos	SINAIA		IPANEMA		MEXIQUE		INDIVIDUALES		TOTAL	
	Visados	%	Visados	%	Visados	%	Visados	%	Visados	%
UGT	264	28,48	111	21,55	217	21,36	157	10,03	749	18,61
CNT	78	8,41	99	19,22	186	18,31	157	10,03	520	12,92
FAI	0	0,00	15	2,91	31	3,05	0	0,00	46	1,14
PSOE	106	11,43	60	11,65	124	12,20	314	20,05	604	15,01
PCE	187	20,17	55	10,68	113	11,12	78	4,98	433	10,76
JSU	54	5,83	15	2,91	31	3,05	78	4,98	178	4,42
IR	82	8,85	25	4,85	52	5,12	314	20,05	473	11,75
UR	19	2,05	25	4,85	52	5,12	78	4,98	174	4,32
ANV	7	0,76	15	2,91	31	3,05	78	4,98	131	3,26
PNV	7	0,76	15	2,91	31	3,05	78	4,98	131	3,26
ACR	4	0,43	25	4,85	52	5,12	78	4,98	159	3,95
ERC	46	4,96	25	4,85	52	5,12	78	4,98	201	5,00
Sin Part.	73	7,87	30	5,83	44	4,33	78	4,98	225	5,59
SUMA	927		515		1.016		1.566		4.024	

Although the Cárdenas government publicly expressed its intention to welcome asylum seekers from all positions within the political spectrum, the president's representatives shaped policies and restrictions to favor participants affiliated with political parties and labor unions sympathetic to the government of Juan Negrín, the last Prime Minister of the Second Spanish Republic and leader of the ruling Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers'

²⁰ Table appears in Velázquez Hernández, "La otra cara," 86.

Party, PSOE). In a confidential letter to Diego Martínez Barrios, the President of the Spanish Cortes, Mexican Ambassador to France Narciso Bassols clarified that Mexico intended to accept as many republican exiles as possible. Bassols also made two suggestions relating to the selection process. First, he recommended that the Spanish government and the national organizations affiliated with the Spanish Popular Front coordinate the selection of refugees. Second, asylum would be granted by Mexico to those facing the greatest threat of political persecution.²¹ These suggestions reflected pragmatic solutions for the Mexican government but posed a number of problems for Spanish officials. Years of infighting between political factions had weakened the Popular Front and made any selection process an explicitly political decision based on ideological preference rather than existential threat.

Bassols' suggestions to Martínez Barrios only reinforced the divisions emblematic of Spanish domestic policies throughout the Civil War. In an April 1939 press release regarding the SERE's role in selecting refugees, Bassols distinguished the asylum-seekers that would be permitted entry into Mexico. Responding to the resounding opposition from conservative Mexican newspapers regarding the admission of International Brigade members, Bassols stressed that only Spanish citizens would be granted asylum in Mexico. Among those Spaniards, however, the SERE intended to root out prospective "undesirables." While there were many anti-fascist asylum-seekers that opposed the Franco uprising, Bassols explained, certain exceptions applied to those that exhibited anti-social behavior. Among them were those deemed "adventurers," "bandits," or "immoral."²² Throughout the Civil War, republican and communist factions associated members of anarchist and anti-Stalinist leftist groups with such descriptors, therefore implying that they should be excluded from the

²¹ Confidential. Narciso Bassols to Diego Martínez Barrios (February 28, 1939), AHSRE, "Exilio Español" (January 1939-August 1939), 54-55.

²² "Extracto del discurso del Sr. Bassols" (April 18, 1939), AHSRE, "Exilio Español" (January 1939-August 1939), 86.

selection process. Similar discriminatory practices emerged in Mexico, with the leaders of the Partido Comunista Mexicano (Mexican Communist Party, PCM) and the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (Confederation of Mexican Workers, CTM) actively condemning the Cárdenas government's decision to grant the most well-known anti-Stalinist dissident, Leon Trotsky, with political asylum. In public meetings and in their publications, the PCM and CTM leaders condemned Trotsky's presence in Mexico, accusing him and the alleged "Trotskyists" of the POUM as being agents of fascism.²³

Whereas the PCM and the CTM represented the most ardent supporters of the Cárdenas government's asylum initiative, dissent emerged among certain sectors of the Mexican Left that opposed the sectarian persecution of anti-fascist militants in Spain. Following the imprisonment of the surviving POUM leadership in April 1938, Mexican students distributed leaflets directed at the Spanish Embassy in Mexico rejecting the charges of sedition made against POUM leaders in August of that same year.²⁴ Written on behalf of the "revolutionary students" of the IV International at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico, UNAM),

²³ "Partido Comunista de México, VI Congreso (January 1937)," Archivo CEMOS, Caja 9, Expediente 1, 150; "Resolución general adoptada por el VI Congreso Nacional del Partido Comunista de México," Caja 9, Expediente 1a, 12; "Se condenó la labor del trotsquismo en el congreso del partido comunista," *El Popular* (Mexico City), March 23, 1940; "La CTM acusa a Leon Trotsky de ser instrument en la "guerra de nervios" Yanqui contra México," *El Popular*, June 6, 1940; "El pobrecito refugiado," *El Popular*, June 6, 1940; Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 218.

²⁴ Following the establishment of the government of Juan Negrín in April 1937, CNT and POUM militias were repressed by republican forces with the assistance of the Soviet-backed Partido Comunista de España. After the detention, torture, and assassination of the POUM leader Andreu Nin following the May Days of 1937, the surviving leaders attempted to reorganize the party, but were arrested by the Negrín government in April 1938. Though Negrín's efforts to swiftly carry out a Soviet-style show trial against the POUM leaders, he granted the prisoners a legal defense team organized by prominent leftist and anarchist leaders. Their efforts to absolve the POUM leaders of guilt ultimately failed, and in October 1938, the POUM was permanently dissolved, with most of its leaders charged with lengthy prison terms. See: Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism*, 227-231.

the leaflet condemned the Negrín government's repression of the POUM leadership, including two foreign members of the IV International, the Mexican-born Spaniard Grandizo Munis and the U.S. citizen Rosalio Negrete.²⁵ As discussed in greater detail in the final chapter of this dissertation, the ideological preconditions by which Spanish republican and Mexican authorities deemed refugees "desirable" thus depended as much on political affiliations as racial or class affinities between the two countries.

Exiles affiliated with minority political organizations accused Spanish authorities of prioritizing members of their own parties over those most vulnerable to political persecution. In the weeks leading up to the arrival of the first wave of refugees, Cárdenas tasked Mexico's Ambassador to France, Narciso Bassols, to coordinate with officials representing the last republican government of Prime Minister Juan Negrín to distribute visas among prospective exiles in French concentration camps.²⁶ Asylum-seekers alleged that representatives of the SERE were purposefully excluding individuals aligned with Spain's revolutionary movements, especially those with anarchist sympathies.²⁷

On August 1, 1939 the national committee of the anarcho-syndicalist CNT sent a nine-page report to President Lázaro Cárdenas detailing the SERE's selection discrepancies. Of the first three vessels to relocate refugees from French concentration camps, the report claimed that only 24% of the passengers were anarchists, in contrast to 33% that identified as republicans, 38% as marxists,

²⁵ "Asunto: Envía manifestos suscritos por la IV Internacional sobre el proceso que se sigue en Barcelona"; "Libertad! para los trabajadores antifascistas sentenciados a muerte en Madrid" (August 15, 1939), Fundación Universitaria Española, Fondo Gordón Ordáz (hereafter FUE-FGO), Caja 3, Expediente 1, 3.1.80.

²⁶ Piña Soría, *El presidente Cárdenas y la inmigración de españoles republicanos*, 11-12, 18-21; Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 193.

²⁷ For more on the discrepancies between anarchists and the asylum process, see: Herrerín López, "Políticas de los anarcosindicalistas españoles exiliados en México;" Herrerín López, *El dinero del exilio*, 52-53; Velázquez Hernández, *Empresas y finanzas del exilio*, 109-112.

and 5% who were not members of any party or labor union. According to the CNT, SERE officials asked asylum-seekers not only to state their political affiliation but also give their views on which political factions they believed “behaved better” during the Spanish Civil War.²⁸ The CNT’s report charged that those who did not state that they were affiliated with the PSOE or its allies were excluded from receiving visas.²⁹ The CNT national committee further noted that they had spoken to Ambassador Bassols, who assured them that Spanish relief officials would address any injustices or mistakes in the selection process.³⁰

News of the discriminatory practices quickly made its way to Mexican anarchist groups in Guanajuato and San Luis Potosí, which sent telegrams to President Cárdenas demanding Mexican authorities intervene on behalf of those facing persecution.³¹ According to Aurelio Velázquez Hernández, the disparities in political affiliation on the first three refugee vessels were even more severe than the CNT report suggested; only 15% of heads of household that received visas to Mexico were affiliated with the CNT and FAI. His data suggest, however, that allegations of preferential treatment for Negrín’s allies, in particular the PCE, were false.³² In contrast to members

²⁸ Germinal Esgleas, Federica Montseny, and Roberto Alfonso, “Al excelentísimo señor Don Lázaro Cárdenas, Presidente de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos. México, D.F.,” AGN-LCR, Caja 908, Expediente 546.6/212-14 (Legajo 3).

²⁹ Piña Soria, *El presidente Cárdenas y la inmigración de españoles republicanos*, 12-13; Velázquez-Hernández, “La otra cara del exilio,” 84.

³⁰ Esgleas, Montseny, and Alfonso, “Al excelentísimo señor Don Lázaro Cárdenas,” AGN-LCR, Caja 908, Expediente 546.6/212-14 (Legajo 3).

³¹ Grupo Saco y Vanzetti to Lázaro Cárdenas (January 3, 1940), AGN-LCR, Caja 908, Expediente 546.6/212-15; Centro Cultural Regeneración to Lázaro Cárdenas (November 20, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 908, Expediente 546.6/212-15.

³² DIPS Inspector Clavé noted in a February 1940 memorandum that many refugees continued to believe that Negrín and the CTARE gave preferential treatment to communists and excluded other political factions from receiving visas for asylum. Testimonials taken with refugees in the 1970s and 1980s also indicated that many of these claims did not dissipate over time. See: AGN-LCR, Caja 315, Expediente 10, 59-61; Interview with José Gené, conducted by Concepción Ruíz Fines (1979), INAH-DEH, PHO/10/11, 216-225; Interview with Mercedes Maestre, conducted by María Alonso (1981), INAH-DEH, PHO/10/28, 72-73.

of Negrín's allied factions, the PCE received only 11% of the total asylum visas.³³ Although the political affiliations of all refugees that requested asylum is not available, Dolores Pla Brugat notes dramatic irregularities in those approved for asylum versus those that were granted visas onboard one the vessels, the *Sinaia*. Of the 22% of anarchist heads of family that solicited asylum on the vessel, around 5% were granted visas. Republicans, who composed 20% of the requests, received approximately 20% of the visas for the expedition. Marxists, who made up 55% of the asylum requests, received around 40%. The 3% of applicants that were unaffiliated with a party received the second largest number of visas onboard of the *Sinaia*, nearly 35%.³⁴ While similar statistics do not exist for the *Ipanema* or the *Mexique*, anarchists, and to a lesser extent Marxists, received the fewest visas per the total solicitations for the *Sinaia*, indicating a clear bias against exiles affiliated with more radical political movements.



Figure 13: Vessel tickets for refugees affiliated with the CNT onboard the *Ipanema*.³⁵

Anarchists were not the only ones who made accusations of discrimination. In a report to DIPS Director Arriola, Inspector José M. Clavé claimed that passengers disembarking from the ship *Mexique* accused SERE officials of favoring communist factions over PSOE members affiliated with

³³ Exiles affiliated with PSOE and its labor affiliate, the Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT), received the most visas, approximately 34 per cent combined. See: Velázquez-Hernández, "La otra cara del exilio," 86-88.

³⁴ Pla Brugat, *Els exilats catalans*, 177-179.

³⁵ AHSRE, "Exilio Español" (March 1939 – August 1939), 2, 11.

Indalecio Prieto. Although Negrín was also a member of the PSOE, his collaboration with the PCE led many in his party to accuse him of being a pawn of the Soviet Union. As news spread throughout the French camps of the SERE's interview practices, *prietistas* notified others to lie to interrogators and claim support for Negrín's factions.³⁶ Similarly, many asylum-seekers tied to the POUM, CNT, and FAI lied or omitted their political affiliations during the selection process. Claudio Esteva Fabregat, for example, frequently collaborated with anarchist and anti-Stalinist groups during the Civil War despite being a member of the Juventudes Socialistas (Socialist Youth) and the Comité Nacional de Cataluña (National Committee of Catalonia). Upon entering the French concentration camp, he only brought his membership card from the Comité Nacional de Cataluña, never mentioning to SERE officials his ties to the CNT or the POUM.³⁷ Such omission reflected the degree in which sectarianism mitigated the selection process, as well as the longstanding demonization of revolutionary elements in Spain. Exiles affiliated with revolutionary movements that opposed liberal democracy were characterized as aiding the creep of fascism in Spain.

Preparing for Exile: Spanish Asylum Seekers at Sea

Despite the discriminatory practices exhibited by aid officials, comradeship among those proliferated at sea. As refugees, no longer facing persecution at home or the uncertain future that awaited in French concentration camps, began to focus on their futures in Mexico. While the vessels lacked space for large gatherings, passengers utilized their time at sea to organize conferences to discuss the best ways to support the Mexican people and their ongoing Revolution. On any given day, conferences were held between teachers, workers, peasants, and professionals and conducted in Spanish, Catalan, and other regional languages to discuss how best to use their technological skills

³⁶ Inspector PS-15 to Cipriano Arriola (August 8, 1939), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 315, Expediente 10.

³⁷ Interview with Claudio Esteva Fabregat, 78, 86-89.

and trades to further the labor, agrarian, and economic reforms of the Revolution.³⁸ In an effort to educate passengers about the country they were going to be residing in, Spanish and Mexican officials published daily newspapers to give updates of events on-board the *Sinaia*, the *Mexique*, and the *Ipanema* while also providing useful information regarding Mexican society, culture, and politics.

While the papers' editorial staff consisted of refugee passengers from all of the political factions that comprising the Spanish Popular Front, their coverage blended both the editors' analyses of the refugee crisis as well as official policies and standards as dictated by the refugee auxiliary delegations. The newspapers included articles on Mexico's history, geography, culture, and contemporary political struggles. Many of the daily editions included assessments of the Cárdenas government's various reforms and how Spaniards could contribute to their advancement. On board the *Sinaia*, the first vessel to make its way to Mexico, passengers learned of these efforts through a daily column entitled "Las ideas del Presidente Cárdenas." The series intended to explain the six-year plan enacted by Cárdenas as a radical initiative to improve the economic conditions for every Mexican citizen. In particular, it noted that the initiative not only sought to carry out the immediate task of redistributing land to the country's campesino communities, but also to incorporate them within Mexico's institutional apparatuses through socialist education endeavors and the recently established National Bank of Ejidal Credit. The initiative suggested a broad reorganization of Mexican society, which in some ways reflected the agrarian reforms initiated during the Second Spanish Republic as well as the goals of the Spanish Revolution.³⁹

³⁸ "Lo que pasa a bordo," "Hoy," *La Sinaia: Diario de la primera expedición de republicanos españoles a México* (May 31, 1939); Interview with Antonio Navarro, 142.

³⁹ Edward Malefakis, *Agrarian Reform and Peasant Revolution in Spain: Origins of the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970); Natividad Rodrigo González, *Las colectividades agrarias en Castilla-La Mancha* (Toledo: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha, 1985); Frank Mintz, *Anarchism and Workers' Self-Management in Revolutionary Spain* (Oakland: AK Press, 2013), Pelai Pagès, *El sueño igualitario entre los campesinos de Huesca: Colectivizaciones agrarias durante la guerra civil, 1936-1938* (Huesca: Sariñena Editorial, 2013); James Simpson and Juan Carmona, *Why*

Above all, Mexican and Spanish officials on-board stressed the importance of Spanish exiles' incorporation into rural society. Refugees skilled in agriculture were to assist Mexican campesinos in developing new cultivation techniques and to teach students in *escuelas normales* (normal schools) and vocational agricultural programs.⁴⁰ Campesinos and agriculturalists on-board the *Sinaia* also participated in meetings with Mexican officials to discuss the ways in which they could contribute to the agrarian program upon arrival.⁴¹

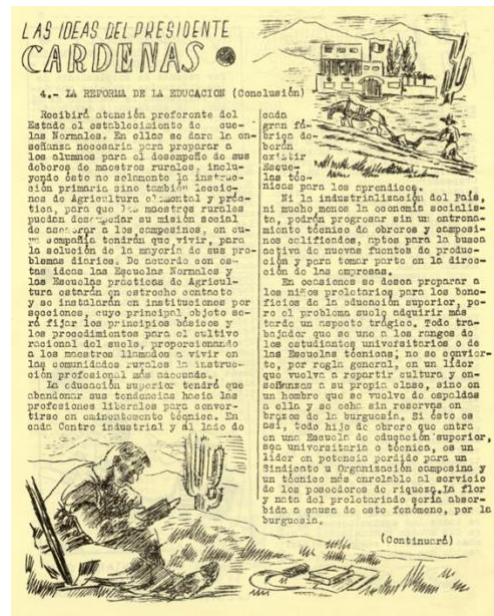


Figure 14: *La Sinaia* article on education reform.⁴²

Some émigrés recalled the events and conferences on Mexico as being especially well-attended.

Antonio Navarro, for instance, was familiar with small property cultivation techniques used in his hometown of Almansa, Albacete and recalled that the lack of meeting spaces forced many events to

Democracy Failed: The Agrarian Origins of the Spanish Civil War (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

⁴⁰ "Las ideas del Presidente Cárdenas: La reforma de la educación," *La Sinaia: Diario de la primera expedición de republicanos españoles a México*, May 30, 1939.

⁴¹ "A todos los agricultores," *La Sinaia: Diario de la primera expedición de republicanos españoles a México*, May 31, 1939.

⁴² "La reforma de la educación, continuación," *La Sinaia: Diario de la primera expedición de republicanos españoles a México* (31 May 1939).

be moved on to the open deck of the vessel rather than the allotted dining rooms.⁴³ As articulated during meetings and in the vessel's daily newspaper, refugees were not intended to be isolated from rural communities but expected to directly engage with local campesinos to develop new systems of production and distribution. Through these efforts, Spaniards were to support Mexican campesinos in gaining control of the technical means and goods in their own hands, rather than to serve as intermediaries.⁴⁴

On-board the *Ipanema*, the last vessel to arrive in the summer of 1939, exiled Spanish campesinos learned about the laws pertaining to settlements. As a result of the Mexican Revolution, new agrarian laws restricted certain types of property ownership in an effort to avoid the disproportionate allocation of lands. One article stressed the importance of these laws and Spaniards' duty to uphold them. In particular, the colonization initiative served to counteract the longstanding process of privileging foreign land ownership, which was frequently the root of rural conflicts during the Mexican Revolution. Refugees learned that to be granted a land title and credit through the Ejidal Bank, their crops had to be continuously cultivated and their lands could not become fallow.⁴⁵ In many ways, the Spanish refugee relocation effort attempted to reconcile the longstanding practice of previous administrations to prioritize foreign colonization over the enhancement of domestic cultivation. Whereas Spanish immigrants in the past benefited from higher wages and greater access to land, the new initiative made efforts to place exiles on equal footing with their Mexican counterparts, regardless of skillset. For exiled agriculturalists and campesinos, the effort affirmed their aspirations to contribute to the nation's agrarian reform by working as equals to Mexican campesinos.

⁴³ Interview with Antonio Navarro, 234-236.

⁴⁴ "Las ideas del President Cárdenas: La reforma agraria," *La Sinaia: Diario de la primera expedición de republicanos españoles a México*, May 28, 1939.

⁴⁵ "Nuestros campesinos hacia México," *Ipanema: Diario de abordó*, June 17, 1939.

The ethnic diversity of Mexico and the role Spaniards played in resolving the nation's "Indian problem" were two of the most common topics of discussion onboard. The *Ipanema's* passengers learned about the racial demographics of the Mexican nation. In one article, editors noted that at the time of the Spaniards' arrival over half of the country's population were mestizos (54%), with Indigenous people making up 30%, whites 15%, and Afro-descendants 1% of the total population.⁴⁶ Despite these statistics, the article stressed that biological qualifiers did not exclusively determine the racial composition of Mexico. "You must observe, however, that racial data is individually and collectively false," the article warned. It further explained that the process of *mestizaje* complicated any effort to describe a shared racial experience:

Numerous indigenous groups have come out of isolation through the expansion of national life and as a result have lost their ethnic characteristics and languages. The data captured on race, along with being an anti-scientific concept, are patently false because very few individuals or families have an exact knowledge of their grandparents' ethnic characteristics and none know those of their great-grandparents.⁴⁷

Much like in Mexico, Spanish conceptions of race celebrated *mestizaje*, albeit with certain caveats.⁴⁸

At the turn of the twentieth century, Spanish anthropologists repudiated the biological determinism of the European eugenics movement and instead proposed that the fusion of multiple races produced "a permanent, immutable, transmissible quality."⁴⁹ Similarly, Mexican intellectuals such as José Vasconcelos proposed that the mixing of races established a *raza cósmica* (cosmic race), an amalgamation of all the races located in the Americas that established a superior cultural

⁴⁶ "¿Conoceís Méjico?," *Ipanema: Diario de abordo*, June 17, 1939.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Mary Nash, "Social Eugenics and Nationalist Race Hygiene in Early Twentieth Century Spain," *History of European Ideas* 15, no. 4-6 (1992): 743-744; Alexandra Minna Stern, "From Mestizophilia to Biotypology: Racialization and Science in Mexico, 1920-1960," in *Race & Nation in Modern Latin America*, eds. Nancy P. Applebaum, Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 187-204; Rosemblatt, *The Science and Politics of Race in Mexico and the United States*.

⁴⁹ Goode, *The Impurity of Blood*, 97.

manifestation that transcended skin color.⁵⁰ However, such racial discourses still implied that social and cultural characteristics could depress the social, cultural, and moral fabric of the Mexican and Spanish races.

The “regeneration” of the race, it was argued, required the advancement of policies that improved the welfare of a society through technological and scientific advancements.

regularly attributed racial degeneration to a lack of social productivity. As much as such notions refuted the biological determinism of Social Darwinism, the racialist worldviews of the theorists that proposed such concepts tinted all propositions for regenerating society. In particular, the notion that certain qualities seen as inherently “Spanish” or “mestizo,” in the Mexican case, needed to be encouraged by the state to avoid social degeneration. As a result, the discourses of both society’s notions of the origin of crime and “social dissolution” came from degenerate qualities within society. By the late 1910s, Spanish criminal anthropologists and politicians accused congested urban conditions of industrial cities as the breeding ground for “degenerative” political ideals, such as anarchism.⁵¹ Although regenerationist ideals that rejected threats to social and moral health were espoused by proponents on various sides of the political spectrum, including anarchists, the circumstances in which they manifested through the Spanish refugees’ incorporation into Mexican society was twofold.⁵² Not only were Mexican and Spanish officials concerned about the prospective

⁵⁰ José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race: A Bilingual Edition* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997). For more on Vasconcelos’s influence on Mexican society, see: Joaquín Cárdenas Noriega, *José Vasconcelos: Caudillo cultural* (México, D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2008); Ilan Stavans, *José Vasconcelos: The Prophet of Race* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011); David Dalton, *Mestizo Modernity: Race, Technology, and the Body in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2018).

⁵¹ Goode, *The Impurity of Blood*, 180.

⁵² Richard Cleminson, “Eugenics without the State: Anarchism in Catalonia, 1900-1937,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 39 (2008): 232-239; Lomnitz, *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón*, 311-317; Jorge Molero-Meso, Isabel Jiménez-Lucena, and Carlos Tabernero-Holgado, “Neo-Malthusianism and Eugenics in the Struggle over Meaning in the Spanish Anarchist Press, 1900-1936,” *História, Ciências, Saúde--Manguinhos* 25, no. 1 (2018): 105-124; Richard

dangers of incorporating political subversives into the receiving society, they also desired refugees that would assist in the elimination of “degenerative” attributes within Mexican society—with specific concern about those allegedly found in Indigenous peoples.

Indeed, even as Mexican officials on the *Ipanema* stressed the fallacy of biological determinism, they noted the social significance of racial hierarchies in Mexico by listing the various forms of terminology based on colonial categorizations of intermixing. Unlike the distinctions promoted by the *casta* system, which emphasized heredity, religion, and status as important contributions to racial identity, the article acknowledged the dramatic change in Mexico’s racial makeup as a result of intermixing. “Although individuals of the Spanish race continued being the most important contribution to *mestizaje*,” the article claimed, “their contributions have lessened every day. Intermixing, particularly in recent years, has been carried out between individuals from diverse categories of *mestizaje* between themselves as well as among those of the indigenous race.” The article further stressed that mestizos represented “the most important element in Mexican demography” and that, phenotypically, the Mexican population “tends to get Indianized, from an anthropological point of view.”⁵³ As such distinctions attempted to demonstrate an aversion to colorism within Mexican society, the ongoing association of native peoples to degenerative social qualities simultaneously reproduced the desire to incorporate Europeans into the biological milieu of Mexican society.

Similar forms of racial thinking appeared in articles published onboard other vessels. On the *Sinaia*, one article discussing the Cárdenas government’s initiatives to resolve the “Indian problem” proposed that the issue was one based exclusively on social degeneration rather than biological

Cleminson, *Anarchism and Eugenics: An Unlikely Convergence, 1890-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

⁵³ “¿Conoceís Méjico?” *Ipanema: Diario de abordo*, June 17, 1939.

attributes. According to its author, alcoholism, stagnant wages, and a lack of educational resources placed large sectors of the country's Indigenous population "under the yoke of misery, fanaticism, and vice." Exiles were therefore encouraged to serve as exemplary models of industriousness and clean living for Mexico's Indigenous populations to emblemize. For exiled agriculturalists and farmers destined for the countryside, refugees were to educate and encourage Indigenous communities to "love labor as a social duty."⁵⁴ On the one hand, the literature produced by Mexican and Spanish officials onboard the vessels characterized political refugees as a vanguard for social regeneration in the countryside. On the other hand, such a discursive tilt toward miscegenation and community assimilation avoided making any concrete solutions to confront the pervasive racial inequality and poverty within Mexican society.

Despite the conflicting expectations of the Mexican and Spanish Republican governments, refugees shared many of the same aspirations as those communities that petitioned in favor of their integration. Upon their arrival in Mexico, passengers were required to fill out migration forms for the Mexican and Spanish governments. When asked what they wished to do for work while living in exile, passengers were nearly unanimous in their responses. Rather than seeing their migration as an opportunity for social mobility, the vast majority of refugees wrote that they wanted to continue the labor they did in Spain while doing whatever would most benefit the Cárdenas government and the Mexican Revolution.⁵⁵ By the end of 1940, approximately 80% of Spanish refugees that arrived in Mexico had naturalized as citizens, most of which never returned to their country of origin.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ "Las ideas del Presidente Cárdenas: El problema de las razas indígenas," *La Sinaia: Diario de la primera expedición de republicanos españoles a México*, June 1, 1939.

⁵⁵ "Hojas de datos requeridos por la delegación de México de los republicanos españoles que solicitan radicarse en la república mexicana" (Abril 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 155, Expediente 6009.

⁵⁶ Clara E. Lida, *Inmigración y exilio: Reflexiones sobre el caso español* (México, D.F.: Siglo XXI, 1997), 112; Jorge de Hoyos Puente, *La utopía del regreso: Proyectos de Estado y sueños de nación en el exilio republicano en México* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 2012), 129.

As newspapers on-board the refugees' vessels encouraged Spaniards to fully integrate into Mexican life and to be appreciative of the country's support of the Second Republic, officials simultaneously discouraged them from viewing themselves as permanent residents, much less as potential Mexican citizens. "You are not new Mexicans," one article warned, "but Spaniards that will always be Spaniards, in Mexico and all over the world." Other materials were more direct. Prior to their disembarkation, passengers received brochures detailing what the Mexican and Spanish governments expected of them. They were warned not to meddle in national politics, nor should they reflect on their past experiences during the Civil War. Officials recommended that passengers "forget and to not criticize the mistakes of the past, and to bury forever the hatred that exists in your land, while in exile, and wherever you are." But for many exiles politicized during the Civil War, and who witnessed the importance of international solidarity to their struggle, national identity was a fluid concept forged by changing circumstances. Reflecting on his time at sea, Claudio Esteva Fabregat recalled his growing affinity to Mexico. "Spain was over," he recalled, having been lost to the ravages of fascism. Like many other young militants, he naturalized as a Mexican citizen to demonstrate his appreciation to the Cárdenas government and the Mexican people for their support.⁵⁷

To ensure that refugees observed the Mexican government's stipulations for asylum, the Spanish republican government's relief committee held meetings on vessels in transit to Mexico to clarify the terms of their asylum. One brochure distributed by refugee aid officials on board the *Quanza* stated:

Refugee: [...] When you are in Mexico, know that you have many obligations: you should be interested in the country where you live, work honestly, comply with the laws of Mexico, avoid interfering in politics and foreign political parties ... and [you should] not criticize the mistakes of the past. [You should forget] about all of that hatred that exists in your land [while] in exile ... [You] should

⁵⁷ Interview with Claudio Esteva Fabregat, 96.

understand one thing: that your siblings, family, and friends depend on your future performance, so that those that are suffering [in Spain] can be saved and freely enter into Mexico. If your presence causes disorder [...] then the Mexican people will have to put an end to collective immigration and restrict your entry.⁵⁸

At the same time, officials expected asylum-seekers publicly to praise the Cárdenas government's support and hospitality. In an article published in the *Ipanema's* on-board daily newspaper, officials emphasized the refugees' obligations to the Mexican state:

Our moral and political conduct must be the best weapon General Cárdenas' government has ... [If we cannot] intervene directly in Mexican politics, we can influence it by supporting, based on our conduct, the great policies for its people and the generosity of the government that governs the destiny of the nation to which we arrive in a dozen days.⁵⁹

Although the Cárdenas administration was vocally supportive of the exile community, its stipulations blurred the boundaries of what constituted permissible and restricted acts of political engagement. Such provisions became even less clear when, almost immediately following their arrival to the country, refugees were granted the right to naturalize as Mexican citizens. As Spaniards navigated life in exile, they were expected to simultaneously assert and shed their political pasts as a gesture of good faith to the Mexican government.

Conclusion

In many ways, the exiles that came to Mexico represented a diverse amalgamation of Spanish society. This diversity, in fact, is what made the selection process all the more difficult for Mexican and Spanish republican aid officials to determine which asylum seekers best represented the varying

⁵⁸ "Instrucciones para los compatriotas llegados en el vapor '*Quanza*'" (November 24, 1939), Archivo Histórico del Ateneo Español de México (hereafter AHAEM), Exilio, Personajes, Caja 12, Expediente 150, 180. Passengers on board the *Mexique* received similar brochures. See "A los pasajeros del vapor '*Mexique*.' Instrucciones a seguir para la mejor organización del desembarco y estancia en Veracruz," (July 27, 1939), AHAEM, Exilio, II República, Caja 25, Expediente 313.

⁵⁹ "Política de responsabilidad," *Ipanema: Diario de a bordo*, June 24, 1939.

qualifiers of a desirable émigré. Most exiles came from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, vastly different regions, and maintained a variety of political ideals that did not fit within a single designation. Despite these heterogeneous attributes, asylum seekers were regularly reduced to their last known affiliation during the Civil War, leaving some of the most vulnerable at risk of further persecution. Although it is unclear how many refugees were purposefully excluded from selection due to their political affiliations, many of those that did obtain asylum maintained the same ideals as those that were not selected. In exile, Spaniards found themselves living among one another, regardless of their political backgrounds, native tongues, or regional identities. And just as they attempted to acculturate to Mexican society, they also had to learn to live, within and through differences, among each other.

CHAPTER SIX

The Prospects & Failures of Rural Refugee Colonies

On August 20, 1939, delegates from over thirty municipalities and seventeen *ejido* communities congregated to discuss the recent arrival of hundreds of Spanish refugees at the Hacienda of La Margarita in Contepec, Michoacán. Two Spanish exiles also attended the meeting as representatives of the refugee community, who had been invited by the state's governor to settle on an expropriated hacienda which would be declared as an *ejido* for their subsistence. For the past decade *agraristas* in Michoacán had been immersed in violent clashes with local landowners and opponents of the government's land reform, leaving thousands of dead and even more unhealed political wounds. The question of permitting hundreds of foreigners to take control of fertile lands was a topic of much interest both locally and throughout the country. Juan Correa, the general secretary of Contepec's Liga de Comunidades Agrarias (League of Agrarian Communities), notified the community representatives that Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas and Michoacán governor Gildardo Magaña asked for their blessing to permit the refugees to colonize the lands as part of the ongoing agrarian reform. After the campesinos stated their support for the initiative, the two representatives from the refugee colony voiced their appreciation of the gesture of goodwill by the campesinos and announced their loyalty to them and the workers of Michoacán. The *agraristas* responded with enthusiasm and applause, welcoming their "brothers in struggle" to the community.¹

Despite the jubilation of the *ejidatarios* of Michoacán and the Spanish exiles, the Hacienda of La Margarita would be abandoned just three months later. From 1939 to 1945, refugee colonies established throughout the Mexican countryside experienced similar fates, leading thousands of exiles to migrate to urban centers. Despite ongoing efforts by the Cárdenas administration and the exiled Spanish Republican government, the incorporation of Spanish refugees into rural Mexican

¹ Ejidatarios of Michoacán to Lázaro Cárdenas (August 20, 1939), AGN-LCR, Expediente 546.6/212-12.

enclaves had been a disaster. What caused these efforts to fail? Some scholars have noted that the refugees' urban proclivities, skillsets, and poor rural living conditions all contributed to the abandonment of the colonies.² Others suggest that aid relief committees' inefficient selection process and management of the colonies also contributed to their disbandment.³ Such explanations, however, omit the aspirations of the refugees—many of whom were campesinos and industrial workers—who sought to support the reforms of the Cárdenas government while reestablishing a life much like the ones they had had in Spain. Another commonly cited motive for the refugees' mass migration to cities was local opposition to the exiles' integration into rural communities.⁴ While it is clear that certain Mexican communities maintained a deep distrust toward the government's refugee initiative, archival records and refugee testimonies do not suggest that this was the root cause for exiles' urban migration.

By focusing on community petitions and the oral testimonies of refugees living in the Mexican countryside, this chapter provides an alternative reading of popular responses and refugee experiences in the state-established colonies. These sources demonstrate that many rural Mexican communities not only petitioned to have Spanish exiles join their villages, but also proposed to incorporate them as members of their *ejidos*, community-held lands distributed as part of the agrarian reform.⁵ Mexican campesinos' active efforts to integrate foreign political exiles provide insights into the nature of campesino popular consciousness and how rural Mexicans viewed the global conflicts occurring outside their villages. What is more, that Spanish refugees persistently sought to overcome aid officials' mismanagement of the colonies similarly signifies their efforts to immerse themselves

² Pla Brugat, *Els exiliats catalans*, 217-218.

³ Velázquez Hernández, *Empresas y finanzas del exilio*; Maricruz Zambrana Jirash, "Exiliados españoles en el campo mexicano. El caso de la empresa colonizadora 'Santa Clara,'" (master's thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2017).

⁴ Fagen, *Exiles and Citizens*, 53-54.

⁵ Emilio Kourí, "On the Ejido," *Humanities* 1, no. 2 (2020): 222-226.

into rural life. Both efforts speak to the concurrence of radical reinterpretations of the revolutionary reforms emanating both vertically from the state to communities as well as the aspirations of citizens and exiles as agents of social change.

I argue that the failures of these colonization efforts were not only the consequence of the Spanish republican officials' grave mismanagement of the colonies, but also of the broader disjuncture between Mexican state modernization proposals and the on-the-ground realities of exiles and citizens. While federal and state representatives mediated the procurement of rural properties for the Spanish republican government's aid apparatus, the CTARE, both states failed to fully appreciate the social, political, and ecological conditions that affected the lands allocated to the refugees and the communities they inhabited. The disorder of the colonization initiative was further complicated by both countries' shifting definitions of what constituted the behavior of a "desirable" political exile. Whereas "undesirables" had been largely defined as those refugees that strove for a radical reorientation of society through revolution, the outbreak of World War II and the subsequent Cold War expanded these definitions to include all of those that opposed liberal capitalism. As a result, communist refugees also came under state scrutiny as the dissolution of the Communist International led to radical reinterpretations of party politics during the 1940s. The experiences of Spanish exiles in the Mexican countryside provide new insights into the growing tensions between the desires of citizens and exiles within a rapidly changing and increasingly authoritarian society.



Figure 15: (Left) Caption: “Mexicans and Spaniards: All Workers” (1939). (Right) A Mexican campesino playing guitar for children of the Spanish refugees at Rancho “El Paraíso” in Estado de México (1939)⁶

Rural Support for Spanish Refugee Colonization

Throughout 1939 and 1940, the CTARE received dozens of requests from agricultural labor unions, peasant organizations, and villages to relocate Spanish refugees to their communities. The petitions mostly came from local agrarian leagues or from specific *ejidos*. Devoid of the racial rhetoric invoked by *cardenista* officials, campesino petitions emphasized the establishment of new social and economic relationships with political exiles to encourage mutual aid. The *ejido*, as Raymond B. Craib argues, not only represented the state’s efforts to reconcile popular demands for land redistribution through an institutional apparatus of the revolutionary state, but also “functioned as the spatial prism through which an entire corpus of revolutionary history (and mythology) was refracted.”⁷ Through skill-sharing and the application of new agricultural methods used by Spanish colonists, rural proponents of the initiative envisioned the exiles within the temporal and spatial framing that the *ejido* represented. The political openings created by Cárdenas’s economic and political reforms

⁶ *Boletín al Servicio de la Emigración Española*, August 31, 1939; *Boletín al Servicio de la Emigración Española*, October 12, 1939.

⁷ Craib, *Cartographic Mexico*, 219.

also allowed campesinos to both reimagine their relationship to the land, but also to foreign immigration. Building upon the internationalist sentiments that flourished throughout the Mexican Revolution, campesinos envisioned the incorporation of Spanish exiles into their villages and onto their lands as a means to support fellow laborers in need, while also securing new lands and resources through their support of the state's colonization initiative. Unlike previous colonization endeavors, which mostly benefited the state and foreign settlers rather than local communities, the Cárdenas government's aspiration to resettle Spanish political refugees in the Mexican countryside required the support of his rural constituencies. Community petitions in support of Spanish colonization therefore developed out of local demands to rectify historical injustices, including instances in which peasants had been displaced from their ancestral lands—often to the benefit of foreign landowners. The initiative also differed significantly from previous forms of colonization as, unlike past efforts, prospective settlers came from similar class and political tendencies as the Mexican campesinos that welcomed them. As a result of these experiences, landless peasants articulated their petitions as gestures of solidarity to victims of displacement.

Immediately following the government's announcement of the Spanish refugee initiative, various sectors of Cárdenas's political base voiced their approval. CTM locals in the states of Coahuila, Yucatán, San Luis Potosí, and Sinaloa wrote dozens of letters to the president, expressing their support for Spanish republicans and, later, the government's refugee relocation efforts.⁸ Campesinos affiliated with agrarian leagues and labor unions also assisted Mexican and Spanish republican officials to locate prospective sites of rural colonization.⁹ For instance, the general

⁸ AGN-LCR, Caja 907, Expediente 546.6/200, 362-263, 370, 286.

⁹ Leaders of the Confederación Nacional Campesina and other national campesino organizations wrote to President Cárdenas to voice their support for the colonization initiative. See: AGN-LCR, Caja 907, Expediente 546.6/200, 359-360, 587. Local communities also sent proposals on prospective lands and ejidos that could receive the refugees. See: Manuel Bello Méndez to Lázaro Cárdenas (August 16, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 908, Expediente 546.6/212-12, 145; Francisco Trejo to Delegado Agrario, Jalapa Enriquez, Veracruz (July 1, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 210,

secretary of the Liga de Comunidades Agrarias y Sindicatos Campesinos (Regional Committee of the League of Agrarian Communities and Campesino Unions, LCASU) in Cosamalopan, Veracruz, notified President Cárdenas of 20,000 hectares of state expropriated lands located nearby that could be allocated to exiled campesinos.¹⁰ Similarly, Wenceslao Torres, the president of the Comisariado Ejidal “Emiliano Zapata” in Amatlán de los Reyes, Veracruz, proposed that the government send eighty Spanish families to occupy a cultivable 100-hectare plot of land. While the plot had been designated as an *ejido*, Torres claimed that it had been abandoned by local campesinos for unspecified reasons.¹¹ To substantiate his request, Torres attached an approving letter from local delegates of the Frente Popular Amateco and the Confederación General de Trabajadores (CGT)—an anarcho-sindicalist labor federation that benefited greatly from the support of Spanish anarchist émigrés during its founding in the 1920s.¹² The signatories further requested that the government contribute funds to construct a school for local Mexican campesinos and the children of Spanish refugees.¹³ Torres and his supporters saw their proposal as a reciprocal resolution for the government, the exiles, and the local community. As the inhabitants of Amatlán de los Reyes benefited from the skills and resources brought by the refugees’ incorporation, Spaniards also received a welcomed refuge following years of war and devastation.

The integration of exiled families also reflected a broader sense of openness from rural communities as they sought to accommodate newcomers and to express an awareness of how such

Expediente 6442; Castilo Villaseñor to Francisco Trejo (July 20, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 211, Expediente 6444.

¹⁰ Telesforo Contreras to Lázaro Cárdenas (July 27, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 908, Expediente 546.6/212-12, 159.

¹¹ Wenceslao Torres to Lázaro Cárdenas (August 8, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 908, Expediente 546.6/212-12.

¹² For more on Spanish anarchist participation in the CGT, see: Valadés, *Memorias de un joven rebelde*, 177; Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class*, 159-165.

¹³ Julio Ramírez and Juan Morales to Lázaro Cárdenas (August 2, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 908, Expediente 546.6/212-12.

mass migratory initiatives affected the livelihood of their members. For instance, the Comité Regional Campesino of Comalteco in the Municipality of Espinal, Veracruz, notified authorities from the CNC of a plot of federally owned land located near local Totonac ruins. The committee estimated the land could accommodate nearly 300 Spanish refugee families “without having to displace any campesinos and with assured success due to the good quality of the lands.”¹⁴ Local communities’ attention to the existing land tenure patterns as well as the potential prosperity of the incoming refugees highlighted their cautious efforts to accommodate the needs of the receiving population and the new arrivals.

Many studies of Mexico’s revolutionary agrarian reform have emphasized state officials’ persistent efforts to redirect and subvert popular demands through state-controlled channels, officials, and supporters.¹⁵ Recently scholars such as Mónica Salas Landa have compelled us to assess the ways in which agrarian reform initiatives transformed the material and social landscapes of such communities, with a particular emphasis on how rural communities navigated legal and political efforts to co-opt calls for restitution.¹⁶ The land reform initiated by the Cárdenas administration not only enacted the largest redistribution of land of the revolutionary era, it also led to a surge in land grant requests by landless campesinos. Within this political opening, many peasants envisioned the apparatus of the state as a useful instrument for social and structural change. At the same time, campesinos and their state representatives proposed the incorporation of Spanish refugees not only

¹⁴ Andres Landa y Piña to the CTARE (September 6, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 211, Expediente 6443; Walter Krickeberg, *Los Totonaca: Contribución a la etnografía histórica de la América Central* (México, D.F.: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1933), 30.

¹⁵ Romana Falcón, *El agrarismo en Veracruz: La etapa radical, 1928-1935* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1977); Fowler Salamini, *Agrarian Radicalism in Veracruz*; Salvador Salinas, “The National Agrarian Party and the Quest for Power: Morelos in the 1920s,” in *Mexico in Transition: New Perspectives on Mexican Agrarian History, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, eds. Antonio Escobar Ohmstede and Matthew Butler (México, D.F.: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 2013), 357-384.

¹⁶ Mónica Salas Landa, “Enacting Agrarian Law: The Effects of Legal Failure in Post-Revolutionary Mexico,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 47, no. 4 (2015): 685-715.

into their country, but also into their *ejidos* and local communities. These petitions bear even more significance considering the ongoing clashes between rural dwellers and foreign landowners, of whom Spaniards made up a sizeable majority. By addressing social ills that plagued the community through both the Spanish refugee initiative and the government's promises for education reform, such petitions demonstrated rural communities' efforts to utilize state channels to advance their own material and political needs.

This was especially the case for community petitions from the state of Michoacán. Throughout the state, town, municipal, and gubernatorial representatives actively pursued the integration of the exiles to develop new economic ventures, particularly among Indigenous communities located on the state's Pacific Coast and in its mountainous regions. Prior to the arrival of the 998 exiles onboard the *Ipanema*, state and municipal authorities coordinated with federal immigration officials to bring exiled campesinos and their families with experience in maritime fishing and other skills suitable to the terrain and ecological conditions of specific localities. Along the coast, the families were to assist in teaching new fishing techniques among Nahua communities, while others would immerse themselves into the pueblos to teach local farmers how to produce cider. In the state's sierras, Michoacán officials requested that exiles share their techniques in meat curing and sheep herding. In the municipalities of Uruapan and Morelia, Spaniards were to assist in the establishment, administration, and production of industrial vineyards.¹⁷ Shortly after the request, the head of the Departamento de Migración Andres Landa y Piña, notified Michoacán state representative Vicente Zaragoza that seven men and one woman that specialized in olive and grape cultivation were destined for Morelia.

Initial efforts to relocate exiles to specific communities in the state of Michoacán also served

¹⁷ "Acuerdo del Secretario de Gobernación para la distribución de refugiados en el estado de Michoacán" (June 29, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 211, Expediente 6444.

to ameliorate relations between state government and Indigenous communities that had unsuccessfully petitioned for land restitutions and other agrarian reform measures in the past. Two communities that requested to host Spanish refugees were the Purépecha villages of Comachuén and Pichátaro. Located approximately 21 kilometers apart in the *meseta purépecha* of central Michoacán, villagers of the two communities remained largely isolated and maintained their populations through kinship networks with neighboring townships. Economically, residents sustained themselves through subsistence farming and the local trade of artisanal goods.¹⁸ Although community members from these pueblos had persistently requested lands to establish *ejidos* throughout the duration of the Revolution, the agrarian commission often denied their petitions, citing a lack of written evidence that the lands were owned by their ancestors.¹⁹ By proposing to integrate Spanish refugees into their communities, the people of Comachuén and Pichátaro utilized the government's exile colonization initiative to procure the rights to their ancestral lands. Their gesture corresponded with the aspirations of the state's native son, Lázaro Cárdenas, who persistently sought to incorporate Indigenous communities into broader public projects during his governorship during the 1920s and 1930s. Throughout his tenures as state governor (1928-1932) and presidency (1934-1940), Cárdenas initiated various initiatives and programs to weave Indigenous communities living in the *meseta purépecha* into the social, cultural, and political fabric of the Mexican nation.²⁰ To eradicate social inequities among the country's native populations, Cárdenas utilized the federal government's secular education drives and land reform initiatives to galvanize rural support.

¹⁸ Eric R. Wolf, "Level of Communal Relations," in *The Handbook of Middle American Indians, Volume Six: Social Anthropology*, ed. Manning Nash (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), 308-309; Lucía García López, *Nahuatzen: Agricultura y comercio en una comunidad serrana* (Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1984), 73-74.

¹⁹ Eitan Ginzberg, *Lázaro Cárdenas: Gobernador de Michoacán, 1928-1932* (Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1999), 204; García López, *Nahuatzen*, 35.

²⁰ Letter from Landa y Piña to Francisco Trejo (June 29, 1939), BNAH-CTARE-GC, Caja 211, Expediente 6444.

Yet the tenuous balance to secure community support and to maintain political order in Michoacán proved insurmountable for the ideals of Cárdenas alone. It also needed to be sustained by the support of communities that were sympathetic to the government's reforms, especially in states such as Michoacán, which experienced prolonged periods of civil upheaval during the Mexican Revolution. Throughout the two phases of the Cristero War, or *Cristidada* (1926-1929, 1934-1936), thousands of *michoacanos* took up arms against the revolutionary government's anticlerical reforms, socialist education initiatives, and land distribution policies. Their antagonists not only included Federal troops sent to repress their rebellion, but rural teachers and local *agraristas* who embodied what was believed to be the de-Christianization of Mexican society. The conflicts left over 100,000 dead and triggered a mass exodus of hundreds of thousands to seek refuge in the United States.²¹ Even after the subsequent suppression of Cristero rebellions, anti-state dissent still lingered in the Michoacán countryside, as indicated by the popularity of the Sinarquista throughout the 1930s and 1940s. For some sectors of the Michoacán peasantry, the relocation of thousands of left-wing political refugees represented the Cárdenas regime's forceful hand, seeking to repopulate the countryside after the mass displacement of local religious exiles. While certain sectors of the state's rural population exhibited such hostilities toward *cardenista* reforms, the proposals made by the *ayuntamientos* (village councils) of Comachuén and Pichátaro represented a comprehensive initiative to advance new cultivation efforts and technological innovations in an isolated part of the state where few inhabitants spoke Spanish. The previous efforts of radical political organizers in the region may have helped maintain semblances of mutual aid and international solidarity among

²¹ For more on the Cristero War in Michoacán, see: David C. Bailey, *¡Viva Cristo Rey!: The Cristero Rebellion and Church-State Conflict in Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974); Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire*; Jennie Purnell, *Popular Movements and State Formation in Revolutionary Mexico: The Agraristas and Cristeros of Michoacán* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Butler, *Popular Piety and Political Identity in Mexico's Cristero Rebellion*; Julia A. Young, *Mexican Exodus: Emigrants, Exiles, and Refugees of the Cristero War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

locals.²² In their petitions through Mexican state intermediaries for the CTARE, municipal and town representatives specifically noted that the Spaniards were practitioners of these crafts rather than simply overseers.²³ The stipulation both affirmed their attitudes toward the foreign refugees while also emphasizing that their productivity as laborers were expected as conditions to their residency. The primary issue for such communities was not the incorporation of political asylum seekers in and of itself, but that their presence did not reproduce the racial and class inequalities that so often defined the relationships between Mexicans and foreigners.

Rejection of Community Integration Initiatives

Yet even in localities that supported the government's efforts to incorporate refugees into existing rural communities, most requests by Mexican campesinos to shelter the exiles were either lost to the bureaucratic process or rejected outright by CTARE officials. The committee's inaction reflected a broader discrepancy between the vision of the Mexican state and the exiled Spanish republican government regarding the purpose of such colonization endeavors. Whereas citizens and

²² The Purépecha anarchist Primo Tapia of Naranja, Michoacán became active in internationalist revolutionary movements as a member of the Partido Liberal Mexicano in Los Angeles, California. His connections to the exiled Mexican anarchist movement led him and other Purépecha immigrants to the U.S. Midwest where they organized a multiracial branch of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in Bayard, Nebraska. In 1920, Tapia returned to his native pueblo where he used his connections to local communities to mobilize some of the first *agrarista* insurgencies, agrarian collectives, and labor unions in the region. Although Tapia's efforts to mobilize a radical redistribution of lands countered the influence of Naranja's devout Catholic community leaders, his ongoing efforts to build trust through kinship ties and respect for traditional religious practices galvanized support from neighboring villagers. See: A. Martínez-Múgica, *Primo Tapia, semblanza de un revolucionario michoacano* (Morelia: Gobierno del Estado de Michoacán, 1946); Paul Friedrich, *Agrarian Revolution in a Mexican Village* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970); Arnulfo Embriz Osorio, "Primo Tapia: Cien años de su nacimiento," in *La revolución en Michoacán*, ed. Coordinación de la Investigación Científica, Departamento de Historia (Morelia: Universidad Michoacana, 1987), 119-134; Alicia Castellanos Guerrero and Gilberto López y Rivas, *Primo Tapia de la Cruz, un hijo del pueblo* (México, D.F.: Centro de Estudios Históricos del Agrarismo en México, 1991); Weber, "Wobblies of the Partido Liberal Mexicano," 205-206.

²³ Ibid.

refugees alike were told that the colonization endeavors would assist with the Spaniards' acculturation into Mexican society, the government shifted away such plans by the summer of 1939 and instead proposed the settlement of exiles on plots of land outside the boundaries of existing rural communities.²⁴ The reasons for this abrupt change are multifaceted. In part, the decision reflected the shortcomings of the colonization initiative itself. With thousands of exiles disembarking from vessels every few weeks, the sheer scale of relocating exiles to specific communities proved too difficult a task for state and relief officials. Moreover, the pervasive violence in the Mexican countryside also posed concerns about the physical safety of the exiles themselves. With communities receiving little to no explanation of these outlying factors, many actively sought to take the matter into their own hands, deliberating directly with refugee aid officials and the Mexican state.

Such was the case for the campesinos of Tetela, Oaxaca, who on June 22, 1939, requested that the CTARE relocate to their village two dozen Spanish families disembarking from the *Sinaia*. The proposal came at a moment of crisis for the community. Like in other parts of the country, the *ejidatarios* of Tetela experienced fierce reprisals from other nearby communities as a consequence of their support for the government's agrarian reform. Only 60 of the original 125 beneficiaries of the *ejido* remained, the others lost to assassinations or driven away out of fear of meeting a similar fate. The community hoped that Spanish campesinos would help till the lands, establish schools, and construct new facilities for the town. Specifically, the petition requested that a schoolteacher with a specialization in engineering, four bricklayers, and twenty campesinos—all with their families—as well as five to six single campesino men to be sent to the village.²⁵ When the *ejidatarios'* requests went unanswered, a group of campesinos travelled to Veracruz to proposition Francisco Trejo in person.

²⁴ Velázquez Hernández, *Empresas y finanzas del exilio*, 102.

²⁵ "Asunto: Relativo acomodo refugiados españoles" (October 17, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 211, Expediente 6443.

To address the campesinos' request, Trejo sent a CTARE delegation of engineers and eight refugees to assess the prospects of permanently integrating seventy exiles into the *ejido*. He also requested that the Secretaría de Gobernación approve the refugees' naturalization as Mexican citizens to ensure their eligibility to receive the *dotaciones*, *ejido* land grants.²⁶

On August 16th the Tetela *ejido* commenced a community assembly with the exiles, CTARE representatives, and Ejidal Bank engineers to discuss the prospective incorporation of twenty Spanish refugee families into the pueblo. The day before, the engineers from the Ejidal Bank sent word to their superiors that they approved the relocation effort, noting an abundance of vegetable and citrus crops that could be cultivated by the exiles and the *ejidatarios*.²⁷ The agreement only awaited the approval from the *ejidatarios* themselves. One of the *ejido* members who travelled to Veracruz, Evaristo García, expressed to the assembly that the community was obligated to welcome the refugees, not just for their own benefit, but to serve as a model of comradery to other communities. García further stated that refugees would be treated as "brothers" and important contributors to the community's wellbeing. Another campesino from a neighboring *ejido* supported García's statement, telling the assembly that they should feel proud to receive the exiles, to learn from their skills, and to contribute to President's Cárdenas's initiative. The community's own experiences of being displaced from their lands during the dictatorship of Victoriano Huerta informed their willingness to support the refugees. As people that had also "tasted the bitter bread of exile," the *ejidatarios*' solidarity towards the Spaniards served as an act of reciprocity and mutual aid rather than charity. The Spanish refugees that accompanied the expedition expressed their

²⁶ "Selección de cabezas de familia dispuestos a salir para el ejido de Tetela, Oaxaca" (August 9, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 210, Expediente 6442; Francisco Trejo to the Delegates of the Comisariado Ejidal de Tetela (August 10, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 210, Expediente 6442.

²⁷ Banco Nacional de Credito Ejidal to Delegate of the Secretaría de Gobernación, Tetela, Oaxaca, "Asunto: Manifestando haber autorizado a los C.C. Ings. Raúl F. Urrutia y Alfonso G. Pérez para que concurran a la junta que se colobrá en ese lugar" (August 15, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 210, Expediente 6442.

heartfelt gratitude to the assembly and told the crowd that they felt at ease bringing their families to live among them. One community member responded to the men, “Here is our home and you are welcomed to it.” After two hours of discussion, the meeting adjourned after reaching a consensus in support of the initiative.²⁸



Figure 16: Spanish exile women in Mexico.²⁹

Despite the *ejidatarios*' efforts, the refugees never arrived. On September 25th, over a month after the committee's expedition, Fructuoso Lara Romero, the president of the Comité Ejidal de Tetetla, Oaxaca, wrote directly to President Cárdenas, pleading for his intervention in the matter. After providing Cárdenas the details of the request, Romero stressed the sincerity of their effort: “To date, Mr. General, we have not received either confirmation or rejection of our solicitation,” Romeo explained. “We are concerned about the arrival of these people to our land because we hope to cultivate the entire *ejido*. By doing so, we believe that we will have contributed greatly to our obligations as well as serve as an example for your humanitarian sentiments.”³⁰ Nearly four months

²⁸ Ing. J.J. Islas León to C. Ing. Carlos Islas Hernández (16 August 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 210, Expediente 6442.

²⁹ “Celebran 75 años de la llegada de exiliados españoles a Chihuahua,” *La Opción de Chihuahua* (Chihuahua), September 21, 2014.

³⁰ Fructuoso Lara Romero to Lázaro Cárdenas (September 25, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 211, Expediente 6443.

after the initial request and two months after the arrival of the *Ipanema*, the head of the Departamento de Migración, Andrés Landa y Piña, asked the CTARE to respond to Romero.³¹ Unbeknownst to all, the committee had decided to send the families to a recently established colony for exiles located in the state of Chihuahua without notifying any of the concerned parties of their decision.³² Following the purchase of the Santa Clara hacienda in Namiquipa, Chihuahua, the Mexican government and CTARE officials determined that it would be better to relocate Spaniards into as few localities as possible rather than distribute them throughout the country. As a result, many *ejidatarios* were left disappointed.

The committee's decision to reject community petitions reflected a complete reversal of the government's initial plans to integrate Spanish refugees into Mexican communities. The resolution disregarded the considerable support emanating from Mexico's laboring classes, who were more than willing to accommodate the Spaniards. Rather than addressing the issue directly, the CTARE responded to subsequent proposals with outright rejections or left the requests unanswered altogether.³³ The committee discounted local, state, and federal support for refugee integration into existing rural communities, as it acquired large sectors of rural, unpopulated land in Chihuahua. Although Mexican campesinos' petitions were ignored, they indicate dramatic transformations in the social and political conditions of pueblos during the Cárdenas government. Moreover, such proposals envisioned the refugee initiative as a means to embolden Mexico's revolutionary agrarian

³¹ Andres Landa y Piña to the Comité Técnico de Ayuda a los Españoles (October 17, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 211, Expediente 6443.

³² G. Anadón to Andrés Landa y Piña (November 21, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 211, Expediente 6443.

³³ In one instance, the CTARE's president José Puche responded to the peasant regional committee of Comalteco, Veracruz to deny their request to shelter 300 peasant families, approximately 1,200 individuals, stating that the refugees were to be relocated to an agrarian colony in Santa Clara, Chihuahua. Despite Puche's claim, only 500 individuals total were relocated to the settlement. See: Andres Landa y Piña to the Comité Técnico de Ayuda a los Republicanos Españoles (September 6, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 211, Expediente 6443; José Puché to Secretario de Gobernación (September 18, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 211, Expediente 6443.

reforms and dramatically alter the social fabric of their rural enclaves. Far from the closed corporate communities that anthropologist Eric Wolf describes, Mexican campesinos responded to conditions beyond the boundaries of their villages and *ejidos* to envision the benefits of welcoming foreigners—Spaniards, no less—who were similarly persecuted for reimagining their relationship to the soil they had tilled for generations.³⁴

The Prospects of Colonization in Michoacán

In the state of Michoacán, the continuing reverberations of the *Cristiada* led Mexican state officials to avoid any colonization initiatives that threatened to may reignite political conflicts. As a result, state officials curtailed the arrival of political dissidents characterized as undesirables—namely anarchists. Following the arrival of 2,200 refugees onboard the *Mexique* on July 27, 1939, Michoacán governor Gildardo Magaña’s representative notified Interior Secretary Francisco Trejo of the state government’s concerns over incorporating anarchist refugees into the same agricultural colonies as other refugees with different ideological affiliations. Upon receiving word those contingents of exiles destined for Michoacán had not been divided by political or union affiliation, Magaña’s representative voiced their concerns to the head of the Departamento de Migración, Andres Landa y Piña: “Our goal is to ensure that elements of established (political) affinities and specific job occupations form integral groups that can colonize without the difficulties that often arise among apathetic colonist groups.” He argued that dividing refugees according to their ideologies reflected the “truly revolutionary interest” of avoiding any tensions that might arise between these exiled

³⁴ Eric R. Wolf, “Closed Corporate Communities in Mesoamerica and Java,” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 13, no. 1 (1957): 1-18; For Wolf’s later reassessment of his earlier research on closed corporate communities, see: Eric R. Wolf, “The Vicissitudes of the Closed Corporate Peasant Community,” *American Ethnologist* 13, no. 2 (1986): 325-329.

radicals and locals.³⁵ This policy replicated the existing practice among Mexican and Spanish aid officials to contain radical elements within the refugee population and to promote the émigrés as racially and economically productive assets to Mexican society. For officials such as Magaña and Landa y Piña, Spain's radical movements inhibited economic progress and the political status quo. As will be discussed in greater detail below, the presence of anarchists did not debilitate the development of long-term agricultural colonies. The mismanagement and poor coordinating skills of Spanish relief officials did that.

To implement large-scale colonization ventures, aid officials reached out to state governors that offered to mediate the establishment of rural exile colonies. This plan, however, remained unknown to most Mexican citizens, who continued to petition the CTARE throughout the latter half of 1939. For state governors that volunteered lands to incoming refugees, the benefits of the relocation efforts were twofold. First, it affirmed state representatives' alliance to the Cárdenas government and its expanding state institutions. Second, with the exiled Spanish republican government taking responsibility for the expenses, the relocation program promised new economic revenue streams through the incorporation of literate, skilled European émigrés who would live on uncultivated rural properties. As a result, the endeavor counteracted earlier claims that the initiative took away funds and jobs from Mexican citizens. Through the Spanish republican government's financial subsidiary, the FIASA, the CTARE purchased lands from state governments. To recuperate its investment, the CTARE then expected exiles to establish "collective societies" (*sociedades colectivas*) funded through FIASA loans allocated to individual refugees. All profits made by these loans were then to be invested in agricultural works at CTARE-owned properties. Much like Cárdenas government's efforts to use the refugee community as the basis of the establishment of

³⁵ Letter from N. Molina Enríquez to Francisco Trejo (July 31, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 210, Expediente 6442.

colonias agrícolas (agricultural colonies), the collective societies' purposes were multifaceted.³⁶ First and foremost, the establishments and their inhabitants would vitalize local economies through trade with businesses and industries in the region. The Ejidal Bank and the FIASA would fund the colonies through loans to exiles, depending on the citizenship status of the exiles, who were to repay their debts through capital secured by selling their harvests to federal, state, or private markets.³⁷ Profits gained from the endeavors would then refill the exhausted coffers of the exiled Spanish republican government. How the refugees intended to respond to an initiative so starkly different from the one initially proposed remained to be seen.

With the CTARE's shift away from integrating Spaniards into existing rural communities, the committee's Michoacán delegation proposed a series of initiatives to fund the colonization endeavor in Contepec described at the beginning of this chapter. To incentivize the property's economic development, CTARE agents suggested that the hacienda land be privatized into small parcels funded through loans granted by the Spanish republican government's loaning institution, the Financiera Industrial-Agrícola, S.A. (Industrial-Agricultural Financial Anonymous Society, FIASA). Through the FIASA, exiled campesinos would be eligible for two different types of loans. The first provided credits to purchase seeds, as well as wages and subsistence funds for the incoming Spanish *ejidatarios*, which would then be repaid after the borrower's first harvest. The second established credit lines for campesinos to purchase machinery, tools, and goods which would then be paid back in annual installments over five years. The payments were also to be extracted from the value of successful harvests. Modeled directly after that of the Banco Nacional de Crédito Ejidal, the

³⁶ Unlike other financial societies, such as a *sociedad anonima* or a *sociedad de responsabilidad limitada*, all partners within a *sociedad colectiva* have the right to participate and determine the administration of the business. In theory, this would permit exiles to have as much power in the day-to-day decisions of the colony as a financial venture as that of the Spanish republican government and the CTARE.

³⁷ "Informe: Unión del Técnico Español al Capital ya radicado en México" (July 7, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 196, Expediente 6345.

loan system was meant to address the daily needs of exiles and to ensure the financial productivity of the lands.³⁸ With many settlers heartened and encouraged by the land expropriations initiated during the Spanish and Mexican Revolutions, efforts to integrate the colonies into the commercial economy posed new conundrums for the exiled campesinos and the ways they imagined themselves integrating into Mexican society.

Hacienda La Margarita

On July 18, 1939, Benito C. Gómez of the Campamento “El Tambor” notified President Cárdenas of a housing barracks that could accommodate 200 refugees located near the Tepuxtepec dam and reservoir in northeastern Michoacán. Gómez further proposed that the exiles’ incorporation could be mutually beneficial to the surrounding *ejido* communities, which lacked enough campesinos to cultivate recently expropriated haciendas allocated to them by the agrarian commission.³⁹ These haciendas included La Margarita, a 850-hectare property located in the nearby municipality of Contepec. Cárdenas’s personal secretary notified Gómez that the President agreed to direct the request to the CTARE.⁴⁰ La Margarita was to be designated as an *ejido* for the refugees with the CTARE in charge of its oversight. With Contepec’s proximity to the Tepetongo railroad station, authorities could easily relocate incoming exiles, which would also avoid the additional costs of relocating exiles throughout the state. Unbeknownst to state officials and the refugees, Spanish republican government funds had been exhausted due to the amount of aid and loans granted to refugees during their first few months in Mexico.⁴¹ The ongoing issue of funding both the colony’s

³⁸ “Financiera Industrial-Agrícola, S.A. (FIASA): Instrucciones sobre los préstamos que se conceden” (August 29, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 196, Expediente 6344.

³⁹ Benito C. Gómez to Lázaro Cárdenas (July 18, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 908, Expediente 546.6/212-12.

⁴⁰ Juan Gallaro Moreno to Benito C. Gómez (July 20, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 908, Expediente 546.6/212-12.

⁴¹ Velázquez Hernández, *Empresas y finanzas del exilio*, 40.

establishment and to provide settlers with efficient means to sustain themselves became a point of contention for the CTARE and the exiled campesinos.

Tensions between colonists and aid officials arose soon after the arrival of the first refugees in Michoacán. On July 31, 1939, Zaragoza native and anarchist Francisco Sanz Casabona wrote to the CTARE's president José Puche on behalf of twenty-two exiled Aragonese campesinos to express their outrage over how poorly aid officials had treated them since their arrival in the state. Sanz claimed that the CTARE's state coordinating agent, Pablo Antonio Gayol, abandoned the group shortly after their arrival, giving each exile only four pesos to sustain themselves as they awaited the arrival of an additional 140 exiles travelling from Veracruz. While they waited, the state government provided the group with housing accommodations in a vocational school located outside of Morelia while others were sent to small fincas.⁴² With their needs neglected, the refugees refused to attend a welcome celebration organized by employees of the state government due to their "shameful" clothing. After spending years fighting in Spain "with arms in our hands," Sanz pointed out, "we know how to defend what belongs equally to each and every one of us."⁴³ The very next morning, 140 exiled campesinos and their family members were stranded at the train station after Gayol forgot to organize their relocation, leaving the governor of the state to organize a reception for them instead. Gayol chalked the incident up to an "involuntary mistake" exacerbated by Sanz, whom he accused of using "threats or demagoguery" to rally the other campesinos against him.⁴⁴ As a consequence of Gayol's persistent negligence, Governor Magaña requested that no additional refugees be sent to Morelia until he returned from work-related travels.⁴⁵

⁴² "Asunto: Situación de los refugiados en el estado de Michoacán" (July 7, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 196, Expediente 6345.

⁴³ Francisco Sanz Casabona to José Puche (July 31, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 196, Expediente 6345.

⁴⁴ Telegram from Velo to Gayol (August 1, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 196, Expediente 6345.

⁴⁵ "Solución de la cuestión de los campesinos en el estado de Michoacán" (August 22, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 196, Expediente 6345.

With little faith in the CTARE representative, the group of Aragonese campesinos refused to relocate to La Margarita. Gayol notified his superiors of the group's insubordination and let them know that the Aragonese campesinos instead wanted a loan to purchase a finca located near Morelia. If denied the loan, the group asked to be relocated to different settlements. Considering that the CTARE initially wanted to integrate the refugees into existing villages, none of the proposals seemed unreasonable. Rather, they seemingly affirmed the initial relocation plans proposed to the exiles during the selection process conducted by the SERE in France. Gayol alleged that the group of anarchists' refusals to relocate to La Margarita was in protest to the CTARE's favoritism toward communist refugees and other supporters of the exiled prime minister Juan Negrín. It should be noted that although it is quite plausible that sectarian schisms informed the group's protest, none of the Aragón group's petitions to Puche referenced any political disputes with other prospective colonists. Gayol also omitted that many of the "anarchist" protestors were not, in fact, anarchists at all, but included socialists, republicans, and communists in their ranks.

Without consulting the CTARE steering committee, Gayol ruled that all of the group's requests were out of the question. Gayol cited various reasons against relocating the group, claiming that the presence of exiles in El Rincón would cause tensions with the locals and that there were not enough funds to support settlement for the Spaniards. He also rejected the accusations of preferential treatment toward communists and socialists, noting that the refugee in charge of housing the wives and children of the campesinos was a prominent member of the CNT. He then accused the group of Spanish campesinos of collaborating with local "reactionaries," including the owner of El Rincón, who he accused of leading the local chapter of the Falange Española.⁴⁶ Gayol gave the colonists an ultimatum—either join their compatriots at La Margarita or be forced off CTARE premises within 48 hours. While eleven of the *aragoneses* acquired employment at a local

⁴⁶ Ibid.

sawmill and a neighboring finca, six others chose to join their compatriots to La Margarita, and the remaining five attempted to secure housing and employment on their own.⁴⁷ In a letter to the CTARE, Gayol justified his actions against their “political enemies” and claimed to have the full support of the other colonists.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Gayol could not sway Governor Magaña, who unilaterally approved Sanz and the other campesinos’ request to relocate to the finca El Rincón a week before the CTARE president received Gayol’s report.⁴⁹

Along with the practical components of establishing a settlement at La Margarita, the colony also faced external threats which the CTARE representative sought to mediate. In particular, frequent skirmishes between *agraristas* and opponents of the government’s agrarian reform forced the state government to provide the colony with a detachment of federal troops to monitor the periphery of the settlement. The northeast of Michoacán, where the hacienda was situated, was a hotbed of conflict between *agraristas* and *cristeros* during the 1920s and 1930s and had since become one of the primary sites of recruitment for the burgeoning Sinarquista movement.⁵⁰ Despite these threats, Gayol assured the CTARE that *agraristas* “who look at the Spaniards with great sympathy” surrounded the colony. Further underplaying the threat, he claimed that the head municipal delegate, Juan Correa of the neighboring *ejido* of Contepec, volunteered to be at the disposal of the refugees as they established their crops.⁵¹

Even with the support of state officials and local campesinos, the exiles felt largely

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ “Campesinos refugiados españoles que están autorizado por el Sr. Gobernador de este Estado para administrar la finca de los Hermanos Roch que posen de su propiedad en el termino denominado el “Rincón” (August 15, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 196, Expediente 6345.

⁵⁰ Wolf, “Level of Communal Relations,” 309; Friedrich, *Agrarian Revolution in a Mexican Village*; Jesús Solís Cruz, *Ser ciudadano, ser indio: Luchas políticas y formación del estado en Nurió y Tirándaro, Michoacán* (Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán, 2012).

⁵¹ “Solución de la cuestión de los campesinos en el estado de Michoacán” (August 22, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 196, Expediente 6345.

abandoned by the Spanish republican government's relief committee. Basic food and necessities allocated through the CTARE were provided for, but after weeks of waiting for tools and goods promised by the committee, by late August 1939, the exiles were getting frustrated. The committee ignored their persistent requests for tents that could shelter families together, furthering a sense of isolation among the refugees.⁵² Most distressing, however, was the committee's decision to settle the campesinos in a region still very much in the throes of violent conflict. Local *ejidatarios* warned the refugees that "*cristeros*" had not ceased their violent attacks in the region, as many of them had previously worked on the hacienda granted to the refugees. Rather than be reassured by the presence of federal troops along the outskirts of the property, refugees feared that the proximity of the soldiers only antagonized opponents of the colony. It is unclear if the alleged *cristeros* were in fact local supporters of the *Cristiada* or simply the victims of the country's agrarian reform. In response, CTARE officials continued to claim that there was no immediate danger, as the hacienda was surrounded by sympathetic and supportive *agraristas*.

Just days after arriving, the Spanish exiles at La Margarita called a community meeting on August 21st to address their concerns and to organize a commission that would travel to the CTARE's Mexico City headquarters to appeal to the committee in-person. The meeting began with the group unanimously declaring a vote of no-confidence in Gayol's appointed committee, which they accused of making decisions on behalf of the collective without consultation. A new junta was also elected to represent the refugees among their neighboring *ejidatarios*. Of the five individuals voted to represent the colony, Leonardo Bernardo del Riego, a forty-eight-year-old affiliate of the UGT from Asturias, and Serafín Adell Asensio, a twenty-seven-year-old anarchist from Aragón, received the most votes, and were joined by José Plaza Andreu, Salvador Saludes Saludes, and Juan

⁵² Ibid.

García Ramírez.⁵³ On August 22, 1939, the delegates left for Mexico City to discuss with CTARE President José Puche the colonists' growing safety concerns and to determine what had become of the 7,000 pesos allocated to purchase tools, tractors, and trucks for the colony. The visit from the colonists caught Puche off guard, since he had not been informed of their requests, nor of the conflicts with Gayol.

While Puche promised that the committee would look into assigning a new delegate to the region, he was less clear on how the committee was planning to resolve the threats of violence toward the settlers. Some critics of the refugee initiative claimed that the exiled Spanish combatants served as “shock troops” for the Cárdenas government, thus making the prospective arming of refugees by the Mexican government a particularly contentious proposition. As Puche assured the men that he would try to arrange a shipment of small arms to the colony for defensive purposes, he reiterated that, at the moment, he could only request that the state governor send more federal troops to protect the colony. Along with these pressing issues, the hacienda had yet to receive instructions on how to proceed with actual colonization. Even so, CTARE officials notified the groups that the ground-breaking should be done collectively with three quarters of the cereal crops dedicated to their own consumption and the rest for animal feed. Other basic necessities, including tools, beds, and coats continued to be delayed. The committee allocated the campesinos a daily subsidy of 75 centavos per person throughout the month of September. Before returning to Michoacán, the CTARE gave the men 5,777.74 pesos to distribute among the settlers for their subsistence through the month of September.⁵⁴

To some degree the delays in distribution of goods could have been a result of Gayol's self-aggrandizing reports, which gave no indication of the exiled campesinos' grievances. In fact, the

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

committee never received the request for 7,000 pesos to purchase goods before the arrival of the commission weeks later. Gayol later defended his behavior, stating that all requests should have been sent to the CTARE's loan and finance committee rather than state delegates.⁵⁵ On the other hand, the idea of relocating dozens of newly arrived political exiles to a remote hacienda with no resources also reflects the hasty nature of the refugee relocation initiative as a whole. That even with the support of state authorities and the receiving communities the most basic functions of colonization were not unaccounted for demonstrated the incompetency of relief officials. Even as the Aragón group's criticisms of Gayol seemingly proved to be true, their needs continued to be neglected by CTARE officials.⁵⁶

Weeks after their dispersal from the committee's shelter in Morelia, Francisco Sanz and Marcelo Burguete Pinilla, an exile affiliated with the PSOE, notified President Puche that that the group were homeless, naked, and barefoot. The men asked that Puche notify the governor of Michoacán of their plight, since they had resorted to sheltering in train cars.⁵⁷ Displaced exiles further countered Gayol's claims that the group from Aragón were anti-social undesirables. Two socialist campesinos, Dionisio España Esposito and Gregorio Núñez, objected to Gayol's statements painting them as unappreciative of aid officials' and Mexican authorities' support. Far from being unwilling to work in the fields, the men and others cast aside instead sought to work in order to send money to widowed, orphaned, and imprisoned family members in Francoist Spain.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Gayol was relieved of his duties as the coordinating agent for the CTARE. Although the official reason was to allow him to return to France to aid his ailing wife, his successor actively noted his incompetency as a primary motivation for his dispersal. See: Cuelo to Gayol (August 19, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 196, Expediente 6345.

⁵⁷ Telegram from Francisco Sanz and Marcelo Burguete to José Puche (September 7, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 196, Expediente 6345; "Asilados políticos españoles llegados a bordo del vapor 'Ipanema'," Fundación Pablo Iglesias-Archivo Amaro Rosal Díaz (hereafter FPI-AARD), Caja 271, Expediente 02.

⁵⁸ Dionisio España Esposito and Gregorio Núñez to the CTARE (September 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 196, Expediente 6345.

On September 1, 1939, the colony reconvened to hear from the junta sent to Mexico City as well as to discuss new developments regarding their safety and wellbeing in Contepec. Whereas the CTARE previously suggested that the colony be established as an *ejido*, the loss of many colonists led the committee to propose allocating individual parcels of the property through the FIASA. After hearing the CTARE officials' proposed reorganization of the colony, one exile in attendance instead suggested that officials should send an agronomist to the hacienda to assist in the collective parceling of the land. He also recommended that the CTARE honor its initial proposal to the refugees prior to the arrival—that collectively-held lands and all they produced be the property of all who worked the land.⁵⁹ Colonists once again reminded officials that they urgently needed machinery and tools before the looming October harvest.⁶⁰ The CTARE was ill prepared to meet their needs. Contrasting opinions on how to manage the property and ensure productivity only exacerbated this state of affairs. Little could be done without the support of the relief officials.

By mid-September relations between CTARE officials and the refugees at La Margarita had completely broken down. Perhaps trying to downplay the severity of the problem at hand, the CTARE's agronomist notified Mexico's Interior Secretary that issues at the colony were solely related to climatological concerns. In turn, colonists accused the agronomist and local *agrarista* leader Juan Correa of not notifying President Cárdenas of the mounting security concerns as well as the egregious lack of tools. Once the colonists realized that their requests had been ignored, four refugees travelled to the CTARE's headquarters in Mexico City to protest the worsening conditions in the colony; refusing to return due to concerns for their safety. The men claimed that the lands were not suitable for the types of cultivation they were ordered to produce and that neighboring *ejidatarios* carried arms at all times due to the constant threat of violence from the alleged *cristeros*. The

⁵⁹ "Acta de la 2a reunión celebrada por los colonos españoles en la Hacienda La Margarita" (September 1, 1939), CTARE-BNAH, Caja 196, Expediente 6344.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

men were far from exaggerating: since the refugees' arrival, seven local *ejidatarios* had been assassinated in conflicts with those that opposed the agrarian reform. When one of the delegates from the colony notified FIASA officials of the danger, a representative of the committee threatened to banish the four delegates from the colony for allegedly causing disarray among the settlers. Subsequently, the four refugees were denied any new accommodations by the committee.⁶¹

Shortly after the men's visit, José Puche notified the secretary of the government in Michoacán that the individuals had violated their terms with the Mexican government by abandoning the colony. Puche rejected their claims, favoring instead the opinion of the local *agrarista* leader Juan Correa. Rather than abandoning the colony, Correa recommended that the Mexican government loan the colony 60,000 pesos worth of machinery, paid for by the CTARE.⁶² Puche assured the state secretary that the men did not reflect the views of the other refugees. He then told the four campesinos to either return to La Margarita or to make their way to another hacienda that the CTARE acquired, located hundreds of miles away in Namiquipa, Chihuahua. While one returned to La Margarita, the other three refused both propositions, with two returning to Morelia while another found work in Mexico City at a CTARE-owned factory.⁶³ By October 1, 1939, the lands had not been demarcated, colonists had not begun their harvest, and more *ejidatarios* were attacked by "*cristeros*."⁶⁴

The Abandonment of Hacienda La Margarita

Just three months after the arrival of the refugees, the colony was on the verge of collapse.

⁶¹ "México, D.F., 23 September 1939, 8pm," BNAH-CTARE, Caja 196, Expediente 6344.

⁶² José Puche to José María Mendoza Pardo (September 28, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 196, Expediente 6345.

⁶³ "Informe para el Comité Técnico presentado por la Comisión de la Margarita" (October 1, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 196, Expediente 6345.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Michoacán state officials, distressed by the conflicting reports on the situation in Contepec, sent a land surveyor, Antonio Yáñez, to assess the situation on the ground. In his report back to the CTARE, Yáñez described the bleak consequences of the committee's mismanagement. Half the settlers had abandoned the hacienda, with most moving to Morelia or Mexico City. From Yáñez's interviews, it was clear that most of the refugees fled the colony out of fear of the ongoing threats of violence by opponents of the *agraristas*. Without tools for cultivation, others simply left frustrated by the CTARE's inaction. A related issue, Yáñez noted, were disagreements among the colonists based on ideological convictions. "There exists," Yáñez described, "a certain amount of dissent among [the settlers] regarding the exploitation of the land, as well as ideological dissent."⁶⁵ His report suggested that political affinities contributed to a lack of social cohesion among the exiles. At the same time, their disagreements reflected how the sectarianism of the Spanish Civil War informed the relationship between the exiles and the Spanish Republican government. This was particularly apparent as dozens of settlers rejected the CTARE's subsidies and instead preferred to find work in neighboring *ejido* communities. Yáñez acknowledged as much in his report to the CTARE committee, noting the "perfect coexistence" between the Spanish settlers and the *ejidatarios* of the region.⁶⁶

Colonists also disagreed with the aid committee on how and for whom the lands should be cultivated. Whereas the CTARE envisioned the hacienda's productivity as a means to offset the expenses of relocating the refugees, as well as to invest in efforts to reclaim Spain from Francoist occupation, many of the settlers envisioned the colony as part of the ongoing collectivization process in Mexico. The colonists therefore rejected the loan system proposed by the FIASA, which they felt was a way for the Spanish republican government to monopolize their labor. The refugees'

⁶⁵ "Informe sobre la situación en que se encuentran los españoles refugiados en el estado de Michoacán" (October 2, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 196, Expediente 6345.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

rejections of the Mexican government's and the CTARE's economic visions for the countryside tells us a great deal about the shifting purpose of rural colonization during the 1930s and 1940s. The conflicts that arose from the land seizures and collectivization of properties during the Second Spanish Republic reflected the contestations that emerged from Cárdenas's agrarian reforms.⁶⁷ Recent studies of radically-oriented agrarian movements during and after the Cárdenas administration highlight the tensions between popular demands for land reclamation versus the racial and economic modernization initiatives that informed the state's redistribution efforts.⁶⁸ While the conditions and social dynamics that produced Spain's and Mexico's agrarian questions had inherent differences based on the countries' respective racial compositions, they were similar in the contrast between state economic aspirations for the countryside versus the demands for community self-determination in the allocation and distribution of lands.⁶⁹ The insertion of refugees, many of whom came from regions that experienced the dramatic collectivization of farmlands during the Spanish Revolution, believed and were led to believe by refugee aid officials that Cárdenas's agrarian reform was identical to the radical reorganization of the countryside initiated during the Spanish Revolution. It was within this frame of mind that exiles made their propositions to the CTARE and rejected initiatives that prioritized profits over the needs of the peasantry.

This was apparent when, in late October, CTARE officials decided to abandon the Hacienda La Margarita, notifying colonists that they would be relocated to Chihuahua. When Puche ordered that all monthly subsidies for the refugees be suspended at the end of the month, the 73 remaining refugees in Morelia destined for La Margarita vehemently opposed their relocation to the abandoned

⁶⁷ For more on agrarian conflicts in Spain before and during the Civil War, see: Simpson and Carmona, *Why Democracy Failed*.

⁶⁸ Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata*; McCormick, *The Logic of Compromise in Mexico*; Paula López Caballero and Ariadna Acevedo-Rodrigo, eds. *Beyond Alterity: Destabilizing the Indigenous Other in Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018).

⁶⁹ Simpson and Carmona, *Why Democracy Failed*, 209.

hacienda.⁷⁰ Wishing to uphold their commitments to the state government and to the Cárdenas administration, they wrote to José Puche to request that they be moved onto local fincas to assist local *ejidatarios* develop crops the colonists had produced in Spain. “Regardless of what the committee thinks [of us], we are all farmers who desire to work on finca projects for the benefit of this state. After two months of studying and subjecting our findings [of prospective fincas] to this organization, we have been denied approval.”⁷¹ The signatories stipulated that they did not oppose moving to Chihuahua, but they rejected the unreasonable demands to produce industrial-level agricultural products. They further requested that families, not individuals, be allowed to remain so they could form agrarian collectives with Mexican campesinos. The settlers voiced their exasperation to Puche:

We have been fooled many times, and sadly, even in exile, we continue to be fooled. The committee must take into account that we are more than farmers, we are a business. And we do not need managers, overseers, or administrators. Simply put, such monotonous drones devour our labor! We want land and the means for its exploitation, which is why we have been granted them [in the first place].⁷²

In stark contrast to the grandiose visions of both the Mexican and exiled republican governments, the colonists preferred immersion within local agrarian communities rather than formulating satellites for industrial agriculture production.

By November, most of the remaining refugees at La Margarita had been relocated to Chihuahua to assist in the cultivation of the CTARE’s largest land acquisition, the Santa Clara

⁷⁰ Jose Puche to Anadón (October 24, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 196, Expediente 6345. The Aragonese group continued to face push back from the CTARE for their abandonment of the colony at this time as well. Requests by Sanz for beds continued to unanswered, ultimately leading the Cárdenas administration to intervene and secure the materials requested by the campesinos. See: Telegram from Francisco Sanz to José Puche (October 6, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 196, Expediente 6345; Juan Gallardo Moreno to Francisco Sanz (October 9, 1939), AGN-LCR, Caja 908, Expediente 546.6/212-15.

⁷¹ Spanish refugees in Morelia to José Puche (October 26, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 196, Expediente 6345.

⁷² Ibid.

hacienda near Namiquipa. In the end, La Margarita exemplified the many problems that riddled the refugee initiative—the stark disregard for the colonists’ desires, the lack of accountability for CTARE’s chronic inaction, and the committee’s ineffective and hasty solutions to persistent local conflicts. The imminent abandonment of the Michoacán hacienda provided an opportunity to rectify these problems, but the political tensions that emerged on La Margarita soon reemerged at the newly acquired Santa Clara hacienda in Namiquipa, Chihuahua.

Colonization Efforts in the State of Chihuahua

In early July 1939, refugee aid coordinators in the state of Chihuahua discussed the prospects of bringing exiles to the region. They were assisted by Gustavo L. Talamantes, a local affiliate of the Liga de Comunidades Agrarias y Sindicatos Campesinos (League of Agrarian Communities and Campesino Unions, LCASC) and a close ally to the sitting governor of Chihuahua. Talamantes provided the CTARE officials with information of the social, political, and economic dynamics of the state. In particular, Talamantes stressed the complex relationship between local communities and foreigners. Just like the hacienda in Michoacán, the colony was envisioned as becoming a center of agricultural production which would benefit the Mexican government, local communities, and the Spanish republican government. However, these efforts were complicated by the longstanding history of failed colonization efforts in the Santa Clara valley and the municipality of Namiquipa. Initially the site of a military outpost established by mestizo settlers to quell native raids throughout the late colonial and early republican era, Namiquipa maintained a long legacy of violence perpetrated by settlers seeking to pacify, exploit, and industrialize regions along Mexico’s northern border with the United States.⁷³ Although scarcely populated throughout the late nineteenth and

⁷³ Daniel Nugent, *Spent Cartridges of Revolution: An Anthropological History of Namiquipa, Chihuahua* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Ana María Alonso, *Thread of Blood: Colonialism, Revolution, and Gender on Mexico’s Northern Frontier* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995).

early twentieth centuries, the region hosted a number of prospective European immigrant colonies much like the one to be established by Spanish refugees. Along with the prospects for farming, CTARE surveyors assessing the property noted the presence of existing settlements near the hacienda. To the east of the finca existed an agricultural colony founded by Mennonites that arrived in the region during the 1920s. Mennonite immigration to the region emerged following Mexican President Álvaro Obregón's decision to grant persecuted Christian religious minorities asylum—ironically enough, at a moment when many Catholic citizens were protesting the state's secularization and anti-clerical policies. Although the settlement of Mennonites in the neighboring municipality of Cuauhtémoc initially received little backlash from local communities during the first decade of its existence, the increasing demand for land restitution by local campesinos during the 1930s made the foreign settlement a point of contention.⁷⁴ Such challenges were also present at Santa Clara. In close proximity to the Mennonite colony existed a number of *ejido* endowments and livestock lots, the majority of which were founded and labored upon by former workers of the Santa Clara Hacienda.⁷⁵ The finca's current owner, a Polish businessman of Jewish descent by the name of David Russek, acquired the property through his wife's relation to the hacienda's former owner, the German-born U.S. citizen Enrique Muller.⁷⁶ Russek's unsuccessful efforts as a regional entrepreneur included a failed attempt to establish a railroad line to Santa Clara from Agua Nueva, and later an unfruitful attempt to sell the cattle-grazing property to Doukhobors, a Christian minority sect known and persecuted for their pacifist ideas as well as their ties to communist and anarchist

⁷⁴ For more on the agricultural colonies of persecuted religious minorities in Mexico, see: Will, "The Mennonite Colonization of Chihuahua," 353-378.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Mark Wasserman, *Persistent Oligarchs: Elites and Politics in Chihuahua, Mexico, 1910-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 114-115; Zambrana Jirash, "Exiliados españoles en el campo mexicano," 60.

movements in Russia.⁷⁷

Fully aware of the past conflicts between locals and foreigners, CTM locals and agrarian communities openly supported the arrival of the exiles, promising to find employment for exiles of various professions. Whereas previous colonization endeavors seemingly ignored the needs and demands of local rural communities, the *ejidatarios* willingness to entertain the incorporation of Spanish refugees seemed to be based on the prospective benefits they may experience by supporting such an endeavor. Regional agrarian committees assisted in the CTARE's preliminary survey of lands and proposed that each of their communities incorporate one exiled family into their *ejido*. To ensure the security of the arriving families, the committees recommended that state officials examine each region of the state to determine the specific needs of the community and to allocate a Spanish family whose skills met those requirements. "We hope that you consult the *ejidos* to determine whether the campesinos are in a position to admit a Spanish family," the provisional committee of the LCASC warned. They continued by noting the social and moral significance of President Cárdenas's refugee initiative to Mexico's peasantry. "We empathize with these victims of a fatal dictatorship as we imagine what it would be like if one horrible day the *hacendados* and the enemies of the Revolution tried to evict the campesinos from their parcels. We are pleased to support the cause of the organized campesino."⁷⁸ In return for their hospitality, the state's peasant leagues demanded that longstanding restitutions be decided in their favor, both affirming their support for the agrarian reform and the incorporation of asylum seekers onto newly expropriated lands. Of particular importance to the committee was the acquisition of the Hacienda de San José de Babícora, a property previously owned by U.S. media tycoon William Randolph Hearst, which would then be

⁷⁷ W. Garland Foster, "Canadian Communists: The Doukhobor Experiment," *American Journal of Sociology* 41, no. 3 (1935), 327-340; Wasserman, *Persistent Oligarchs*, 115.

⁷⁸ "Circular: Melquiadas Virrueta, Fructuoso Aguirre, y José Gutiérrez a los comités regionales del estado" (June 27, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 195, Expediente 6334.

cultivated by Mexican *ejidatarios* and Spanish exiles. They also demanded that an additional property, the hacienda of Puerto Palomas, be redistributed to local campesinos.⁷⁹ Whereas other campesino communities support for the refugee initiative seemed to be based out of their empathy towards exiled Spanish campesinos, the initiative presented by Talamantes and the state's peasant leagues seemed to be a much more calculated effort to bargain with the state to obtain additional lands for their constituents.

Initially, the proposition to grant *ejido* restitutions to landless campesinos and to incorporate Spanish refugee families into these communities seemed like a reasonable compromise for all parties. Furthermore, the local Comisión Agraria Mixta (Mixed Agrarian Commission) supported the collaboration between the refugee aid committee, state authorities, and local campesino representatives specifically to bring exiled agricultural technicians with experience in vineyard and olive cultivation to the region. Despite fulfilling the Cárdenas government's aspirations to integrate exiles into Mexican communities, CTARE officials were apprehensive about immersing refugees into existing rural communities. One committee agent thought that incorporating exiles onto existing *ejidos* was "absurd, given the impoverished environment of the *ejidatarios* and the vicious political struggles sustained in them." The CTARE also continued to prioritize productivity and profitability; officials thus recommended that separate properties be acquired for Spanish families so that private industries controlled by the CTARE could be developed.⁸⁰ Much like the colony in Contepec, Michoacán, the prospects of combining financial investments through refugee settlements differed greatly from the aspirations of local campesinos, state officials, and the refugees themselves. The Cárdenas government sought to utilize the *ejido* system to support subsistence economies, but in doing so, left virtually no means for the Spanish republican government to recuperate the expenses

⁷⁹ "Informe sobre un viaje a Chihuahua" (July 9, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 195, Expediente 6334.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

accrued during the relocation efforts. By contrast, bent on ensuring productivity, the committee looked to imitate the “flourishing” economy established by Mormon colonies that settled in the region during the 1920s.⁸¹

Yet just weeks before the Spanish refugees were scheduled to arrive to Santa Clara, the president of Guerrero, Chihuahua *municipio* Alberto Casavantes sent a detailed report to the CTARE on July 24, 1939, regarding the prospective cultivation of the site. As a professional engineer, Casavantes provided a detailed assessment of the geography, climate, and population of the property and its surroundings. Of the 140,000 hectares on the hacienda, only about a third were cultivable, and the majority only suitable for cattle grazing and forestry exploitation. With barren soils composed mostly of limestone and volcanic rock, the surveyors warned that cultivation would be difficult despite the land’s sufficient level of nitrogen and phosphoric acid for farming. Furthermore, the region’s semi-arid climate and extreme temperatures posed additional issues for large-scale farming. The surveyors suggested that crops such as wheat, rye, barley, oats, corn, buckwheat, beans, potatoes, turnips, and beets be cultivated in the months of June and July.⁸² With the arrival of hundreds of refugees to the colony in mid- to late-August, the surveyors’ assessment assured that colonists would have no means of subsistence for nearly a year.

In his field notes, Casavantes also expressed concerns over the lack of water for the settlement, as irrigable portions closest to the Santa Clara River were already occupied by the Mennonite colony and local *ejidatarios*. How the Spanish exiles would fare within this ecological scenario remained largely speculative.⁸³ In the conclusion to his report, Casavantes provided a frank assessment of the property and the condition of the local Mennonite community:

The [Mennonite] colonists, notwithstanding the magnificent preparation and

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² “Informe general sobre la Hacienda de ‘Santa Clara,’” (July 24, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 187, Expediente 6230.

⁸³ Ibid.

cultivation they have done on these lands, are generally living very poorly, despite settling with excellent agricultural tools, good livestock, and sufficient capital. All of these things have diminished considerably, deterring emigration to some of the colonies. Even for the most essential domestic purposes, the water supply has been so depleted that the settlers had to take long pilgrimages to permanent springs with [potable water.]....Despite the numerous years since the colony's founding and the desire of its residents to establish it, this property appears to be abandoned.⁸⁴

Despite Casavantes' warning, the CTARE's urgent need to settle hundreds of refugees expeditiously took precedence over the prospects of tensions between foreign colonists and local campesinos in the Santa Clara Valley. Just three weeks after receiving Casavantes report, aid officials began to develop their plans for colonization.

From the very foundation of the Santa Clara colony, Mexican government and CTARE officials envisioned the property's development as a *colonia agrícola*, a satellite community that formed the center of future industrial agricultural development. As self-sufficient entities, *colonias agrícolas* became commonplace throughout the 1940s as an alternative to the *ejido* system. Whereas *ejidos* served as a means to provide subsistence for Mexico's surplus labor population in the countryside, *ciudades agrícolas* would encourage privately owned properties and enterprises to stimulate a wage economy as well as a reservoir of labor for the industrial sector. *Colonias agrícolas* served as a means to modernize the country's agricultural industries that profited from internal and external markets rather than simply satisfying levels of subsistence.⁸⁵ The Spanish refugee colony, which Mexican officials estimated could sustain over a thousand inhabitants, was specifically designated by CTARE President José Puche to cultivate vineyards.⁸⁶ Santa Clara served as another business venture to replenish the Negrín administration's exhausted coffers. Yet as a site of habitation, its distance from neighboring urban centers as well as the poor quality of the land posed serious problems for its

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Nugent, *Spent Cartridges of Revolution*, 104.

⁸⁶ Piña Soria, *El presidente Cárdenas y la inmigración de españoles republicanos*, 31.

refugee settlers.



Figure 17: Photo of the Santa Clara Hacienda.⁸⁷

Of all the colonization projects organized by the CTARE, the Santa Clara colony was by far the costliest. Preliminary estimates for the construction, maintenance, and cultivation of the hacienda's installations amounted to 2.25 million pesos—approximately 58% of the CTARE's entire fiscal budget for 1940.⁸⁸ To recuperate the cost of the colony, the committee projected that 600 tons of corn, 2,400 tons of oats, the maintenance of 5,500 steers, and the production of 1,000 cubic meters of wood and 8,000 tons of firewood were needed to be produced to turn an annual \$947,000 profit.⁸⁹ Fully aware of the site's geological and climatological limitations, the exiled Spanish republican government nevertheless promoted the colony through its primary publication, the *Boletín al Servicio de la Emigración Española*, which it utilized to “serve, orient, and inform all Spanish emigrants” in Mexico.⁹⁰ In its coverage of the acquisition of the Santa Clara hacienda, officials characterized the settlement as a pragmatic means to provide up to 2,000 recent arrivals access to

⁸⁷ *Boletín al Servicio de la Emigración Española*, October 5, 1939.

⁸⁸ Aurelio Velázquez Hernández, “El exilio español, ¿un impulso económico para México? La iniciativa empresarial del CTARE en 1939,” in *Ruptura y transición*, 240.

⁸⁹ “Colonia agrícola española de ‘Santa Clara’, Estado de Chihuahua” (August 14, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 187, Expediente 6231.

⁹⁰ “Presentación,” *Boletín al Servicio de la Emigración Española* (Mexico City), August 15, 1939.

land, employment, and subsistence. The state's objective was specific: "To turn Santa Clara into a garden, establish industries, form new crops, and build towns on the premises. In a word, to create life on a corner of Mexican society where it currently does not exist."⁹¹ To create this utopian colony, the *Boletín* optimistically detailed various prospective crops, businesses, and resources that colonists could utilize. What is more, the national government proposed that up to 1,500 individuals would join the initial 500 colonists to develop rural homes and artisanal businesses that would surround the colony's central plaza, which would house "a building of communal character" for the settlement's administrative office, cooperatives, medical facility.⁹²



Figure 18: Construction of the provisional barracks in Santa Clara.⁹³

In Search of Settlers

Efforts to populate the rural settlement created challenges for the CTARE and Mexican officials. Initial estimates by the CTARE and Mexico's Interior Ministry proposed an initial colony of approximately 300 inhabitants of diverse occupational backgrounds. Since the purpose of the settlement was to form the basis of a new industrial center, aid representatives proposed sending

⁹¹ "Creaciones de la emigración española: La hacienda de 'Santa Clara,'" *Boletín al Servicio de la Emigración Española*, August 15, 1939.

⁹² The initiatives proposed in the *Boletín* seemed to be directly pulled from the CTARE's personnel in at the colony. See: "Colonia agrícola española de 'Santa Clara,' Estado de Chihuahua, Méjico" (August 14, 1939) BNAH-CTARE, Caja 187, Expediente 6231; "Creaciones de la emigración española: La hacienda de 'Santa Clara,'" *Boletín al Servicio de la Emigración Española*, August 15, 1939.

⁹³ *Boletín al Servicio de la Emigración Española*, October 5, 1939.

dozens of skilled industrial workers along with the large assemblage of campesinos onboard the *Mexique* and the *Ipanema* ships. The diverse occupational background of the exile population provided more than enough skilled laborers for a burgeoning industrial locality. However, the lack of manual laborers would make the establishment of such a community from the ground up much more difficult.

The dispersion of exiled campesinos to various states further complicated initiatives to populate the Santa Clara colony. According to the BNAH's registries of the first wave of settlers at Santa Clara, only 35 of the original 197 heads of families were campesinos or farmers. Of those 35 heads of families, none revealed to aid officials that they had any experience in cattle raising—the most prominent form of cultivation previously exploited by the former proprietor of the hacienda.⁹⁴ Volunteers for the expedition included electricians, bakers, tobacco growers, cigar rollers, mechanics, and white-collar administrators. Although most CTARE records only list the names and occupations of the male heads of the family, the list of volunteers sent from Perote also notes that most of the wives and daughters that came to Chihuahua had experience as dressmakers and seamstresses. Volunteers also included 113 single men and two single women, most of whom had experience as campesinos or skilled farmers.⁹⁵ While it is difficult to determine specific numbers of how many of the volunteers came to Santa Clara with experience in agriculture, at least 30% of the inhabitants had listed their occupations as campesinos, farmers, or some other form of agricultural labor.

Although previous studies of the colony have claimed that a lack of experience in farming or rural living was one of the primary reasons for the colony's failure, the statistics of the settlers indicate that almost a third of the settlement's colony did have such skills. Dozens of campesinos

⁹⁴ Zambrana Jirash, "Exiliados españoles en el campo mexicano," 71-72.

⁹⁵ "Expedición de Chihuahua: Voluntarios (Hombres Solos)," BNAH-CTARE, Caja 187, Expediente 6232.

from the Hacienda La Margarita in Michoacán also joined the colony by the end of the year. Of the approximately 600 people that settled the Santa Clara colony, at least a third had some experience with agricultural labor. To sustain the colonists while the colony established its harvests and industries, CTARE officials distributed daily allowances based on one's occupational background.⁹⁶ The allowance scale seems to indicate an effort to both incentivize skilled laborers relocation to the rural colony as well as the belief that the additional funds could be allocated to establish new businesses. Yet with such a vast property and a still small number of volunteers in comparison to the number of refugees that arrived, CTARE officials also demanded that exiles living off such allowances while unemployed in Mexico City move to the Santa Clara hacienda. As part of their agreement with the Mexican government, Spanish republican officials promised to curtail cases of vagrancy among the refugees, ensuring that those granted asylum would become productive members of society and not wards of the state. Although most of those petitioning to relocate did not have experience in agriculture, the prospective development of various private businesses on the hacienda overcame officials' qualms about exiles' lack of agricultural skills. More than anything, the image of the exiles as productive contributors to Mexican society and the national economy proved a critical motivation for the recruitment of refugees regardless of their trades or skills.

The CTARE proposed a comprehensive project that sought to reconcile the various urgent needs of the refugee populations. How colonists viewed and experienced these plans has been more difficult for historians to assess. Scholars have generally agreed that meager wages, rural poverty,

⁹⁶ Although the committee's records indicate that only 99 exiles at Santa Clara received such subsidies, we can determine that allowances were largely based on skill set. Land surveyors and office workers, for example, received approximately 7 pesos per day, whereas campesinos were allocated less than 4 pesos per day to sustain themselves. The three veterinarians tasked to treat cattle and other animals used for farming received the largest allowances, granted ten pesos each. See: "Profesiones a las que interesar citar para Santa Clara," BNAH-CTARE, Caja 187, Expediente 6232.

sectarian conflicts, and a preference for city life led refugees to abandon the colony.⁹⁷ However, the perspectives and aspirations of the refugees themselves have largely gone untold.⁹⁸ Fortunately, the testimonies of multiple refugees provide some indications of what motivated or deterred exiles from joining the expedition. The Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (National Institute of Anthropology and History, UNAM) conducted and recorded interviews with exiles during the 1970s and 1980s, providing a window into their aspirations, experiences, and reflections on their contributions to the Santa Clara colony. These testimonies attest to how the conflicting expectations of settlers, aid officials, and Mexican state representatives all contributed to the subsequent collapse of the agrarian experiment in Chihuahua. Lastly, these testimonies allow us to follow the trajectories of these colonists as they navigate life, labor, and political struggles in exile.

An Anarchist Settler in Santa Clara

There was no one path to Santa Clara for the refugees once they arrived in Mexico. José Gené, who spent much of the Civil War in the Catalan municipality of Igualada, assisted in the collectivization of cow ranches and poultry farms as a member of the CNT. Initially separated from his wife and daughter during their exodus to French concentration camps, Gené was only reunited with his family when they boarded the *Manual Arnús*.⁹⁹ Passengers of the vessel had to live onboard the ship for a month before eventually being sent by refugee aid officials to Mexico City. With little luck finding employment, Gené initially considered traveling to Oaxaca in the hopes of securing a

⁹⁷ Fagen, *Exiles and Citizens*, 52-55; Pla Brugat, *Els exiliats catalans*, 210-214; Velázquez Hernández, *Empresas y finanzas del exilio*, 49-50.

⁹⁸ One notable exception to this can be seen in an unpublished study conducted by Maricruz Zambrana Jirash, who utilizes the testimonies of some of the colonists of Santa Clara to provide intimate details that substantiate the economic, political, and social conditions that led to the collapse of the agricultural colony. See: Zambrana Jirash, “Exiliados españoles en el campo mexicano.”

⁹⁹ Interview with José Gené, conducted by Concepción Ruíz-Funes (1979), INAH-DEH, PHO/10/11, 236-237.

job through a brother of one of the refugees he was interned with in France. Although the friend's brother notified Gené that there were no employment opportunities at the time, he encouraged Gené to write to the governor of Coahuila, Pedro Rodríguez Tirana, a close ally to President Lázaro Cárdenas and a proponent of Mexico's refugee initiative. Upon receiving a letter of support from the governor, Gené requested permission from the Servicio de Evacuación de Refugiados Españoles to relocate to the northern border state.¹⁰⁰ Despite the aid officials' promises to internees in French concentration camps that they would receive food, clothing, and transportation services upon arrival to Mexico, Gené received only a one-way train ticket, a bread roll, and an apple for his trip.¹⁰¹ With that, Gené and his family made the 840 kilometer journey to Coahuila. Throughout the journey, Gené and other exiles quickly learned about the realities of life in the Mexican countryside. During a stop at a station in San Luis Potosí, Gené recalled the "deplorable" state in which the local residents lived, noting the abandoned plots of land and homes that littered their route. "¡Híjole! What kind of country have we been dropped into?" Gené's wife exclaimed upon seeing the poverty and destitution of local communities passing by. Always the optimist, Gené reassured his wife not to worry and to focus instead on the new opportunities that life in Mexico promised.¹⁰²

After a brief stop in Saltillo, Gené found work on a mesquite ranch in Viesca, Coahuila, along with other exiled anarchists and communists, before being transferred to Santa Clara. Gené first heard of the colony from a SERE official who claimed that the foundations of the site had already been constructed. He also read articles in the CTARE's *Boletín* of the bountiful lands, which were compared to those of Castile, and the guarantee of paid work at the property. Such promises, however, were dashed upon arriving at the abandoned hacienda. "[It was like] the Garden of Hesperides, a thing of pure fantasy," Gené recalled. The hacienda's central organizing committee led

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 239-240.

¹⁰² Ibid.

the initial fifteen settlers to a two-bedroom habitation which they shared while building additional facilities. Suffering from skin diseases that developed after living in concentration camps and at sea for months, the settlers were forced to sleep on the ground. The only source of medical attention came from an unsympathetic German pharmacist in Chihuahua City. Despite these setbacks, colonists were heartened by the arrival of twenty-five tractors and four prefabricated structures purchased from the United States. The colonists' initial reactions to the property suggests that they were unaware of the climatological limitations of the land. "When I saw those fields," Gené recalled, "I said to myself, 'Imagine what I could produce!'" The men divided into smaller groups while their wives and children stayed in Chihuahua City while construction of the site was underway. Gené joined a barrack composed almost entirely of other anarchists, including an exile who was in charge of the fleet of tractor drivers.

News of the colony's shortcomings soon reached the Spanish refugee community located throughout Mexico. During a November meeting with exiles living in the Castillo de San Carlos in Perote, Veracruz, Mexican immigration officials discussed the prospects of relocating the group to the colony in Santa Clara. Some exiles voiced their apprehensions prompted by the inaccurate descriptions of the colony within the Committee's propaganda. Officials gave false reassurances that ignored the ills plaguing Santa Clara. The colony, they claimed, was to be turned into a "piece of Spain" and settlers would be fully supported by the committee's financial loan program.¹⁰³ By the end of the meeting, the immigration official warned all the Spanish émigrés present that their silence signaled their implicit willingness to migrate to Chihuahua.¹⁰⁴

Surely, refugees' specific occupations and experiences further complicated the daunting process of accounting for a large mass of people. However, many of the refugees' concerns were

¹⁰³ "Asuntos tratados en la reunion del 25 de noviembre 1939 en Perote, Ver." (November 25, 1939), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 209, Expediente 6442.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

reasonable given the committee's haphazard means of securing properties with little evidence that the lands were sufficiently arable. In their desperation to find some semblance of stability, many exiles simply took matters into their own hands rather than await the decisions of the Spanish republican and Mexican governments. Claudio Esteva Fabregat, for instance, had already secured a job in a publishing house in Mexico City when the Mexican government mandated that all young and single refugees relocate to the Santa Clara colony. "We began to worry a lot about whether or not they were going to send us to Chihuahua, so we decided that we would stay in Mexico City no matter what it took," Esteva explained. "But for this to happen, [the CTARE] had to authorize us." Without this authorization, the aid committee retaliated against "vagrant" exiles by refusing to provide them subsidies or shelter, as seen in the case of the defiant campesinos in Michoacán. The committee also intimidated settlers by claiming that Mexican labor unions would refuse to hire the exiles—an allegation that CTM leader Lombardo Toledano frequently discredited.¹⁰⁵ Esteva Fabregat soon realized that, despite the CTARE's threats, the committee had no means to keep track of all the refugees, especially those that chose to lose their access to Spanish republican aid.¹⁰⁶ As a result, hundreds of exiles disassociated themselves with the committee and found work elsewhere.

As the exiles already sent to the hacienda integrated into their new surroundings, they quickly became aware of the tribulations experienced by other colonists of the region. A Spanish immigrant who married into the local Mennonite community years before provided the recent arrivals with the lay of the land. He warned his compatriots that despite the vast amount of money the CTARE spent for the hacienda, the lack of irrigation water posed serious barriers to their proposed exploitation of the land. After being shown a plot of land with the remnants of a failed

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Claudio Esteva Fabregat, 122-123.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

attempt to cultivate wheat, Gené quickly realized that those towering fields of wheat he harvested in Cataluña were not to be.¹⁰⁷ Settlements surrounding the hacienda had already secured control of the most irrigable plots near the Santa Clara River, forcing the colonists to excavate new water sources on the barren hacienda property.

Furthermore, the lack of comradery between settlers of different political affiliations and occupational skills further strained settlement efforts. As technicians planned to dig an artesian well, a Catalan campesino familiar with dry farming warned the group that there was no water in the spot they had chosen and that he could help them find a more suitable location. “I told them that I could find water for them, but since I was not a technician nor did I have support, they called me crazy.”¹⁰⁸ Whereas many of the exiled campesinos had been affiliated with the CNT and other radical agrarian movements during their time in Spain, the agricultural technicians that arrived onboard the *Ipanema* and *Mexique* were often affiliates of parties and unions with close ties to the exiled Spanish Republican government, such as the Partido Socialista Obrero Español, the Unión General de Trabajadores, and the Izquierda Republicana.¹⁰⁹ Sectarian strife among the exiles not only manifested itself in political affinities, but also in broader notions of the ways in which labor should be managed. The outbreak of the Spanish Revolution and expropriation of lands in various parts of the country allowed them to put their ideals into practice. Whereas those committed to the collectivization of agriculture frequently worked with one another during the civil war, distrust continued to antagonize communities along village and political divides.¹¹⁰ These divisions

¹⁰⁷ Interview with José Gené, 269-270.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 276-277.

¹⁰⁹ For lists of the political affiliations of refugees onboard the *Ipanema* and *Mexique*, see: “Asilados políticos españoles llegados a bordo del vapor ‘Ipanema’,” FPI-AARD, Caja 271, Expediente 2; “Asilados políticos españoles llegados a bordo del vapor ‘Mexique’,” FPI-AARD, Caja 271, Expediente 2.

¹¹⁰ For more on agrarian divisions before and during the Civil War, see: Malefakis, *Agrarian Reform and Peasant Revolution in Spain*; Jackson, “Collectivist Experiences in the Spanish Civil War;” Francisco Como Romero, *De campesinos a electores: Modernización agraria en Andalucía, politización campesina y*

reemerged in exile, as technicians balanced the CTARE's explicit call for a "communal" experiment in Santa Clara and their own class and professional experiences.

While sectarian divisions certainly played into the early conflicts at Santa Clara, the structure of the CTARE's colonization initiative accentuated such divides due to its simultaneous efforts to forge community among exiles of various backgrounds as well as between Spaniards and the Mexican communities they entered. This environment became increasingly volatile as aid officials sought to save on expenses by allocating private parcels of land to individual families. As one of the first colonists at Santa Clara, José Gené was notified that he was eligible to receive a parcel of land. However, Gené saw many drawbacks in the offer. First, CTARE officials expected grantees to be self-sufficient through the FIASA's loan system. Second, he and his family would no longer be eligible for the committee's subsidies or salaries, which was already significantly lower than what was promised to them prior to their arrival in Mexico.¹¹¹ Lastly, Gené already earned five pesos per day as a tractor driver, which provided the basic necessities for him and his family.¹¹² Gené's apprehensions about taking the land were partly a result of the political climate against anarchist campesinos on the colony as well as the fact that his wife found work while she and her children stayed in Chihuahua City. The offer guaranteed neither financial security nor an arable parcel of land; Gené, therefore, refused.¹¹³ The small wooden houses created by the committee were the only thing Gené could expect with certainty. They were tinderboxes awaiting a fiery disaster. Gené recalled thinking, "The day that a gale blows, and a family starts a fire, all of this goes away. Everything will go to hell."¹¹⁴ The colony's architect, Félix Candela, stated that the structures looked

derechización de los pequeños propietarios y arrendatarios. El caso de la provincia de Jaén, 1936-1936 (Madrid: Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 2003); Simpson and Carmona, *Why Democracy Failed*.

¹¹¹ Interview with José Gené, 277.

¹¹² Ibid., 279.

¹¹³ Ibid., 277-278.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 278.

more like shanties (*chavolas*) than the homes he designed.¹¹⁵ In many ways, the disillusionment experienced by exiled Spanish campesinos in Namiquipa reflected similar those experienced by some Mexican *ejidatarios* during the agrarian reform. While their demand for land was met through restitutions, the lands they were allocated often left much to be desired. As the refugees found, on these crusts of land nothing would grow—“such vast land for nothing.”¹¹⁶



Figure 19: CTARE engineers and Spanish refugees examining a map of the Santa Clara Hacienda (1939)¹¹⁷

From Parcel to Commune: Communist Control at Santa Clara

Within a year, four-fifths of Santa Clara’s inhabitants left. Indeed, long-term settlements in Namiquipa had always been difficult, and internal disputes among settlers were inevitable. However, the Spaniards’ choice to leave was also a result of the exiles’ response to a rapidly changing political landscape. The outbreak of World War II and the end of the Cárdenas regime dashed any hopes for a speedy return to Spain and further complicated their presence in their adopted homeland. In part, the last gasp of the workers’ revolution in Spain also extinguished its prospective expansion

¹¹⁵ Zambrana Jirash, “Exiliados españoles en el campo mexicano,” 81.

¹¹⁶ Juan Rulfo, “Nos han dado la tierra,” in *El llano en llamas* (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1983), 9-15.

¹¹⁷ “Inauguración de la exposición ‘Los castillos de la libertad’ y ‘Santa Clara, 75 años del arribo de los republicanos españoles a Chihuahua,” *Página 8. Periódico cultural y de eventos de Chihuahua* (Chihuahua), September 5, 2014.

elsewhere, as diplomatic maneuvering on both sides of the Atlantic debilitated the Spanish refugees' hopes to obtain "land and liberty" in the Mexican countryside. Their movement was not simply a case of exiled urbanites fleeing the poverty of rural life. The policies of the Mexican and Spanish Republican governments determined the fate of the proposed rural colonization initiatives and the options refugees were left with. In many ways, the exiles' internal migration from the Mexican countryside to the city mirrored the same paths of Mexican campesinos. The initiation of the Bracero Program as a means to support the Allies' war effort brought tens of thousands of Mexican farmers across the U.S. border at the same time as the agrarian reforms of the Cárdenas era were replaced with the industrialization growth facilitated by the Green Revolution. Whether or not the refugee settlements would have survived this dramatic transformation based on their initial purpose is highly unlikely. The end of Mexico's state-led revolutionary reforms did away with the labor experiments of the past and exchanged those radical endeavors for a capitalist model of development enacted through authoritarian rule. The testimonies of refugees that refused to abandon this utopian experiment in Namiquipa provide us a greater understanding of the exiles' lives as they navigated the changing political and economic landscape of rural Mexico. Such narratives grant a more nuanced understanding of why such experiments failed and complicate previous readings of the colony's end.

As they tried to secure the basic necessities of existence in a desolate rural colony, the Spanish refugees at Santa Clara also experienced shifts within the internal dynamics of the colony's population. Upon the collapse of the colony experiment in Contepec, Michoacán, dozens of Spanish refugees relocated to Namiquipa in the hopes of keeping their promises to the Mexican people. However, the growing number of communists at the Santa Clara hacienda further exacerbated the existing conflicts among the colonists, with additional strain from the shifting geopolitical climate caused by the Hitler-Stalin Pact of Nonaggression established on 23 August 1939. The shock of

Stalin's temporary detente with Nazi Germany reverberated throughout the Global Left and among the Spanish refugees—especially those recently granted asylum in the Soviet Union.¹¹⁸ With the PCE's leadership mostly residing in exile in the Soviet Union and with no coherent strategy on how to respond to the new geopolitical conditions, the party leadership in Mexico rejected the party's longstanding aversion to land communalization—an issues that had been a major point of contention between Spanish communists and revolutionary factions during the Spanish Civil War. The members of the PCE Central Committee in Mexico endorsed collectivization at Santa Clara and pushed for the hacienda to be organized as a commune. The decision worried many of the other settlers, including those in favor of communal forms of governance.

In February 1940, CTARE President José Puche responded to a letter sent by the PCE central committee located in Mexico City. The committee member Antonio Mije criticized the CTARE's progress and alleged that the high rate of unemployment and housing insecurity among the refugees was a product of the committee's anti-communist sentiments. While Puche denied Mije's allegations, he also avoided taking responsibility for the slow progress of the initiatives and gave preferences to exiles affiliated with Prime Minister Negrín's allies. The aid president also lashed out against the notion that the committee could resolve all the problems that refugees faced. With more than six thousand Spanish refugees in Mexico, Puche explained, "it is no surprise that [the majority of refugees] have not been placed in the companies established by the Committee, considering the national situation here." Considering the heterogenous nature of the refugee population, finding work for all refugees was an arduous task, Puche concluded.¹¹⁹ Certainly, the task was difficult, but Puche's self-absolution of responsibility stood as a stark contrast to the

¹¹⁸ Abdón Mateos and Agustín Sánchez Andrés, "La crisis del antifascista. Desplome de la república Española y giro del cardenismo," in *Ruptura y transición*, 20; Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *International Communism and the Spanish Civil War: Solidarity and Suspicion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 183-208.

¹¹⁹ José Puche to Antonio Mije (February 29, 1940), FPI-AARD, Caja 296, Expediente 21.

expectations the CTARE placed on recipients of its benefits. He further stated that the committee's duties—and his responsibilities—were to fulfill the demands made by the Cárdenas administration and the exiled Spanish government. Puche rejected Mije's allegations of preferential treatment for republicans, but in doing so, he acknowledged that the selection process had already been skewed to prevent unwanted political refugees from entering the country. He claimed, "Don Juan Negrín enacted a policy to accommodate all honest Spaniards without sectarianism or exclusion of any political or union group, with the clear exception of those that, by their conduct, we have judged as undesirable in exile and in Spain."¹²⁰ Puche inadvertently affirmed anarchists' and revolutionary Marxists' accusations that the Negrín government excluded refugees deemed politically undesirable. These two groups were persistently deemed "undesirable" based on their efforts to enact a social revolution in Spain throughout the Civil War. Puche's statement further confirmed that the Communist Party remained in the good graces of the exiled republican government. Any restrictions faced by communists, Puche alleged, were due to the Mexican labor unions' unwillingness to provide refugees' support, not the actions of the CTARE.¹²¹

In response, Mije attached a report written by one of the CTARE's engineers at Santa Clara, Adolfo Vázquez Humasqué, to validate his charges against Puche. Vázquez Humasqué noted that the committee did not reach out to Mexican labor unions or campesino leagues to secure employment for exiles. Even after a year, no cultivation projects or permanent housing accommodations had been established—conditions that were in direct violation of Mexican colonization laws.¹²² The engineer further asserted that boundaries of the refugee colony had still not

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Adolfo Vázquez Humasqué, "Estudio sobre orientación colonizadora en Santa Clara, Chih." (April 30, 1940), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 187, Expediente 6249. For more on Vázquez Humasqué's participation in the Spanish agrarian reform, see: Julian Casanova, *The Spanish Republic and Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 130; Simpson and Carmona, *Why Democracy Failed*, 187.

been resolved with the former workers of the hacienda, which resulted in increasing tensions with the local Mexican community. Irrigation and fencing projects also remained incomplete. Rather than fault the settlers, Adolfo Vázquez Humasqué notified the committee that the assigned primary engineer at the hacienda, Carlos Gaos, was incompetent in his duties and favored certain colonists over others.¹²³ With little or no progress on the farm and with over 600 settlers, the exiled PCE members were compelled to organize the colony as a commune.

The decision to communalize Santa Clara was not agreed upon by the majority of exiles. While a specific breakdown of the colonists' political affiliations at the colony has been difficult to determine due to insufficient records, the initial settlement was composed of a considerable number of anarchists, socialists, and regional parties, though with more representation from parties and labor federations that maintained a strong rural presence during the Civil War. But with the growing presence of communist exiles on the hacienda, tensions arose regarding the division of labor. Anarchists were assigned to working on tractors, occupying some of the most financially coveted positions available on the colony. Their control of the tractors also meant that anarchists maintained one of the most crucial instruments for cultivating the land. José Gené, who worked alongside other anarchist tractor drivers, recalled a dispute that broke out between a Basque CNT member and communist exiles regarding the anarchists' control of the tractors. Despite attempts to coordinate with the communists in their efforts to cultivate the land communally, the PCE affiliates' ongoing efforts to take control of the primary industrial instruments on the farm led anarchists and other colonists to abandon the colony altogether. Gene recalled, "I told [the other colonists] that I was tired of them [the communists] and their schemes. We had already given them Santa Clara and everything else they wanted, but we wouldn't stay for another minute." The Basque foreman then

¹²³ Vázquez Humasqué, "Estudio sobre orientación colonizadora en Santa Clara, Chih." (April 30, 1940), BNAH-CTARE, Caja 187, Expediente 6249.

informed the group that he would be leaving his position and moving to Chihuahua City. When he asked the others if they wanted to stay, all refused. As a result, the anarchist and socialist settlers commandeered the trucks of the camp and made their way to the state capital, with the Basques and republicans following soon thereafter.¹²⁴

The decision to exit the colony not only left the refugees without a place to stay, but also made them ineligible to receive support from the CTARE. As the refugees migrated to various different urban centers, Gené initially settled in Chihuahua City, where his wife had secured a job. Aid officials denied their further efforts to secure employment in a CTARE-run factory in Mexico City. With few options left to secure employment, Gené decided to naturalize as a Mexican citizen, allowing him to work without the approval of the Spanish republican government.¹²⁵ When asked decades later why he decided to become a Mexican citizen, Gené responded: “Simply because I had no attachment to Spain in the first place. I am not a patriot, so I saw [Mexican citizenship] as the same [as Spanish citizenship]. And I also considered that being Mexican always had more rights and advantages.”¹²⁶ Soon after, Gené and his family moved to the State of Mexico where he briefly found work at a sawmill owned by a Spanish immigrant near Tenancingo.¹²⁷ Like many of other anarchists at Santa Clara, Gené would eventually end up in Mexico City, where the vast majority of the refugee population came to reside.

¹²⁴ Interview with José Gene, 279-280.

¹²⁵ Ibid. 281-282.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 282-283.

¹²⁷ Gené would later quit the position after the sawmill owner, a devout *falangista*, mistreated the Mexican workers that he worked alongside. See: Ibid., 289-300.



Figure 20: Spanish campesinos in Mexico.¹²⁸

The Communist Utopian Colony

Although no written records relate the specifics of the PCE's communalization efforts at Santa Clara, oral histories conducted with party militants and other settlers confirm the objectives and consequences of the shift in policy. In particular, the testimonies of communist exiles Antonio Navarro and Lino Sánchez Portela shed light on the internal workings of the party's activities at Santa Clara. Antonio Navarro, a twenty-seven-year-old doctor from Almansa, Albacete, volunteered to serve as a doctor in Santa Clara's health ward. Although Navarro came from a middle-class background, he was deeply influenced by his hometown's anarchist movement.¹²⁹ The Civil War broke out while Navarro was attending medical school in Madrid and by May 1937, he decided to join the Communist Party. The PCE, as he saw it, was the only leftist faction with a viable vision to end the war. Although an avid party member, Navarro felt that the lack of unity among the various Popular Front factions was the primary reason for the loss of the war. "Why did we crush the [revolutionary] movement?," Navarro pondered during a 1979 interview. By the end of the war, Navarro recalled, many of the anarchists, socialists, and anti-Stalinist communists had abandoned

¹²⁸ *Boletín al Servicio de la Emigración Española*, August 31, 1939.

¹²⁹ Interview with Antonio Navarro, 16-17.

the front, demoralized by ongoing persecutions of their comrades. “They were the people who defended the Spanish land from those usurpers that wished to sell it to foreign powers!,” Navarro exclaimed. The doctor’s empathy for all Spanish workers, regardless of political allegiances, was not necessarily shared by other communists at Santa Clara. Lino Sánchez Portela, a thirty-two-year-old doctor from Madrid had affiliated himself with the PCE since 1934. Yet following the outbreak of the Civil War, he joined ranks with a Socialist Party battalion and commanded the Mira del Río sector’s Health department. He was apprehensive of officially joining the Communist Party, as he was unsure whether or not a dictatorship of the proletariat was necessary for social and economic change. Yet after a colorful conversation with a party delegate in his unit, Sánchez subsequently joined the PCE.¹³⁰ According to Sánchez Portela’s testimonial on his time in Santa Clara, the abandonment of the colony was due to conflicts with anarchists and socialists, not communists.¹³¹ Sánchez Portela provides little evidence to his claims besides a personal spat with anarchist refugees at a bar when visiting Chihuahua City.¹³² While some refugees saw their exile as a means to unite with former adversaries, others still maintained deep animosities.

Even after the majority of settlers left Santa Clara, approximately 94 heads of family remained, most of them affiliated with the Communist Party. With little directive support from the CTARE technicians, the remaining settlers began the difficult process of constructing a sustainable, collectively owned colony. According to Navarro, the small group of settlers only utilized approximately 28,000 hectares of the vast property, with large plots allocated to each head of family

¹³⁰ Sánchez’s induction came after being confronted by a party delegate as to why he had not joined the party. When Sánchez stated that he was only a communist sympathizer, the delegate responded: “Look, go fuck yourself and tomorrow you will have a card.” Sánchez subsequently became a member shortly after that. See: Interview with Lino Sánchez Portela, conducted by Elena Aub (1980) INAH-DEH, PHO/10/ESP 6, 31.

¹³¹ Ibid., 65.

¹³² Ibid., 69-72.

and single settlers, and with the plots nearly ten kilometers away from each other.¹³³ Crop yields varied dramatically due to the lack of rain in certain parts of the valley.¹³⁴ Notwithstanding these obstacles, the shift towards communal living helped the colonists to survive a series of ecological and cultivation setbacks. Following the first year of colonization, the refugees sustained themselves on oat harvests and sold off more profitable crops. Despite amassing enough harvests to fill four 50-meter-long warehouses, exiles profited little from their labor. As part of the agreement made with Mexico's Department of Agriculture, the CTARE was given twenty years to pay for the purchase of the property and ten years to pay for the machinery purchased from a business in the United States. The CTARE sold the products cultivated by the colonists to large agricultural companies throughout northern Mexico.¹³⁵ According to Antonio Navarro, wholesalers gouged prices and forced colonists to sell potato crops for four cents each, which were then priced at twenty-five cents the very next day.¹³⁶ Over the years, entire yields of crops were lost to frost, drought, and disease, further jeopardizing the colony's future. Still, the settlement produced some crops successfully. While no records exist to provide a sufficient assessment of the annual yields of the colony, Lino Sánchez Portela claimed that the colony generated 80% of the wheat consumed in Mexico, a figure that historian Maricruz Zambrana Jirash suggests was not necessarily a result of the large yields of the crop, but rather due to a general lack of wheat produced elsewhere in the country.¹³⁷ The colonists also sold their large yields of oats to the Mexican government, which provided more profitable returns than private markets.¹³⁸ According to Navarro, what little money was acquired from the harvests was sent directly back to Europe to assist in the PCE's clandestine resistance movements in

¹³³ Interview with Antonio Navarro, 160-161.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 161.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 173-174.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 163-164.

¹³⁷ Interview with Lino Sánchez Portela, 57; Zambrana Jirash, "Exiliados españoles en el campo mexicano," 82, fn 309.

¹³⁸ Interview with Lino Sánchez Portela, 60.

Spain and in France.¹³⁹ For the colonists that remained in Santa Clara, the commune's purpose was not to be financially productive, but to put their political ideals into practice.

The remaining settlers also developed closer ties to the other settlers in the valley. Relations between the exiles and local *ejidatarios* thawed as a result of their decreasing population and limited cultivation on the property, which subsequently alleviated the Mexican campesinos' concerns regarding the parceling of the property. The refugees were also pivotal in the advancement of the Mexican government's education, medical, and hygiene initiatives. One refugee, Felipe Zamora Salamanca, who arrived in Mexico when he was just seventeen years old, organized other exiles to assist in the literacy campaign established by Mexican President Ávila Camacho. Colonists also organized an artists' group, which hosted theatrical events on Sundays open to the local community. To combat the ongoing struggle against malaria in the region, Navarro, Sánchez Portela, and other physicians established facilities to vaccinate local community members as well as educators and students at the local *escuelas normales*. All medications were made free of charge to exiles and local community members, in part thanks to the settlers' collaborations with the head of health in the region, Dr. Jesús Olmos.¹⁴⁰ When not working, colonists organized study centers that hosted lectures on national and global affairs, with particular focus on the refugees' response to World War II. Beyond politics, basic education classes in history, geography, and other fields of study were also conducted.¹⁴¹ The refugees' response to the long-term needs of the local communities forged new networks of relations to local communities and in turn established various forms of mutual aid networks.¹⁴²

The gradual advances of the settlers at Santa Clara in cultivation and social integration,

¹³⁹ Interview with Antonio Navarro, 179-180.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Antonio Navarro, 167-169.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Antonio Navarro, 167-171.

¹⁴² Interview with Lino Sánchez Portela, 60.

however, could not sustain the colony's existence within Mexico's changing political and economic climates. As a financial investment of the CTARE, the future of the colony came into question following a series of financial and political shifts in the Spanish republican government's relationship to the Mexican state following the end of Lázaro Cárdenas's presidential term in December 1940. Although Cárdenas believed that his designated successor, Manuel Ávila Camacho (r. 1940-1946), represented a moderate candidate that would appease those that opposed his administration's reforms, Ávila Camacho's presidency instead marked a sharp turn rightward in policies and initiatives. This included an end to the various accommodations provided to the exiled Spanish republican government and the refugee community. By the summer of 1940, the Negrín government exhausted the remaining funds of the republican government, leading the Mexican government to expropriate the CTARE-controlled properties due to their ostensibly low economic productivity.¹⁴³

Conclusion

The collapse of the SERE and the CTARE also led to the downfall of the Santa Clara colony. With much of the land remaining unsettled due to the loss of colonists, in 1941 the CTARE sold 86,285 hectares of the property to pay off debts accrued to the Mexican government. By then, thirty of the remaining settlers had also abandoned the colony, making life even more difficult for those that continued to work the land. In August 1945, the CTARE liquidated the property for 300,000 pesos and sold all the agricultural machinery.¹⁴⁴ Those that remained in Santa Clara until the end were left with little more than what they had brought with them six years earlier. Antonio Navarro recalled leaving "annoyed and almost penniless," as he sold off his few possessions of value

¹⁴³ *Diario Oficial: Órgano del Gobierno Provisional de la República Mexicana* (Mexico City), Dec 1, 1942; Velázquez Hernández, *Empresas y finanzas del exilio*, 181-184.

¹⁴⁴ Aurelio Velázquez Hernández, "La otra cara," 223-224.

to pay for his and his family's relocation to Mexico City.¹⁴⁵ Although there is some speculation that some exiles remained in Namiquipa, the liquidation subsequently ended the PCE's rural experiment.

As most colonists relocated to urban centers, they found themselves immersed in an entirely different political and economic landscape than the one in which they arrived in 1939. The agrarian reform that Lázaro Cárdenas championed had been abandoned, with his successor pushing the country deeper into the global capitalist economy by way of the Green Revolution.¹⁴⁶ The Bracero Program, a binational agreement permitting hundreds of thousands Mexican campesinos to obtain temporary employment in the United States to compensate for the labor shortage caused by World War II, initiated a twenty-two year exodus from the Mexican countryside, permanently altering the land and its communities.¹⁴⁷ The growing concerns of the spread of communism to the Americas brought many of the left-wing refugees under the increased scrutiny of the Mexican government's growing political intelligence apparatus. It is within this new reality that Spanish refugees once again reconceptualized their relationship to Mexican society; in just a few years, refugees' increased uncertainty toward their host country replaced their former optimism for Cárdenas's revolutionary reforms. Spanish exiles reassessed their relationship to Mexico, Spain, and the broader struggle for liberation pulsating throughout Latin America.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Antonio Navarro, 191-192.

¹⁴⁶ Tore S. Olsson, *Agrarian Crossings: Reformers and the Remaking of the US and Mexican Countryside* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 193.

¹⁴⁷ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 127-166; Rankin, ¡México, la patria!, 211-212; Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

CHAPTER SEVEN

From Comrades to Subversives: Mexican Secret Police and “Undesirable” Spanish Exiles, 1939-1959

In the early hours of September 20, 1948, four members of the Juventudes Libertarias Mexicanas (Mexican Libertarian Youth, JLM) were detained by police as they carried a bucket of paste, paintbrushes and over 3,000 leaflets to the Zócalo, Mexico City’s historic center.¹ Since three of the detained youths were Spanish exiles, the Mexican state’s intelligence apparatus, the Dirección de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (Directorate of Political and Social Investigations, DIPS), launched an investigation regarding the JLM and its members. Unlike other Spanish political organizations in exile, which primarily focused on overthrowing the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, the JLM condemned Mexico’s ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI) for its “betrayal of the [Mexican] Revolution.” Consisting of only 30 members, the JLM called on all Mexican youth to unite under the banner of “revolutionary syndicalism.”²

After seven days of detention in a clandestine prison, the young men were interrogated by Mexico City’s chief of police. Having forced the captives to watch film footage of recent Mexican Independence Day parades, the chief reproached them for criticizing the government after it provided the exiles with support in their time of need. One of the students, Octavio Alberola Suriñach, replied that their activities stemmed from the fact that “some [exiles] could enrich

¹ Originating in Spain, the Federación Ibérica de Juventudes Libertarias was re-established by exiled Spanish youth who were among the 20,000 political refugees that fled to Mexico following the victory of Dictator Francisco Franco in 1939. Among the detained were two engineering students from the national university: Octavio Alberola Suriñach, a 20-year-old Spanish exile from Menorca, and Manuel González Salazar, a Mexican national born in Coatepec, Veracruz. The two youths were imprisoned along with Floreal Ocaña Sánchez and Francisco Rosell Rosell, 25-five-year-old Spanish anarchists who helped establish the Mexican chapter of the organization upon their arrival.

² “A la juventud. A la opinión pública en general.” (September 16, 1948), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 114, Expediente 4; Agustín Comotto, *El peso de las estrellas: Vida del anarquista Octavio Alberola* (Barcelona: Rayo Verde Editorial, 2019), 67.

themselves at the expense of suffering Mexican people.” Infuriated by the Spaniard’s retort, the chief threatened to “send them to the Islas Marías,” a penal colony off the Pacific coast of Nayarit.³ When Alberola and his close friend and Mexican national, Manuel González Salazar, warned the officers that students would retaliate if they were harmed, the two were separated from their comrades and detained in an abandoned building for an additional three weeks.⁴



Figure 21: Mugshots of the detained members of the Juventudes Libertarias (left to right): Francisco Rosell Rosell, Octavio Alberola Suriñach, Manuel González, Floreal Ocaña.⁵

The disappearance of the students triggered divergent responses among Spanish exiles and Mexican citizens. Spanish refugee organizations refused to publicly condemn the Mexican government’s detention of the students, whereas leaders from Mexican labor and campesino unions wrote to the government to protest the youths’ arrests.⁶ Shortly thereafter, a lawyer representing the students’ parents accused the government of violating the Mexican Constitution by detaining the

³ Comotto, *El peso de las estrellas*, 71–72. For more on the Islas Marías penal colony, see Diego Pulido Esteva, *Las Islas Marías: Historia de una colonia penal* (Ciudad de México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2017).

⁴ Interview with Octavio Alberola, conducted by Ulises Ortega Aguilar (2009), cited in Ortega Aguilar, “Regeneración y la Federación Anarquista Mexicana,” 243–246.

⁵ AGN-DGIPS, Caja 102, Expediente 10; Caja 114, Expedientes 4, 6, 7.

⁶ Rafael Ortega C. and Nicola Llanas to Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (September 28, 1948), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 114, Expediente 4; Margarito Pérez Armenta to Ruiz Cortines (September 29, 1948), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 114, Expediente 4; Interview with Octavio Alberola, conducted by Eduardo Daniel Rodríguez Trejo, March 2015, cited in Eduardo Daniel Rodríguez Trejo, “La otra izquierda: Testimonios de una ideología olvidada, el anarquismo en México, 1931–1971” (master’s thesis, Instituto Mora, 2016), 161–162.

youths without charge.⁷ In response to these protests, DIPS Director Lamberto Peregrina Ortega published an internal memorandum suggesting that the exiles had violated Article 33 of the Constitution, which forbade foreigners from interfering in national politics.⁸ It further suggested that then Mexican president, Miguel Alemán Valdés (r. 1946–1952), was willing to pardon the students so long as they signed an agreement vowing never to interfere in national politics again. Confusingly, interrogators demanded that González, a Mexican national, also sign the document.⁹ The extralegal arrest and indefinite detention of the Spanish youths, along with the symbolic “denationalization” of a Mexican citizen, exemplified the DIPS’s broad discretionary powers to police political exiles and their supporters.

Between 1939 and 1960, the DIPS opened over 200 investigations to monitor the political activities of thousands of Spanish exiles. As state officials publicly celebrated the refugees’ assimilation into the racial and social fabric of post-revolutionary Mexican society, specific sectors of the Spanish exile arrived in Mexico. Of particular concern were exiles with known anarchist and communist affiliations, a sizeable minority of the approximately 20,000 Spaniards that sought refuge following the end of the Spanish Civil War.¹⁰ In exaggerated and often fraudulent reports, DIPS inspectors linked refugees with “undesirable” social ills such as racial degeneration, disease, criminality and social dissolution. As the history of Mexico’s treatment of immigrants confirms, such tropes were frequently attributed to non-European communities.¹¹ Less commonly, however, were

⁷ Enrique Rangel to Lamberto Ortega Peregrina (September 30, 1948), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 114, Expediente 4.

⁸ “Opinión,” memorandum from Ortega Peregrina (October 1, 1948), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 114, Expediente 4.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ The exact number of anarchists and communists that arrived from Spain is unknown. However, at least a quarter of the Spanish refugees that arrived in 1939 identified as members of the CNT and FAI, or the PCE. See Velázquez Hernández, “La otra cara del exilio,” 86.

¹¹ Yankelevich, *¿Deseables o inconvenientes?*; Hernández, *Mexican American Colonization during the Nineteenth Century*; Grace Peña Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican: Global Migration, Localism, and*

such characteristics ascribed to Spaniards, whom state officials perceived as the most assimilable due to the colonial history of racial intermixing. Yet in mid-twentieth-century Mexico, Spanish exiles that espoused internationalist sentiments were deemed, quite paradoxically, a threat to the heirs of the nation's social revolution.

This chapter contributes to a growing field of scholarship that examines the Spanish Civil War's impact on Latin American society.¹² While most studies of the Mexican state's response to the Spanish Civil War have emphasized the humanitarian significance of the country's refugee initiative, declassified surveillance records from the DIPS archive suggest that the Mexican secret police – which included DIPS operatives, the Secret Service of the Mexico City chief of police and later the Dirección Federal de Seguridad (Federal Security Directorate, DFS) – actively thwarted the refugees' integration into the country's political milieu, even after the vast majority of them had naturalized as Mexican citizens.¹³ State surveillance reports not only indicate a much more contentious relationship to the Spanish exile community than has previously been suggested, but also provide insight into Mexico's contradictory practice of publicly praising revolutionary dissidents while privately thwarting their political endeavors.

By examining state surveillance reports, refugee testimonies and materials produced by the exiles, I scrutinize the state's interpretation of anarchist and communist refugees' political motives. From their arrival under the Lázaro Cárdenas government to the early years of PRI rule, exiled

Exclusions in the U.S.–Mexico Borderlands (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012); García, *Looking Like the Enemy*; Gleizer, *Unwelcome Exiles*; Yankelevich, *Inmigración y racismo en México*; Chang, *Chino*.

¹² Patrick Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); Weld, "The Spanish Civil War and the Construction of a Reactionary Historical Consciousness in Augusto Pinochet's Chile;" Lambe, *No Barrier Can Contain It*; Weld, "The Other Door."

¹³ For discussion of the recent threats to shut down the declassified DIPS archive, see "Académicos e historiadores acusan censura en Archivo General de la Nación," *El Universal* (Mexico City), January 21, 2020; "Fraude, apertura de archivos prometidos por el AGN," *El Universal* (Mexico City), February 21, 2020.

Spanish militants conducted activities that blurred the boundaries of national and international politics. Whereas political exiles with existing ties to clandestine movements in Spain continued to support their compatriots from abroad, the migrants' children and younger refugees became radicalized by life in exile as well as through their ties to Mexican political and labor movements. As this chapter demonstrates, DIPS investigators became increasingly concerned about the integration of exiles within national dissident movements, leading to a steady increase in surveillance and repression throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Despite the Mexican secret police's efforts to thwart political bonds from emerging between Spanish and Mexican radicals, they were only partially successful in curtailing the revolutionary encounters propagated by exiles and citizens.

Lázaro Cárdenas and Mexican State Surveillance during the Spanish Civil War

The expansion of Mexico's political intelligence apparatus under the Lázaro Cárdenas presidency had subsequential consequences for the Spanish refugee population that arrived in the country in 1939. The decision to admit thousands of political refugees fleeing the Spanish conflict came at a particularly volatile moment in the consolidation of Mexican state power. A series of counter-revolutionary mobilizations – including the recent Cristero Wars (1926–1929, 1934–1936), the 1938 uprising of Saturnino Cedillo and the oppositionist candidacy of Juan Andreu Almazán in the 1940 presidential election – all tested the political control of the ruling Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (Party of the Mexican Revolution, PRM).¹⁴

¹⁴ John Sherman, "Reassessing Cardenismo: The Mexican Right and the Failure of a Revolutionary Regime, 1934–1940," *The Americas* 54, no. 3 (1998): 357–378; Navarro, *Political Intelligence and the Creation of Modern Mexico*, 13–120. Originally founded as the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (National Revolutionary Party, PNR) in 1929, the party was renamed the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana under Cárdenas' administration in 1938. The name change reflected Cárdenas' efforts to align workers, peasants, civil servants and the military under one unified political entity. However, the state's experiment in popular corporatism was short-lived. By 1946, the party would undergo yet another name change, to the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI), symbolizing a marked shift away from Cárdenas's "workers' democracy" toward an

To track potential conflicts relating to the Spanish exiles, the government utilized its growing political intelligence apparatus to monitor those that supported and opposed the refugee initiative. While the DIPS primarily monitored critics of the PRM, it also tracked the activities of sectors that were loyal to the Cárdenas administration. The most prominent supporters of the refugee initiative – the national labor organization, the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (Confederation of Mexican Workers, CTM), and the Partido Comunista Mexicano (Mexican Communist Party, PCM) – were regularly the targets of DIPS intelligence operatives. Agents patrolled public events and monitored the coalitions that formed between the Mexican Left and Spanish exile groups.¹⁵

Throughout Cárdenas's presidential term, DIPS inspectors focused on the activities of groups that were sympathetic to the refugees, but also the country's Spanish immigrant population and its reported overwhelming support for the Franco military uprising. DIPS inspectors received dozens of tips, rumors, and denunciations from Mexican civilians, labor unions, and agrarian leagues pertaining to the political activities of Spanish immigrants already residing in Mexico, most of whom were businessmen or property owners. According to Mexico's Secretariat of the Interior, up to 40,000 of the 47,000 Spanish immigrants living in Mexico prior to 1939 were members of the Falange.¹⁶ However, when the Interior Secretary tasked DIPS to investigate the alleged political affinities of Spanish émigrés, their findings ruled out hundreds of Spanish immigrants from having any ties to the organization.¹⁷ By 1939, the agency suspected that as many as 750 current Falange organizers were active throughout the country.¹⁸ Although it is difficult to discern how many

authoritarian party apparatus that centralized political authority behind the president and party officials.

¹⁵ "Eliseo Castro Reina: Su expediente como Inspector de la Oficina, Tomo 4" (January–December 1938), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 68, Expediente 4.

¹⁶ Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 164.

¹⁷ "Minutario. Comprende del 1201 al 1400" (June 13, 1939–July 7, 1939), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 40, Expediente 4.

¹⁸ "Informe de las actividades del centro que dirigen ilegalmente españoles fascistas" (April 1939), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 142, Exp. 1.

Spanish immigrants in Mexico were card-carrying *falangistas*, there was no doubt that large sectors of the Spanish colony supported the Nationalists, as was evident on March 28, 1939, when large crowds of Spanish immigrants publicly celebrated the news that Madrid had fallen into the hands of Francoist forces.¹⁹ The potential threat of the Falange's influence on both Spanish immigrants and sympathetic Mexicans granted the DIPS more than enough justification to investigate if the *falangistas* were in violation of Article 33 of the Mexican Constitution, which forbade foreigners from interfering in national politics.

DIPS investigators documented the movements, contacts, and locations of suspected *falangistas* throughout the country and beyond, going so far as monitoring news coverage in other countries to uncover the Falange's transnational political networks. Of particular value to investigators was the coverage of Spanish immigrants' ties to prominent Mexican businessmen in Mexico documented by Cuban newspapers, such as *Diario Español* and *Diario de la Marina*. For example, the *Diario Español*'s coverage of the death of Mexican entrepreneur and suspected Francoist sympathizer Manuel Escandón provided DIPS inspectors with the names of the 500 individuals that attended his funeral, including numerous members of the UNE and prestigious members of the Mexico's various Spanish cultural centers. Agents also documented an article from the Havana newspaper *Diario de la Marina*, which detailed the ties between UNE leaders in Mexico and Spanish fascists based out of Cuba.²⁰ Such coverage provided DIPS agents the opportunity to further increase their registry of suspected fascists, as well as their ties to national and international business and political contacts.²¹

As part of their reconnaissance efforts, DIPS investigators infiltrated meetings and private

¹⁹ Matesanz, *Las raíces del exilio*, 328.

²⁰ "Del *Diario de la Marina* de la Habana, Cuba de 12 de diciembre de 1938" (December 1939), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 321, Expediente 64.

²¹ "Del *Diario Español* de 5 de marzo de 1938" (March 5, 1938), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 321, Expediente 64.

events organized by *falangistas* in Mexico City. In July 1938, DIPS Inspector José M. Clavé documented a meeting of over 1,000 Spanish immigrants celebrating the second anniversary of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. With some attendees dressed in the Falange's paramilitary uniforms and with portraits of General Francisco Franco and Falange founder José Antonio Primo de Rivera adorning the hallways, attendees watched propaganda films depicting the advances of the Nationalist military in various Spanish cities. When some attendees recognized Clavé, who had been tracking Falange activities in the capital for a number of months, event organizers notified the inspector that the event was only open to Spanish citizens and explicitly prohibited its membership from speaking about politics publicly in Mexico.²²



Figure 22: *Falangistas* at the Casino Español in Mexico City, celebrating the capture of Madrid by Nationalist Forces. (March 28, 1939)²³

²² Inspector PS-15 to Humberto Amaya (July 20, 1938), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 321, Expediente 64.

²³ "Falangistas celebrant en el Casino Español la toma de Madrid por el general Francisco Franco, 1939," March 28, 1938, Mediateca Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.



Figure 23: Women from the Spanish Colony of Mexico City giving the *falangista* salute at the Casino Español. (March 28, 1939)²⁴

The Spanish immigrant community's ties to the Falange complicated the Mexican government's refugee initiative. Cárdenas appealed to the well-established patrons of Spanish immigrant cultural centers and casinos in Mexico City to assist incoming exiles to secure jobs, housing, and other basic necessities upon their arrival. Shortly after the first shipload of refugees arrived in Mexico, DIPS Inspector Clavé scheduled meetings with Spanish community leaders on behalf of the head of the Office of Population, Francisco Trejo, who hoped to procure a list of prominent Spanish businessmen located in Mexico City who could assist in securing employment for the refugees in their businesses and factories. While some Spanish leaders spoke favorably of the Mexican government's efforts to support refugees, others saw the request as retaliation from republican officials working for the Spanish Embassy who wished to harass "those of us who do not get involved in politics." Other Spanish businessowners told Inspector Clavé that they feared hiring Spanish exiles over Mexican nationals because it violated the country's labor laws and would result

²⁴"Mujeres de la Colonia Española de la Ciudad de México haciendo el saludo falangista, 1939," March 28, 1938, Mediateca Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.

in protests from Mexican labor unions. The group then suggested that, in the event that the Mexican government naturalized the refugees, they would be willing to support their compatriots.²⁵ Some leaders from the city's various Spanish cultural centers did ultimately collaborate with DIPS officials, providing them with a list of forty-one affiliates from the Orfeó Català de Mèxic and the Centro Español de México that could potentially provide jobs for the refugees.²⁶ A few weeks before the DIPS request, leaders from the Orfeó Català sent a letter to their members requesting that they provide a monthly contribution to assist their compatriots seeking exile in Mexico.²⁷ Investigations of Spanish fascist networks were also complicated by the personal motivations of DIPS agents. Inspector Clavé, who monitored Spanish immigrants' ties to both far-left and far-right organizations, seemed particularly sympathetic to the Spanish colony's reluctance to support the Mexican government's refugee initiative. His report regarding his meeting with Spanish immigrant leaders noted a deep sense of suspicion among settled Spanish immigrants of the government's support for the exiles, while also seeming to confirm their concerns regarding the "so-called refugees."²⁸ He then framed the leaders as expressing a "sincere and great enthusiasm" to cooperate with the Mexican government but defended their reluctance to assist the government. After noting the precariousness of many Spanish business operations in the country, he affirmed their alleged concerns about hiring Spaniards over Mexican employees. He concluded his report by noting that some attendees were reluctant to support the initiative due to their distrust of the Spanish Embassy's *chargé d'affaires*, José Loredó Aparicio, whom they accused of working for the Mexican government to "impose and annoy those who do not get into politics." While one leader asserted that he respected the government's efforts, he refused to comply with the request to assist the exiles "because, after all, I

²⁵ José M. Clavé to Cipriano Arriola (July 6, 1939), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 81, Expediente 4.

²⁶ José M. Clavé to Cipriano Arriola (July 7, 1939), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 81, Expediente 4.

²⁷ Petition from President Juan Sala G. and Secretary Amadeo Sors of the Orfeó Català de Mèxic, S.C.L. (June 20, 1939), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 81, Expediente 4.

²⁸ José M. Clavé to Cipriano Arriola (July 6, 1939), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 81, Expediente 4.

have much to thank this country (Mexico) that I view as if it were my own.” While Clavé never directly addressed his own views of the pro-Spanish initiative, he was abundantly suspicious of the Spanish exiles’ racial and political threats to the Mexican nation. Although working on behalf of the Cárdenas government, his views and activities as a member of the Mexican secret police seemingly aligned much more with the Mexican far right than the government’s humanitarian endeavors.

DIPS Investigations and the Making of the “Undesirable” Exile

In a July 15, 1939 memorandum, DIPS Inspector José María Clavé wrote to his superior, Director Cipriano Arriola, to alert him of the potential dangers posed by a large contingent of anarchist and communist refugees that had arrived on board the *Ipanema* six days earlier. He attached a complete list of the names and passport numbers of all 994 passengers, obtained without the refugees’ knowledge, in order to monitor their movements and activities throughout the country. Clavé’s discreet acquisition of the information, he explained, was compelled by the imminent danger the passengers posed to Mexican society.²⁹ According to the report, the ship’s captain informed Clavé of a mutiny that took place during the voyage from France, when anarchist and communist passengers threatened to kill him for being a “traitor” and for collaborating with Spanish republican officials to restrict their requests for asylum.³⁰ When the ship arrived at the Caribbean island of Martinique for repairs, French colonial authorities forcefully removed mutineers that refused to disembark. Once on land, Clavé continued, the radicals “carried out a constant Bacchanalian orgy

²⁹ Inspector PS-15 to Cipriano Arriola (July 15, 1939), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 315, Expediente 8; “Vapor ‘*Ipanema*’: Relación de pasajeros que conduce para el Puerto de Veracruz,” AGN-DGIPS, Caja 315, Expediente 10.

³⁰ The accusation emerged from claims that migration officials loyal to the Spanish republican government of Juan Negrín had purposely excluded anarchists and communists from receiving asylum in Mexico. For more on the discrepancies during the visa process, see Herrerín López, “Políticas de los anarcosindicalistas españoles exiliados en México,” Herrerín López, *El dinero del exilio*, 52–53; Velázquez Hernández, *Empresas y finanzas del exilio*, 109–112.

with the Black women of the country (the majority of [the refugees] having contracted venereal diseases), which occasioned much work to get them to return to the ship.”³¹ The radicals’ alleged violent temperaments and licentious sexual behavior, the inspector concluded, made the surveillance of the refugees’ activities and whereabouts throughout Mexico an urgent matter of national security.

The accusations of Clavé’s report to DIPS Director Arriola challenged many Cardenista officials’ claims that the refugee initiative complemented the country’s racial ideology of *mestizaje*. In their efforts to assure citizens that the refugees would easily assimilate into Mexican society, proponents of the relocation program proclaimed that the two nations’ shared history and culture would encourage racial miscegenation and intermarriage between members of Indigenous communities and exiles relocated to rural sectors of the country.³² However, the alleged sexual relations between Spanish men and Black women – and more specifically, the accusation that refugees had contracted sexually transmitted diseases from Black women – was framed as a danger to future generations of Mexicans. Though racial mixture was encouraged by the Mexican government, it sustained the belief that Afro-descendant peoples were racially inferior to mestizos, thus implying that radical refugees posed both a racial and hygienic threat to society.³³ Ultimately, the notion of disease-ridden Spanish men with radical political tendencies conjured long-standing eugenicist polemics that correlated ideology, race and hygiene with social degeneracy.³⁴

³¹ Inspector PS-15 to Arriola (July 15, 1939), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 315, Expediente 8; Hoyos Puente, *La utopía del regreso*, 125–126.

³² Piña Soría, *El presidente Cárdenas y la inmigración de españoles republicanos*, 71–72; Fagen, *Exiles and Citizens*, 33–34.

³³ Roseblatt, *The Science and Politics of Race in Mexico and the United States*, 48.

³⁴ Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp, “Cuando los extranjeros perniciosos se convierten en ciudadanos: Procesos de naturalización en México a principios del siglo XX,” *Migración y ciudadanía: Construyendo naciones en América del norte*, eds. Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp, Julián Durazo-Herrmann, Erika Pani and Catherine Vézina (Ciudad de México: El Colegio de México, 2016), 132–133; Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics*, 55–56; Yankelevich, “Mexico for the Mexicans:” 405–436.

In stark contrast to Clavé's reports, the testimonies and records of the exiles on board the *Ipanema* suggest that the inspector's allegations were fabricated. Although anarchists and communists made up a sizeable portion of the vessel's passengers, sources and testimonies from passengers on the boat made no reference to attacks or conflicts during the voyage.³⁵ For instance, a daily newspaper published aboard the ship provided reports of the passengers' activities and discussions, including a detailed description of their short stay in Martinique. "Both the authorities and civilian population of Martinique interacted with our people with a love and reverence that well merits our heartfelt gratitude," the article asserted. Local vendors offered the travelers free refreshments, fruit, sweets and tobacco, as others questioned the exiles about the perils of the Spanish Civil War. The author concluded by sending an "enthusiastic and Latino shout to freedom for all nations, big and small, which, united, work for a rebirth of love and justice that is capable of ending at once the differentiation of races and the tyranny of ... imperialism."³⁶ Written and edited by representatives from republican, socialist, communist, anarchist and regionalist factions, the newspaper's lack of reporting on the alleged incident raises the question as to the validity of Clavé's claims. What is more, testimonies from passengers aboard the *Ipanema* make no mention of violent incidents nor "illicit" activities between passengers and Martinique residents. On the contrary, those aboard the *Ipanema* recalled the camaraderie between passengers of various political factions and their lively discussions about Spain, international politics and their aspirations to contribute to Cárdenas's revolutionary reforms.³⁷ While these accounts did not bear out the claims made by the Mexican

³⁵ While the CNT report to Cárdenas stated that approximately 71% of the *Ipanema*'s passengers were anarchists and communists, Velázquez Hernández's review of visa statistics indicates that anarchist and communist heads of household comprised approximately 36% of the boat's passengers. See Germinal Esглеas, Federica Montseny and Roberto Alfonso to Cárdenas, (August 1, 1939) AGN-LCR, Caja 908, Expediente 546.6/212-14 (Legajo 3), 112; Velázquez-Hernández, "La otra cara del exilio," 86–88.

³⁶ "Espirtu de libertad," *Ipanema: Diario de abordo* (June 27, 1939).

³⁷ Ibid.; Interview with Antonio Navarro, 128–134; Interview with Ricardo Mestre Ventura, conducted by Enrique Sandoval (1988), DEH-INAH, PHO/10/99, Tomo 2, 428–434.

secret police, the refugees' declarations of racial equality, anti-imperialism and expanding revolutionary reforms challenged the state's views of the exiles as assimilable, docile subjects.

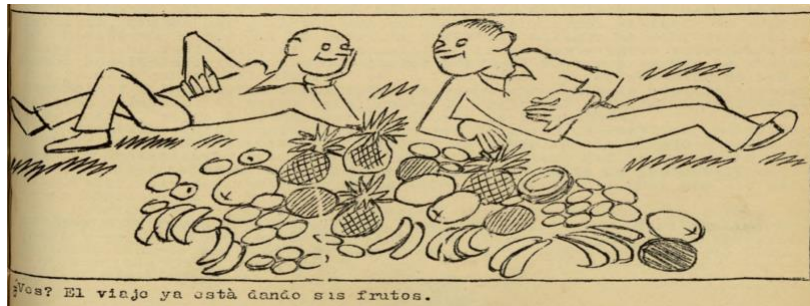


Figure 24: Illustration in the newspaper *Ipanema* depicting the refugees' experiences in Martinique. The caption reads: "You see? The trip is already paying off (literal translation, "bearing fruit")."³⁸

As a consequence of Clavé's claims that anarchist and communist exiles coordinated a mutiny on board the *Ipanema*, subsequent DIPS investigations differentiated the alleged criminal tendencies of the two factions. Although decades of state repression had virtually extinguished all sedentary anarchist movements in Mexico, state intelligence officials grew increasingly worried about the rapid growth of the PCM and the growing influence of the Soviet Union in geopolitics.³⁹ Whereas DIPS inspectors accused Spanish communist exiles of colluding with the Soviet Union, investigations of anarchists focused on allegedly criminal, rather than political, acts. In both instances, exiles affiliated with Spain's revolutionary Left were distinguished from their republican compatriots as subversive threats to national order.

Even as Lázaro Cárdenas publicly called for the protection of all refugees, regardless of their political affiliations, the views and actions of DIPS investigators demonstrate the variance in putting

³⁸ *Ipanema: Diario de abordo*, June 27, 1939.

³⁹ The influence of anarchists in Mexico's labor and political movements was hampered by the deportation of Spanish anarchist émigrés who were critical participants of the Mexican libertarian movement prior to the Spanish Civil War. See Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class*, 156–177; Spenser, *Stumbling Its Way Through Mexico*, 99–107. For more on communist movements during the Cárdenas years, see Barry Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 47–62; Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico*.

these policies into practice. As scholars have shown, Cardenista policies did not embody a monolithic ideological tendency, but rather an array of local, regional and national interests consolidated under the banner of the ruling party.⁴⁰ With the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 and the looming presidential election of 1940, DIPS agents and other intelligence agencies wielded considerable influence in the policing of immigrants suspected of espionage. While Aaron Navarro rightly asserts the DIPS reports had to be plausible in order for the president and other officials to act on their recommendations, the need for plausibility did not make them impervious to the biases and limitations of the agency's inspectors.⁴¹ The secret police's reconnaissance thus served as incomplete mosaics of complicated social, cultural and political relations that allegedly posed a threat to national stability. In coordination with other government officials, the Spanish republican government in exile and state-backed labor and political organizations, DIPS agents shaped the ways in which subsequent administrations distinguished between "desirable" and "undesirable" refugees.

Communist Refugees and the Limits of State Surveillance

As global conflicts overshadowed Mexico's internal political turmoil, anxieties over the presence of Spanish communist exiles throughout the country garnered much of the intelligence operatives' attention. The outbreak of the Second World War and the signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact of Nonaggression coincided with a rightward shift within the Mexican government under President Manuel Ávila Camacho (r. 1940–1946), who swept back many of the Cárdenas government's radical reforms and expanded the DIPS's role in monitoring political dissidents with

⁴⁰ For more on Cardenismo, see Knight, "Cardenismo: Juggernaut or Jalopy?:" 73–107; Fallaw, *Cárdenas Compromised*.

⁴¹ Navarro, *Political Intelligence and the Creation of Modern Mexico*, 6–7.

ties to the Soviet Union and the Axis powers.⁴² In a joint effort with the United States' Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), DIPS operatives detained Axis nationals suspected of espionage, imprisoning them in a former military fortress which served as an internment camp throughout the war.⁴³ While émigrés from the Axis nations were heavily monitored by the Mexican secret police, Spanish communist refugees' activities were also regularly surveilled by intelligence operatives.⁴⁴ As the political biases of DIPS inspectors and the agency's coordination with US intelligence operatives demonstrate, wartime anxieties prompted new investigations into the Spanish exiles' role in the spread of communism and possible Soviet collaboration.

Two years before Mexico's official entrance into the Second World War, rumors of Soviet espionage had already emerged within the DIPS. In August 1940, just days before the assassination of Leon Trotsky by Spanish Soviet agent Ramón Mercader, Inspector Clavé warned Director Arriola that "reliable sources" had notified him of a new "Stalinist organization" being established by exiled members of the Partido Comunista de España residing in Mexico.⁴⁵ In spite of scant details, the

⁴² Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*, 93–96; Tanalís Padilla, "Rural Education, Political Radicalism, and Normalista Identity in Mexico after 1940," in *Dictablanda*, 341–359.

⁴³ Before serving as an internment camp during the Second World War, the San Carlos Fortress in Perote, Veracruz, was used as a temporary refugee center for recently arrived Spanish exiles in 1939. See Inclán Fuentes, *Perote y los Nazis*. For more on the treatment of Axis nationals in Mexico during the Second World War, see García, *Looking Like the Enemy*; Chew, *Uprooting Community*.

⁴⁴ For more on the FBI's covert counter-intelligence activities in Mexico and Latin America during the Second World War, see Federal Bureau of Investigation, *History of the Special Intelligence Service of the Federal Bureau of Investigations*, vol. 4 (Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1947), 471–511; María Emilia Paz, *Strategy, Security, and Spies: Mexico and the U.S. as Allies in World War II* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); Martha K. Huggins, *Political Policing: The United States and Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 58–78; Marc Becker, *The FBI in Latin America: The Ecuador Files* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

⁴⁵ During the first assassination attempt against Trotsky, 30 people were detained in connection to the crime, including a number of Spanish exiles. The testimonies of those detained would ultimately lead police to another Mexican veteran of the Civil War and Soviet agent, the famed muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros. While Trotsky's assassin, Ramón Mercader, was a Spanish communist and Soviet agent, he had no direct ties to Spanish communist exiles. Mercader entered Mexico using a forged US passport under the name of a deceased US volunteer of the International Brigades. Upon being arrested, he spoke only in French and claimed to be a Belgian Trotskyist. Nonetheless, Lázaro Cárdenas condemned the Mexican Communist Party for the assassination and stated that Spanish

informant claimed that “GPU agents,” members of Soviet Russia’s secret police, had entered the country to relay “direct orders from Moscow” to the Catalan leftist leader and alleged Comintern agent, Joan Comorera i Soler.⁴⁶ Along with Comorera was another GPU agent, an unnamed Spanish woman who worked as the secretary of the chief of police in Barcelona and provided the Soviets’ intelligence during the Civil War.⁴⁷ Though little else was known of the alleged plot, the claim furthered suspicions of a Soviet incursion into Mexican politics.

Two months later, Clavé suggested that the new organization was in fact a merger between sectors of the Mexican and Spanish communist parties. According to the informant, Comorera instructed the Mexican and Spanish recruits to destroy all evidence of their connection to their respective communist parties. This included exchanging their party membership cards emblazoned with hammers and sickles for new ones that lacked any discernible reference to their party affiliation. Interestingly, Clavé’s informant did not elaborate as to why members were issued new cards, despite the cell’s anonymity being of the utmost importance. Nevertheless, the informant notified Clavé that 5,000 new membership cards were printed by Pedro Martínez Cartón, a Spanish typographer and former lieutenant colonel in the Spanish republican army.⁴⁸

Perhaps more alarming to Clavé’s superior was the report’s claim that the newly merged group was closely aligned to many of the leftist organizations most loyal to the PRM under

refugee communists had violated their promise to avoid political conflicts in their host country. See Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 199–200; Rubén Gallo, “Who Killed Leon Trotsky?,” *The Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 75, no. 1 (2013): 112–18; Smith, *The Power and Politics of Art in Postrevolutionary Mexico*, 110–114.

⁴⁶ In 1934, the State Political Directorate (known by its Russian acronym, GPU) merged into the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD). Mexican intelligence reports used both acronyms to describe Soviet espionage, despite the fact that the GPU technically no longer existed as an entity. As the DIPS archival catalogue’s references to Soviet ties to the Spanish refugees consistently used the older acronym, I use the older acronym for clarity with the documents.

⁴⁷ Inspector PS-15 to Arriola (August 16, 1940), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 81, Expediente 5; Inspector PS-15 to Arriola (August 17, 1940), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 81, Expediente 5.

⁴⁸ Inspector PS-15 to Arriola (October 8, 1940), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 81, Expediente 5, 168.

Cárdenas. According to the report, the Sindicato de Artes Gráficas (Graphic Arts Union) was providing military training for members of the PCM as well as the CTM. “Workers’ militias,” as John Lear notes, were established by Mexican communists, labor leaders and artists, in the style of Spain’s Popular Front, to “defend ‘the conquests of the [Mexican] Revolution’” from the rise of fascism at home.⁴⁹ Although various unions provided military training for their members and stockpiled weapons in union halls during the late 1930s, most had focused on symbolic acts of solidarity in the visual culture of the union federation’s artwork and propaganda.⁵⁰

In contrast to these past endeavors, Clavé’s informant suggested that the CTM and PCE were stockpiling arms and hand grenades manufactured in an agricultural colony established for Spanish exiles in Santa Clara, Chihuahua. The group had also allegedly stolen dynamite from a nearby construction site and acquired additional contraband smuggled across the Mexican–US border by the militant socialist and reputed Soviet agent, Santiago Garcés Arroyo.⁵¹ The accusations of the transborder movements of Soviet-backed agents and weapons smuggling reinforced the DIPS’s characterization of left-wing Spanish exiles as abusing the country’s humanitarian gesture by subverting national politics. Ironically, Clavé seemingly omitted that, following rumors of a forthcoming military uprising before the 1940 presidential elections, the Mexican government requested that the refugees at Santa Clara assist in quelling any attempts to overthrow the government. For three weeks, the women and children of the colony were sent to Torreón and a general from the military came to the colony to distribute arms to the men in case an insurrection broke out in Chihuahua.⁵² As noted at the beginning of this study, Spanish refugees were regularly

⁴⁹ Lear, *Picturing the Proletariat: Artists and Labor in Revolutionary Mexico*, 244–255.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 245–253.

⁵¹ Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism*, 252, 260–265; Julius Ruiz, *The “Red Terror” and the Spanish Civil War: Revolutionary Violence in Madrid* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 299–300.

⁵² Interview with Antonio Navarro, 207–210.

called upon by the Cárdenas government to “defend the Mexican Revolution,” which included the prospects of taking up arms against counterrevolutionaries or military defectors. From the perspective of Clavé, such gestures of solidarity and—in the case of naturalized exiles— patriotism, were irrelevant.

As a result of Clavé’s allegations, DIPS agents began to monitor the activities of Spanish refugees, particularly those accused of having led the communist parties’ merger. Inspectors developed profiles of members of the PCE’s political bureau in exile, such as Pedro Martínez Cartón, Antonio Mije and Vicente Uribe, as they were deemed critical actors in the newly formed clandestine cell.⁵³ Of particular interest was the Spanish communist exile Margarita Nelken and her ties to Mexican radical networks and other known affiliates of the Comintern. Although Nelken was not a member of the party’s political bureau, she was a relentless organizer, writer and regular speaker at the Mexican leftist rallies. Inspectors routinely followed Nelken’s visitors from her residence in Lomas de Chapultepec to the homes of other PCE members and their Mexican contacts. Authorities also monitored Nelken’s frequent travel outside the country, including a trip to Cuba funded by the Servicio de Evacuación de los Refugiados Españoles. By May of 1942, intelligence operatives were also tracking Nelken’s family members, including her daughter Magda, a member of the Mexican anti-fascist organization, the Partido Anti-Sinarquista (Anti-Synarchist Party). Nelken’s husband, Martín de Paul, also came under surveillance due to his frequent contributions to the Spanish refugee journals, *Hoy* and *Seneca*. Even though de Paul published pieces that applauded the Mexican state’s solidarity with the Spanish exile community and its resistance

⁵³ Inspector PS-15 to Arriola (October 8, 1940), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 81, Expediente 5; Inspector PS-12 to Arriola (February 6, 1941), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 315, Expediente 11; Inspector PS-12 to Arriola (February 13, 1941), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 317, Expediente 10.

against transnational fascism, state operatives continued to monitor his connections to several anti-fascist groups.⁵⁴

Despite DIPS inspectors' extensive surveillance of Spanish communist leaders and their knowledge of the communist parties' merger, collaborations between rank-and-file Spanish refugees and the Mexican Left went largely undetected. With no record of the communist parties' merger in their historical archives, the only substantive information on the quotidian activities of Spanish and Mexican communists exists in interviews conducted with exiles. Between 1940 and 1943, Spanish communist militants joined their Mexican counterparts in their efforts to organize workplaces and communities throughout the country. Ramón Guillot Jordana, for example, was a cabinetmaker and an active member of Catalan leftist parties during the Civil War before joining the PCM shortly after his arrival in Mexico in 1939. Guillot was quickly assigned to a "troika" comprised of Spanish exiles that coordinated bi-weekly training with communist teachers and artists in Pachuca, Hidalgo.⁵⁵ Lino Sánchez Portela, another PCE member, was recruited by PCM General Secretary Dionisio Encina to open a medical clinic for a mining union in Torreón, Coahuila. There, he provided free medical services during a three-month strike against American Smelting.⁵⁶

While some exiles were open about their collaborations with the PCM, others remained silent about their roles and responsibilities within the organization. For example, Julio Luelmo supported the PCE's merger with the Mexican communists but was reluctant to discuss his role in the PCM even decades after the fact. He admitted to working at the Universidad Obrera de México (Workers' University of Mexico), an institution established by the CTM's leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano, but when asked to elaborate, he refused to speak on the record about his time as a party

⁵⁴ "Refugiados españoles: Actividades comunistas que desarrollan algunos de ellos" (February 1941), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 315, Expediente 11.

⁵⁵ Interview with Ramón Guillot Jordana, conducted by Dolores Pla Brugat (1979), INAH-DEH, PHO/10/47, 217–219.

⁵⁶ Interview with Lino Sánchez Portela, 74–94.

militant.⁵⁷ Exiles' silences did not necessarily implicate a clandestine Soviet conspiracy, but rather an ongoing effort to navigate the increasingly rigid boundaries defined as engagement in national politics by Mexican officials. Along with fears that their actions would negatively affect other asylum seekers, many rank-and-file exiles upheld the veneer of non-engagement as a means to continue their political work in a context in which political intelligence officials routinely scrutinized party leaders.⁵⁸ In other instances, exiles' reluctance to speak openly about their activities was in an effort to protect their host nation from allegations of collusion in the overthrow of the Franco regime.

Despite some communist militants' engagement in Mexican national politics, others focused their attention on the ongoing suffering of their compatriots in Spain. Enriqueta and Rómulo García Salcedo, active members of the PCE during the Civil War, took up Cárdenas' offer to naturalize as Mexican citizens and subsequently joined the PCM rather than remaining members of the PCE. Whereas exiles like Luelmo immersed themselves into the PCM's national campaigns, this couple instead focused their efforts on providing resources for refugees who returned to Spain to join clandestine resistance cells.⁵⁹ The couple also hosted fundraisers and sent clothes back to Spain through a subsidiary of the PCE, the Unión de Mujeres Antifascistas (Union of Anti-Fascist Women).⁶⁰ For Enriqueta and Rómulo, the party merger was largely symbolic, with Mexican militants focusing on national issues and Spanish refugees working toward the needs of their

⁵⁷ In the transcription of Elena Aub's interview with Luelmo, she notes that three pages of testimony on his activities in the PCM were redacted upon his request. Interview with Julio Luelmo, 95–100.

⁵⁸ Interviews conducted with rank-and-file members of exiled revolutionary organizations reveal an unwillingness to discuss their connections to clandestine transnational political movements, even decades after the events took place. Sebastiaan Faber has rightly described these "silences and taboos" as a form of both collective trauma and self-censorship caused by fear of appearing disloyal to the Mexican nation, its citizens and exiled Spanish republicans. See Sebastiaan Faber, "Silencios y tabúes del exilio español en México: Historia oficial vs. historia oral," *Espacio, Tiempo, y Forma: Serie V, Historia Contemporánea*, 17 (2005): 373–389.

⁵⁹ Dolors Marín Silvestre, *Clandestinos: El maquis contra el franquismo, 1934–1945* (Barcelona: Plaza y Janés Editores, 2002).

⁶⁰ Interview with Rómulo García Salcedo, 86–89.

community. “Although we felt Mexican,” Rómulo explained in an interview conducted in 1980, “there is a Spanish background that is impossible to deny or sweep away.”⁶¹ The DIPS’s focus on the PCE’s leadership provided rank-and-file militants the space to engage in activities beyond the confines of national and international distinctions. These efforts, however, were constrained by the unspoken restrictions posed by their ambiguous legal status as both exiles and naturalized citizens.

As the Soviet Union became an increasingly important ally in the fight against the Axis Powers, its decision to dissolve the Comintern in May 1943 brought the PCM–PCE merger to an abrupt and unceremonious end. Shortly thereafter, the PCM’s efforts to build a coalition with the country’s national labor confederation dissolved after a series of expulsions of party members closely aligned with the CTM’s leader, Vicente Lombardo Toledano.⁶² The PCE explicitly turned its attention away from coordinating projects with Mexican leftist groups and instead shifted its support to clandestine resistance movements in Spain. Though the dissolution of the PCM–PCE collaboration dispelled certain fears of Soviet espionage, DIPS investigations of communist leaders from both parties continued well into the post-war era.

Anarchist Refugees, Political Violence, and the Criminalization of Dissent

In contrast to government surveillance of communists, which emphasized the threat of Soviet influence in national politics, secret police investigations of anarchist refugee activities were described explicitly as criminal acts, devoid of any political intention. DIPS agents coordinated with various state-supported organizations, including the CTM, to distinguish anarchist exiles from ‘desired’ political asylum seekers affiliated with republican and socialist factions in Spain. The distinction was not new: throughout the Civil War, factions of the Popular Front that wished to

⁶¹ Ibid., 88.

⁶² Ibid., 120–112.

preserve the Spanish republican government regularly thwarted the revolutionary aspirations of anarchist groups. Although the Mexican government publicly lauded Spain's anarchist revolutionaries during the conflict, Mexican intelligence operatives exploited the factional divisions that pitted Spanish loyalists against one another to criminalize anarchist exiles.⁶³

On December 26, 1941, four members of the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (Iberian Anarchist Federation, FAI) robbed a payroll truck outside of the Cervecería Modelo brewery in Mexico City, leading to a bloody shoot-out among the assailants, the truck driver and local police. Founded by Spanish immigrants in 1925, the Cervecería Modelo had long been a site of labor and political unrest, in part because of its owners' suspected sympathies with the Franco regime.⁶⁴ Though three of the attackers were able to escape, the aftermath left one FAI militant and the truck's driver dead, with several other bystanders and police officers severely wounded. Five days later, the secret service of Mexico City's chief of police arrested two of the accomplices and discovered the apartment hideout of the purported leader of the armed robbery, Mariano Sánchez Añón. After yet another shoot-out with authorities, a wounded Sánchez Añón chose to commit suicide rather than be captured.⁶⁵

The use of armed violence to achieve political means was not uncommon for anarchist militants in Spain. Founded in 1927, the FAI rejected the mass organizational model of the anarcho-syndicalist Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labor, CNT) and instead formed clandestine political networks, or *grupos de afinidad* (affinity groups). Comprised

63 For more on ideological divisions during the Spanish Civil War, see Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism*; Evans, *Revolution and the State*.

64 "Falange Española" (October 8, 1942), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 741, Expediente 17; Carlos Herrero Bervera, *Los empresarios mexicanos de origen vasco y el desarrollo del capitalismo en México, 1880–1950* (México, D.F.: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2004), 203–209; Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War*, 156.

65 "Fueron detenidos otros dos de los tenebrosos asaltantes al sub-pagador de 'La Modelo'," *El Popular* (Mexico City), January 2, 1942.

largely of young, unskilled working-class men, anarchist affinity groups engaged in bank robberies, political assassinations and community defense forces when outlawed from participating in formal political and labor spheres during the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera (r. 1923–1930). Both the Primo de Rivera dictatorship and Spanish republican officials characterized the CNT's and the FAI's activities as the seditious crimes of bomb-wielding terrorists. Nevertheless, many sectors of the Spanish working class viewed the *grupistas'* tactics as cathartic acts of retribution against the military dictatorship and the 'authoritarian' characteristics of the Second Spanish Republic.⁶⁶ As Clara E. Lida suggests of their nineteenth-century ideological forebears, clandestine anarchist activities were a "premeditated, practical, rational, and effective response to legalized violence and repression."⁶⁷ During the Second Republic, as moderate sectors of the anarchist movement distanced themselves from clandestine acts of violence, CNT and FAI militants maintained a great deal of popular support among people disillusioned by the republican government's ongoing suppression of radical movements composed of migrant workers, the unemployed, tenants and other urban-based labor sectors.⁶⁸ However, these methods and political aspirations made them controversial figures in Spain as well as in Mexico.

Interestingly, the most severe condemnations of the FAI's 1941 attack on the Cervecería Modelo came from members of the Spanish exile community and the Mexican Left. Throughout January 1942, the CTM's daily periodical *El Popular* covered the secret police's ongoing criminal investigations of the Spanish anarchist refugee community. Published almost exclusively in the

⁶⁶ Ealham, *Class, Culture, and Conflict in Barcelona*, 48–53, 130–131; Julián Vadillo Muñoz, *Historia de la CNT: Utopía, pragmatismo, y revolución* (Madrid: Los Libros de la Catarata, 2019); Julián Vadillo Muñoz, *Historia de la FAI: El anarquismo organizado* (Madrid: Los Libros de la Catarata, 2021).

⁶⁷ Clara E. Lida, "Los discursos de la clandestinidad en el anarquismo del XIX," *Historia Social*, 17 (1993): 65.

⁶⁸ Ealham, *Class, Culture, and Conflict in Barcelona*, 121–129; Pamela Beth Radcliff, *From Mobilization to Civil War: The Politics of Polarization in the Spanish City of Gijón, 1900–1937* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 183–194.

paper's "Policía" section, the coverage of the case shared headlines with murders, suicides and other acts of criminal violence. Similar to the sensationalist and gory accounts of crime covered in Mexico's *nota roja* (red note) newspapers, *El Popular*'s detailed description of the harrowing shoot-out between FAI militant Sánchez Añón and secret service officers included a graphic image of the anarchist's bullet-riddled body and an earlier photograph of Sánchez Añón in a double-breasted suit reminiscent of the era's depiction of gangsters.⁶⁹ The paper also suggested that two women detained at the hideout – Sánchez Añón's "young lover," the 18-year-old María Mersele, and her close friend, 30-year-old Juana Bailó Mendoza – condoned the men's crimes and touted the leader's suicide as a heroic act fitting for a revolutionary man. Recalling the moment Mersele was notified of her lover's death, the article claimed that 'she screamed at the secret service agents with all of her heart, "this is how men die!" Under a photo depicting the two young women holding toddlers, the article noted the "cynical smile of Juana ... who [looks like she is] in the mood to celebrate' the martyrdom of Sánchez Añón and his attacks against the agents of the state. With no reference to the attack having any political motivations, the article concluded by noting the secret service agents' ongoing investigations of 'the now sadly celebrated Sánchez Añón, the criminal gangster of the Federación Anarquista [Ibérica].'⁷⁰ Thus, the author corroborated the Mexican secret police's endeavors to portray anarchists as 'gangsters' while ignoring the FAI's intentions to attack industrialists with well-known ties to Spanish fascist movements in Mexico.

⁶⁹ "Fueron detenidos otros dos de los tenebrosos asaltantes al sub-pagador de 'La Modelo'," *El Popular*, January 2, 1942; For more on the *nota roja* genre in Mexican society and culture, see Pablo Piccato, "Written in Black and Red: Murder as a Communicative Act in Mexico," in *The Politics of Violence in Latin America*, ed. Pablo Policzer (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2019), 89–91.

⁷⁰ "Fueron detenidos otros dos de los tenebrosos asaltantes al sub-pagador de 'La Modelo'," *El Popular*, January 2, 1942.



Figure 25: (Above) Photos of Mariano Sánchez Añón published in *El Popular*. (Below) Photo of María Mersele (left), Juana Bailó Mendoza (right) with Mexico City Secret Police officer and Mersele's and Bailó's children.⁷¹

Three weeks after the initial shoot-out, authorities had arrested nine men and three women accused of being accomplices in the Cervecería Modelo attack. The charges against them included homicide, assault, attempted robbery, obstruction, perjury and criminal association, as well as the use

⁷¹ *El Popular*, January 2, 1952.

and concealment of prohibited firearms.⁷² During the indefinite detention of Luis Cara Sabio, who was accused of being a member of Sánchez Añón's "gang" responsible for the Cervecería Modelo incident and also an attack on a relief organization run by the Spanish republican government in exile, he claimed under interrogation that FAI members had threatened to kill him if he refused to join their group. As Cara Sabio repeatedly declared his innocence to his interrogators, he informed them that the other suspects were allegedly well known to police in Barcelona. Another detainee, Margarito Jiménez Contla, was also interrogated by secret service agents for an undisclosed period of time. After he submitted a confession, reporters noted, the visibly distraught Jiménez asked not to be interrogated any further and to be left alone.⁷³ Even as reporters heralded the police's capture of the band of anarchists, they alluded to the fact that the confession may have been obtained through torture. Yet as a consequence of the police's heavy-handed tactics, the interrogations produced a wealth of information on an alleged criminal enterprise comprised of Spanish and Mexican anarchists, as well as a detailed account of the alleged crimes conducted by FAI militants in Spain.⁷⁴

⁷² "Fueron consignados a las cortes penales los asaltantes españoles," *El Popular: Sección Policía*, January 17, 1942.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ For more details on the FAI shoot-out at the Cervecería Modelo and its impact on the Mexican anarchist movement, see Ortega Aguilar, "Regeneración y la Federación Anarquista Mexicana, 1952–1960."



Figure 26: Photos of the alleged Sánchez Anón “Gang” and the individuals that identified them. Published in the “Policía” section of *El Popular*.⁷⁵

Responses to the Cervecería Modelo attack from the Spanish refugee community invoked many of the same disagreements on tactics and strategies that had emerged between different political and labor movements during the Spanish Civil War. On December 30, 1941, the assistant secretary of the Mexico City-based Federación de Organismos de Ayuda a los Republicanos Españoles (Federation of Spanish Republican Aid Organizations, FOARE), Luís P. Maya, cabled President Ávila Camacho to condemn the deaths of brewery employees and pleaded that authorities avoid apprehending refugees of “clean conduct.”⁷⁶ Despite the efforts of Spanish republican groups to distance themselves from the incident, a number of exiles unaffiliated with anarchist groups were

⁷⁵ *El Popular*, January 2, 1942.

⁷⁶ Luis P. Maya to Manuel Ávila Camacho (January 3, 1942), Archivo General de la Nación-Manuel Ávila Camacho (hereafter AGN-MAC), Caja 669, Expediente 541/422.

also victims of secret police raids. On January 9, 1942, Concepción Majoral wrote an urgent plea to the president on behalf of her husband, Edilberto Colón, who was detained by Mexico City police during a series of raids following the attack at the Cervecería Modelo. Like many exiles, Colón had found work at the factory following his arrival in Mexico in June 1939. Majoral insisted that her husband was wrongfully accused of being an anarchist and said that, in fact, in Spain he had been a member of the Unión General de Trabajadores (General Union of Workers, UGT), a trade union federation closely aligned with the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, PSOE).⁷⁷ President Ávila Camacho's personal secretary forwarded Majoral's petition to the general prosecutor's office the following day, although an exact outcome is not known. However, other refugees accused of connections to the attack did not receive such support from the Mexican government.⁷⁸ Police also raided the apartment of Ramón Guillot Jordana, one of the refugees who joined the PCM upon his arrival. He shared a residence with other refugees who worked in a factory owned by the exiled Spanish republican government. During the raid, officers destroyed all of the men's possessions and confiscated the documentation relating to their asylum status – an act that deliberately stripped the refugees of their legal right to political asylum. The loss of their immigration records put the men in a particularly precarious position, as documentation was necessary for them to claim refugee status within Mexico and to receive pensions from the Spanish government in exile for their service during the Civil War. Fortunately for Guillot, his military identification card was catalogued at a relief organization's office, allowing him to continue receiving his pension.⁷⁹ The Mexican secret police's heavy-handed treatment of exiles of various political affiliations went

⁷⁷ Cable from Concepción Majoral to Ávila Camacho (January 9, 1942), AGN-MAC, Caja 669, Expediente 541/424.

⁷⁸ Cable from Jesús González Gallo to Majoral (January 10, 1942) AGN-MAC, Caja 669, Expediente 541/242.

⁷⁹ Interview with Ramón Guillot Jordana, 122–123.

unmentioned in the CTM's newspaper and the Spanish republican press, thus reinforcing the exiles' silence as they faced continued persecution.

As Spanish exiles of all political spectrums emphatically denounced the Cervecería Modelo incident as a "scandalous criminal act," Mexican anarchists condemned the government's broader crackdown on anti-authoritarian groups that had no ties to the FAI. Writing on behalf of the Juventudes Libertarias (Libertarian Youth) of San Luis Potosí, Evaristo Contreras published a flyer rejecting the association between the FAI and the greater anarchist community, and instead condemned the Mexican secret police's torture and extralegal imprisonment of Mexican anarchists, Spanish refugees and radical immigrants throughout the country. More pressing than the FAI's activities, Contreras declared, was the erosion of democratic values in Mexican society, as police officers forced detainees to make false confessions.⁸⁰ Despite the government's crackdown on exiles of various political affinities, Spanish republican and Mexican leftist organizations reinforced the state's framing of the Cervecería Modelo incident as a purely criminal act. This rhetoric would become a hallmark tactic of the Mexican government's suppression of subsequent dissident movements as agents of "social dissolution."

Anarchist Exile Activities in Cold War Mexico

The repression of anarchist political activities continued under the presidency of Miguel Alemán Valdés. Prior to serving as interior minister during the presidency of Ávila Camacho, Alemán was highly regarded as the former governor of Veracruz, where his wife aided Spanish

⁸⁰ Juventudes Libertarias de San Luis Potosí, "El imperativo de la hora: Un llamado a los anarquistas del país," Document 25 (1942), Biblioteca Virtual Atorcha, www.antorcha.net/biblioteca_virtual/politica/fac/fac25.html, accessed 25 September 2020; "Carta al Señor Presidente, 29 de diciembre de 1941," *El Popular*, January 5, 1942.

refugee children during the Civil War.⁸¹ The Mexican Left and various Spanish exile sectors supported Alemán's 1946 presidential campaign in the hopes that he would encourage the victorious allied powers to liberate Spain from Franco's control.⁸² Such hopes never materialized, and instead Alemán's government flirted with re-establishing economic and cultural relations with Francoist Spain. At the same time, his administration systematically suppressed his left-wing supporters and purged the state-controlled labor confederations of any radical dissidents.⁸³ A far cry from his past support of the Spanish refugee cause, Alemán's heavy-handed policies antagonized many militant exiles and led to an increase in clandestine political activities.

As exiled republican government officials looked to international sanctions and diplomacy to combat the Franco regime, radical sectors of the Spanish refugee community chose to directly intervene in Mexico's efforts to re-establish ties with Francoist Spain. On February 20, 1950, the Spanish anarchist Gabriel Fleitas Rouco assassinated the Spanish diplomat José Gallostra y Coello de Portugal as the latter stepped out of his Mexico City office. Due to the lack of formal relations between Mexico and Spain, Franco had sent Gallostra as an "extraofficial" representative to discuss the prospects of reopening commercial and travel relations with the Alemán government.⁸⁴ However, following the discovery of a manuscript in Gallostra's possession deploying Spanish fascist tropes of Mexicans' racial inferiority, public opinion turned in favor of the jailed assassin. In

⁸¹ Ryan M. Alexander, *Sons of the Mexican Revolution: Miguel Alemán and His Generation* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2016), 49.

⁸² "Apretemos files en torno de la candidatura de Miguel Alemán para llevar adelante la lucha por la independencia de México," *La Voz de México* (September 16, 1945); "Nuestro saludo al Sr. Presidente de la República Mexicana," *España Popular* (December 6, 1946); Jones, *The War Has Brought Peace to Mexico*; Lear, *Picturing the Proletariat*, 261–310.

⁸³ Alegre, *Railroad Radicals in Cold War Mexico*, 40–42; Patrick Iber, "Managing Mexico's Cold War: Vicente Lombardo Toledano and the Uses of Political Intelligence," *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 19, no. 1 (2013): 11–19; William A. Booth, "Hegemonic Nationalism, Subordinate Marxism: The Mexican Left, 1945–1947," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 50, no. 1 (2018): 31–58.

⁸⁴ "José Gallostra Coello de Portugal: Español. 1950 – Informes sobre su muerte," AGN-DGIPS, Caja 112, Expediente 25; "Ha sido asesinado en Méjico el representante de España, Don José Gallostra Coello de Portugal" and "Para ellos, la guerra no ha terminado," *ABC* (February 22, 1950).

an interview conducted with journalists, Fleitas was praised when he explained to journalists that his actions were based on the insults Gallostra voiced against the Mexican people and the Spanish exiles.⁸⁵

The revelations not only saved Fleitas from extradition to Spain, but also led many on the Mexican Left to demand Alemán invoke Article 33 of the Constitution and purge the country of Spanish immigrants loyal to Franco.⁸⁶ It should be noted that, despite Gallostra's animosity towards the Mexican government and ties to the pro-Francoist Sinarquista movement and the right-wing Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party, PAN), the DIPS never condemned his meddling into Mexican national politics.⁸⁷ Following a "thorough investigation" of known communist groups and hang-outs in Mexico City, a confidential DIPS report ruled out the possibility that Fleitas was acting on behalf of any national or foreign communist parties. Instead, the agency suggested that Fleitas' actions reflected the criminal behavior associated with "all Spanish refugees and those with extremist ideals."⁸⁸ Although the assassination extinguished Mexico's attempts to reconcile relations

⁸⁵ "Revelador documento del diplomático franquista," *La Prensa* (Mexico City) March 10, 1950; "Fleitas Rouco reafirma que Gallostra ofendió a México," *La Prensa*, 11 March 1950, clippings found in AGN-DGIPS, Caja 112, Expediente 25; "Pausas del camino: Gallostra y los mexicanos," *Excelsior* (March 13, 1950) clipping also in AGN-DGIPS, Caja 112, Expediente 25; Ricardo Pérez Montfort, "La mirada ofensiva de la Hispanidad: México en los informes del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores franquista, 1940–1950," in *México y España en el primer franquismo, 1939–1950*, 109.

⁸⁶ "Fleitas Rouco reafirma que Gallostra ofendió a México," *La Prensa*, March 11, 1950; "La autenticidad del documento insultante de Gallostra fue comprobado por la procuraduría" and "Provoca indignación el documento de Gallostra," *El Popular*, March 11, 1950.

⁸⁷ For more on the Sinarquista movement and the PAN, see John W. Sherman, *The Mexican Right: The End of Revolutionary Reform, 1929–1940* (Westport: Praeger, 1997); Meyer, *El sinarquismo, el cardenismo, y la iglesia*; Héctor Gómez Peralta, "Los raíces anti-sistémicas del Partido Acción Nacional," *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales* 57 no. 214 (2012): 187–210.

⁸⁸ "Confidencial. Asunto: Se informa sobre la prosecución de la investigación ordenada" (February 23, 1950), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 112, Expediente 25.

with Francoist Spain, the incident confirmed intelligence officials' long-standing suspicions of anarchist exiles' impact on national political affairs.⁸⁹

Just one month before Gallostra's assassination, DIPS Special Agent Agustín Daroca Ponsa published a dossier describing Spanish anarchists and communists as "a constant threat to the Mexican Republic's social security" and provided a detailed description of specific dissidents' "criminal" histories. Daroca's dossier of suspected dissidents included the prominent anarchist exiles Juan García Oliver and Jaime Balius Mir, noting the men's professions as *pistoleros* (gunfighters) and their "long history of criminal service to the FAI."⁹⁰ Fleitas's roommate, an "anarchist *pistolero* by profession" from Aragón, was described as a leader of the FAI in Mexico with "a long history in the files of the Catalan police."⁹¹ While the dossier contained no documentation relating to Spanish criminal records, the descriptions of the FAI militants matched the confessions collected by Mexican secret service agents following the shoot-out at the Cervecería Modelo eight years earlier. Whether the information is corroborated by additional, yet still classified, DIPS reconnaissance or simply replicated the charges that anarchists had proclivities toward criminal behavior has yet to be determined. The dossier does, however, provide insight into the ways in which intelligence operatives conflated seemingly unconnected political activities as an ongoing criminal conspiracy.

Starting in the 1950s, a new generation of Spanish anarchist exiles coming of age in Mexico also garnered the attention of the Mexican secret police. Soon after the internal distribution of the dossier, the DIPS began to focus its investigations on the radical student movement and its ties to the children of Spanish exiles. Politicized by their families' experiences during the Civil War as well

⁸⁹ For more on the impact of the Gallostra assassination, see: Carlos Soya Ayape, "El poder mediático del exilio español en el México de los años cincuenta: En torno al asesinato del representante de Franco, José Gallostra," *Historia Mexicana* 63, no. 3 (2014): 1309–1376.

⁹⁰ Agustín Daroca Ponsa to Ortega Peregrina (February 28, 1950), AGN-DGIPS, Caja 315, Expediente 11.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

as the outbreak of a general strike in Barcelona in 1952, exiled Spanish youth mobilized alongside left-wing Mexicans demanding that Alemán's government condemn the Francoist government's suppression of political dissidents. The protests against the Mexican government subsequently led DIPS agents to infiltrate meetings and conferences put on by various Spanish youth organizations.⁹² Whereas mainstream exile political groups focused their political work primarily on liberating Spain from the Franco dictatorship, Spanish youths associated their anti-Francoist politics with the burgeoning Mexican student movement and its focus on Latin American political struggles. In particular, Mexican and Spanish students became clandestine contacts for a small group of revolutionaries led by a then unknown Fidel Castro, who briefly resided in Mexico City in 1955 following a failed attempt to overthrow the Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista.

Among the young exiles who assisted the Cubans was Octavio Alberola Suriñach. Alberola became a well-known member of the student movement following his 1948 arrest mentioned at the beginning of this article. Much like other radical anarchist militants and the members of the *Juventudes Libertarias*, Alberola received little support from other refugee organizations following his detention by the secret police. Representatives of the CNT, for example, hesitated to publicly condemn the Mexican government for the incident, instead chastising the youth's activism as "adventurous," opportunistic and falling outside of the purview of the Spanish exile community's political endeavors.⁹³ Such disagreements, in fact, spoke to a broader generational divide between Spanish refugees. More than their parents and veterans of the Civil War, Spanish youth brought up in Mexico and politicized by life in exile immersed themselves into political struggles on both sides of the Atlantic.

⁹² "Refugiados españoles: Actividades comunistas que desarrollan algunos de ellos," AGN-DGIPS, Caja 315, Expediente 11.

⁹³ Rodríguez Trejo, "La otra izquierda," 161–162.

Deeply influenced by the ideas of internationalism and anti-imperialism permeating the Latin American Left, Alberola and other Spanish exiled youth saw the Cuban Revolution as part of a broader struggle against authoritarianism in Spain and abroad.⁹⁴ Alberola and his fellow students put on regular events at the Ateneo Español de México (Spanish Athenaeum of Mexico) and the Teatro del Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas (Theatre of the Mexican Electrical Workers' Union) to build popular opposition to the Batista regime and to galvanize support for the Cuban struggle.⁹⁵ Although under continuous surveillance by the Mexican state, Alberola acknowledged that his status as a Spanish refugee provided him with more flexibility to speak out against Latin American dictatorships:

Despite the fact that this collaboration was justified by the moral and political duty of being in solidarity with those who struggled against the two most disgraceful dictatorships of that period ... the PRI did not view the “illegal” revolutionary activities favorably, as it could create diplomatic conflicts. Hence the “usefulness” of my interventions in public acts of solidarity with the Cuban guerrillas; I intervened as a Spanish and anti-Franco refugee, which allowed me to denounce the collusion of Latin American dictatorships with the Franco regime, without the representatives of those dictatorships being able to ask the Mexican government to prohibit such acts. Nor could the Francoist representatives, because Franco’s Spain was not officially recognized in Mexico.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Renata Keller, *Mexico’s Cold War: Cuba, the United States, and the Legacy of the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 47, 51–52; Pau Casanellas, “‘Hasta la fin’: Cultura revolucionaria y práctica armada en la crisis del franquismo,” *Ayer* 92, no. 4 (2013): 28–29; Octavio Alberola, *La revolución: Entre el azar y la necesidad* (Buenos Aires: Libros de Anarres, 2017), 31–34; Lambe, *No Barrier Can Contain It*, 207–219.

⁹⁵ Despite the Spanish exiles’ support for the Cuban Revolution, Alberola and others grew critical of the Castro regime, particularly because of its collaborations with the Franco regime and the execution of anarchist revolutionaries who had assisted the Revolution during its formative years. For more on Alberola’s views of the Cuban Revolution, see Stuart Christie, *My Granny Made Me an Anarchist: The Stuart Christie File: Part 1, 1946–1964* (Hastings: Christie Books, 2002), 217–21; “‘Castro Turns His Back on Anti-Francoists’,” Interview with “Interior Defense” (D.I.) Organizer Octavio Alberola in Basque Journal *Argia* by Aitor Azurki, trans. Paul Sharkey, 2014, originally published in Basque in *Argia* (January 11, 2014). For more on relations between the Castro and Franco regimes, see Haruko Hosoda, *Castro and Franco: The Backstage of Cold War Diplomacy* (London: Routledge, 2019).

⁹⁶ Alberola, *La revolución*, 31–32.

As Alberola and other exiles assisted Cuban revolutionaries with funds, resources and weapons training in the Mexican countryside, the subsequent success of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 galvanized other exiled Spanish militants throughout Latin America.⁹⁷ Soon after, Alberola and fellow anarchist exile Juan García Oliver coordinated a conference in Caracas, Venezuela, to rejuvenate the Spanish anarchist CNT union, which had been debilitated by a number of internal divisions.⁹⁸ According to Alberola, one of the contributing factors to the reunification of the CNT was “the triumph of the *barbudos* (bearded ones) of the Sierra Maestra.” The Cuban Revolution also encouraged new collaborations between anti-Francoist movements in Mexico, Latin America and Europe, such as the Movimiento Español 1959 (1959 Spanish Movement).⁹⁹ For this younger generation of anarchist refugees, the overthrow of authoritarian regimes in Latin America complemented their aspirations to recapture Spain from the Franco dictatorship.¹⁰⁰

Despite his initial run-in with the secret police, there are no records indicating that the DIPS was aware of Alberola’s activities. Though the lapse is unusual, considering how frequently Spanish exiles were targeted by the DIPS, it is possible that local political conflicts – such as the mounting activism of railroad workers and students – took precedence over the activities of the refugees.¹⁰¹ Yet according to Alberola, his continued political activities did not go unnoticed. In May 1967, Octavio’s father, José Alberola Navarro, a fellow CNT militant and member of its regional defense council in Aragón during the Civil War, was found gagged and hanged in his Mexico City apartment,

⁹⁷ Comotto, *El peso de las estrellas*, 113–119.

⁹⁸ Danny Evans, “Uprooted Cosmopolitans? The Post-War Exile of Spanish Anarchists in Venezuela, 1945–1965,” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 25, no. 2 (2019): 321–342.

⁹⁹ Elena Aub, *Palabras del exilio: Historia del ME/ 59, una última ilusión* (México, D.F.: INAH, 1992); Faber, *Exile and Cultural Hegemony*, 162–163; Comotto, *El peso de las estrellas*, 113–119.

¹⁰⁰ Manuel de Paz-Sánchez, “Voces disonantes: Opiniones libertarias sobre Venezuela y Cuba (1958–1961),” *Revista de Indias* 77, no. 270 (2017): 463–489.

¹⁰¹ Alegre, *Railroad Radicals in Cold War Mexico*; Padilla, “Rural Education, Political Radicalism, and Normalista Identity in Mexico after 1940,” 341–359; Jaime M. Pensado, *Rebel Mexico: Student Unrest and Authoritarian Political Culture during the Long Sixties* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 83–180.

while Octavio was in New York City for a conference denouncing US military bases in Spain. Though state officials ruled José's death as suicide, detectives who spoke to the building's doorman suspected four young men of conducting the murder. To this day, Octavio Alberola and others in the Spanish anarchist community have alleged that the intruders were Francoist agents assisted by the Mexican secret police as a retribution for political activities.¹⁰² As with many cases of the subsequent Mexican Dirty War, the lack of any DIPS documentation pertaining to the death of a well-known political refugee leaves many unanswered questions regarding the state's official conclusion that the death was not a result of foul play.¹⁰³

Conclusion

Mexico's safeguarding of political exiles fleeing the Spanish Civil War has been widely regarded as one of the nation's most significant contributions to international human rights and affirmed the revolutionary credentials of subsequent administrations for decades to come. Yet, as this article shows, the country's hospitality was underscored by its ongoing surveillance of exiles and naturalized citizens. While the state's intelligence apparatus lacked the resources and means to fully expose the nature of Spanish exiles' connections to national and international political organizations, its discourses on criminality tended to regard these activities as acts of subversives rather than agents of social change. As seen in later instances of "humanitarian" support for political exiles fleeing dictatorships and left-wing revolutionary movements in Latin America, the Mexican state's

¹⁰² For more on the death of José Alberola, see extract from *Últimas Noticias* (Mexico City), May 3, 1967, quoted and cited in Comotto, *El peso de las estrellas*, 212–213; Octavio Alberola and Ariane Gransac, *El anarquismo español y la acción revolucionaria, 1961–1974* (Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1967), 203; Alberola, *La revolución*, 66.

¹⁰³ Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata*; Fernando Herrera-Calderón and Adela Cedillo, eds., *Challenging Authoritarianism in Mexico: Revolutionary Struggles and the Dirty War, 1962–1982* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Alexander Aviña, *Specters of Revolution: Peasant Guerrillas in the Cold War Mexican Countryside* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); McCormick, *The Logic of Compromise in Mexico*.

paradoxical treatment of exiled Spanish anarchists and communists both affirmed its public image as the Revolution's rightful heir while honing its methods of repressing domestic threats to its political control.¹⁰⁴ And while the DIPS's purported purpose was strictly to monitor domestic social conflicts, this article demonstrates the agency's significant role in policing threats to the reopening of economic and cultural relations with Francoist Spain. Despite these efforts to contain the activities of Spanish exiles, militant refugees found ways to participate in transnational revolutionary struggles and evade the watchful eye of Mexico's growing intelligence apparatus. Nonetheless, the ongoing efforts to villainize the most politically active sectors of the Spanish diaspora added to a growing lexicon of what acts, by whom, constituted dissent and subversion in post-revolutionary Mexico.

Chapter Seven contains material as it appears in Aguilar, Kevan Antonio. "From Comrades to Subversives: Mexican Secret Police and 'Undesirable' Spanish Exiles, 1939-60." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 53, no. 1 (2021): 1-24. The dissertation author was the sole author of this material.

¹⁰⁴ For recent studies detailing the broader use of exiles in national politics throughout Latin America, see Luis Roniger, James N. Green, and Pablo Yankelevich, eds., *Exile and the Politics of Exclusion in the Americas* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2012); Patrick William Kelly, *Sovereign Emergencies: Latin America and the Making of Global Human Rights Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

EPILOGUE



Figure 27: “Journey Through Life;” an artistic rendering by the EZLN depicting its delegation’s “invasion” of Spain.¹

In recent years, the question of incorporating refugees from Central America, North Africa, and the Middle East has become a topic of polarizing public debate not only in the United States and Europe, but in Mexico as well.² This line of inquiry focuses on refugees from the Global South’s

¹ Originally published in “The Route of Ixchel,” *Enlace Zapatista* (29 April 2021), accessed May 24, 2021. http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2021/04/29/the-route-of-ixchel/#_ednref1.

² Wendy Pearlman, *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled: Voices from Syria* (New York: Custom House, 2017); Leo Lucassen, “Peeling an Onion: The ‘Refugee Crisis’ from a Historical Perspective,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41, no. 3 (2018): 383-410; Eileen Truax, *We Built the Wall: How the U.S. Keeps Out Asylum Seekers from Mexico, Central America, and Beyond* (London: Verso Books, 2018); David Scott Fitzgerald, *Refuge Beyond Reach: How Rich Democracies Repel Asylum Seekers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); James Daria, Carolina Valdivia, Teresita Rocha Jiménez, Lynn Stephen, and Abigail Thorton, *The Migrant Caravan: From Honduras to Tijuana: An Analysis by the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies Fellows, 2018-2019* (La Jolla: Center for U.S. Mexican Studies, UC San Diego School for Global Policy & Strategy, 2019); Greg Grandin, *The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2019); Silvia Pasquetti and Romola Sanyal, eds., *Displacement: Global Conversations on Refuge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020); Aviva Chomsky, *Central America’s Forgotten History: Revolution, Violence, and the Roots of Migration* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2021).

movement to Global North. Departing from this trajectory, this dissertation instead examined how everyday Mexican citizens responded to political refugees emanating from the country that previously subjugated their ancestors and in turn sought to expand the reforms of the Mexican Revolution. In doing so, I seek to reorient our gaze away from the West as the primary site of refuge to demonstrate how Spanish exiles and Mexican citizens negotiated and renegotiated notions of racial, class, and national differences to address geopolitical changes occurring in their respective countries as well as throughout the world. Like the many refugee “crises” of the twentieth century, Mexico’s asylum initiative exposed the internal conflicts that divided Mexican society as much as it addressed the incorporation of asylum seekers. But it also demonstrated the radical possibilities of community-based responses to international political crises. Although such endeavors largely proved unsuccessful due to the economic and political aspirations of the Mexican and Spanish republican governments, they conjured a longstanding practice between the two countries’ laboring classes to reconcile past historical traumas and to propose new collective futures.

Mexico’s support for Spanish asylum seekers stands out in the history of exile in world history. As Mario Sznajder and Luis Roniger note, the use of exile as a political mechanism has been widely utilized throughout the continent since colonial times, serving as a means to relocate or expel individuals that the state deemed “social offenders, outcasts, rebels, and criminals.”³ In the twentieth century, the proliferation of military dictatorships and authoritarian regimes has further associated Latin American nations as sites of expulsion, rather than spaces of refuge. For most, asylum is associated with the countries in the Global North, despite the fact that these same nations aided and abetted many of Latin America’s authoritarian regimes.⁴ While scholars have pushed against such

³ Mario Sznajder and Luis Roniger, “Political Exile in Latin America,” *Latin American Perspectives* 34, no. 4 (2007): 7.

⁴ Teresa Hayter, “No Borders: The Case against Immigration Controls,” *Feminist Review* 73 (2003): 10. This is not to argue that foreign intervention is the only cause for the proliferation of authoritarian regimes in Latin America. As recent scholarship in the Latin American Cold War

polarizing generalizations, few studies acknowledge that multiple Latin American nations have been both sites of asylum and sites of expulsion—often at the same time.⁵

Mexico was no exception to this paradox. In the late nineteenth century under the Díaz dictatorship, Cuban revolutionaries found refuge along the country's Gulf coast during their struggle against the Spanish Empire.⁶ Left-wing organizers from all over the world also found shelter in Mexico throughout the 1920s and 1930s, along with Nicaraguan revolutionary Augusto Sandino.⁷ Victor Serge and Leo Katz—the father of the renowned historian of Mexico, Friedrich Katz—were also among the many European anti-fascists granted asylum in the 1940s.⁸ Mexico championed the rights of political refugees in the United Nations, protected U.S. Americans escaping persecution during the Cold War, and became a safe haven for thousands of individuals fleeing military regimes

demonstrates, such forms of impunity are as much a result of internal factors within a given society as they are affected by global policies and practices. See: Steve J. Stern, *Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet's Chile, 1973-1988* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser, eds., *In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Steve J. Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet: The Memory question in Democratic Chile* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Miguel La Serna, *The Corner of the Living: Ayacucho on the Eve of the Shining Path Insurgency* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); David M.K. Sheinin, *Consent of the Damned: Ordinary Argentines in the Dirty War* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012); Heidi E. Tinsman, *Buying into the Regime: Grapes and Consumption in Cold War Chile and the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Kirsten Weld, *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Andrew C. Rajca, *Dissensual Subjects: Memory, Human Rights, and Postdictatorship in Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2018); Thomas C. Field Jr., Stella Krepp, and Vanni Pettinà, eds., *Latin America and the Global Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

⁵ Sznajder and Rodniger, "Political Exile in Latin America," 23.

⁶ Dalia Antonia Muller, *Cuban Émigrés and Independence in the Nineteenth Century Gulf World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 15-42.

⁷ Dorothea Melcher, "La solidaridad internacional con Sandino, 1928-1930," *Iberoamericana* 36, no. 1 (1989): 20-40; Donald C. Hodges, "Sandino's Mexican Awakening," *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 19, no. 37/38 (1994): 7-34; Friedrich Katz, "Violence and Terror in the Mexican and Russian Revolutions," in *A Century of Revolution*, 55; Spenser, *Stumbling its way through Mexico*; Iñigo García-Bryce, *Haya de la Torre and the Pursuit of Power in Twentieth-Century Peru and Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

⁸ Rankin, *¡México, la patria!*, 37-38; Ilán Semo, "In Memoriam. Katz, la historia, la alegoría," *Historia y Grafía* 35 (2010): 229-235; Beatriz Urías Horcasitas, "Victor Serge en México, 1941-1947," *Historia Mexicana* 70, no. 4 (2021): 1765-1814.

in Central and South America during the 1970s and 1980s.⁹ All the while, political reformers and dissidents throughout the country fell victim to various forms of repression not dissimilar from those implemented by the very regimes asylum seekers escaped.¹⁰ In both the Global North and the Global South, states have persistently espoused their dedication to human rights and freedom for asylum seekers while subsequently restricting basic rights to other groups of people. Such contradictions are the norm, not the exception, in all states that seek to uphold their monopolies on violence.

What makes Mexico's Spanish refugee initiative significant, this dissertation argued, was not the policies the state enacted. Instead, it was in the gestures and actions of everyday people during one of the first mass political refugee crises of the modern era. Campesinos and workers opened their homes, their businesses, and even their long-desired lands to individuals fighting for ideals

⁹ For more on Mexico in the United Nations, see: David Jorge, "Contra Franco en Naciones Unidas: México, altavoz de la República Española," *Tzitzun: Revista de Estudios Históricos* 66 (2017): 267-294. For more on U.S. artists that escaped anti-communist persecution during the Cold War, see: Rebecca M. Schreiber, *Cold War Exiles in Mexico: U.S. Dissidents and the Culture of Critical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); For more on Mexico's safeguarding of political exiles from Central and South America during the Cold War, see: Leon G. Campbell, "The Historiography of the Peruvian Guerrilla Movement, 1960-1965," *Latin American Research Review* 8, no. 1 (1973): 63; Pablo Yankelevich, ed., *México, país refugio: La experiencia de los exilios en el siglo XX* (México, D.F.: Plaza y Valdés, 2002); Jorge Luis Bernetti and Mempo Giardinelli, *México, el exilio que hemos vivido: Memoria del exilio argentino en México durante la dictadura, 1976-1983* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes Editorial, 2003); Pablo Yankelevich, "The COSPA: A Political Experience of the Argentine Exile in Mexico," *Latin American Perspectives* 34, no. 4 (2007): 68-80; Gabriela Díaz Prieto, Jorge Ferreira and Emilio Kourí, eds., *Revolución y exilio en la historia de México: Del amor de un historiador a su patria adoptiva, homenaje a Friedrich Katz* (México, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 2010); Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War*, Updated Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Aldo Marchesi, *Latin America's Radical Left: Rebellion and Cold War in the Global 1960s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 188-225; Daniela Morales Muñoz, "Brasileños asilados en México. Dos casos de excepción," *Historia Mexicana* 70, no. 2 (2020): 839-892.

¹⁰ Alexander Avina, "An Archive of Counterinsurgency: State Anxieties and Peasant Guerillas in Cold War Mexico," *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 19, no. 1 (2013): 41-51; Jaime M. Pensado and Enrique Ochoa, "Final Remarks: Toward a Provincialization of 1968," in *México Beyond 1968: Revolutionaries, Radicals, and Repression during the Global Sixties and Subversive Seventies*, eds. Jaime M. Pensado and Enrique Ochoa (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018), 273-296.

much like those that galvanized so many to struggle through the decades of the Mexican Revolution. This dissertation demonstrated the ways in which Mexican communities interpreted the sheltering of Spanish exiles as a social, cultural, and political rupture from previous social relations forged during a temporal opening for revolutionary change. While the Mexican government largely ignored or repressed such efforts, exiles and citizens asserted their demands upon their respective governments to expand the reforms fought for throughout the Mexican Revolution. Mexican commoners' perceptions of Spanish refugees did not emerge with their arrival in 1939, but rather as a consequence of shared political struggles to reimagine community outside the geographical and administrative borders of nation-states. Similarly, many of the exiled Spanish revolutionaries that came to Mexico sought to contribute to the revolutionary reforms of the Cárdenas government. These efforts provide an example of how pragmatic and utopian visions of solidarity can inform community-based responses to future voluntary and involuntary migration crises.

Future Encounters

On May 2, 2021, amidst an ongoing global pandemic and under the bewildered gazes of U.S. tourists, a delegation from the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation, EZLN) boarded a small vessel, *La Montaña*, and set sail from Islas Mujeres, Quintana Roo, to “invade” Spain.¹¹ The voyage, which marked the 500th anniversary of the Spanish invasion of Mexico, sought to ignite a social transformation—not one against Europeans, but with them.

¹¹ “Zapatistas set sail for Spain on mission of solidarity and rebellion,” *The Guardian* (May 4, 2021), accessed May 24, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/04/zapatistas-set-sail-for-spain-on-mission-of-solidarity-and-rebellion>; “Viente en espiral,” *Enlace Zapatista* (May 6, 2021), accessed May 24, 2021. <https://vimeo.com/545809574>.

In a communique regarding the forthcoming “invasion,” Subcomandante Galeano—better known by his former *nom de guerre*, Subcomandante Marcos—begins by retelling the legend of Ixchel, the Mayan fertility goddess, “who stretched herself over the planet as a rainbow in order to teach the world a lesson about plurality and inclusion and to remind us that the earth is many colors, not just one, and that all people, without ceasing to be what they are, together illuminate the wonder and marvel of life.”¹² Whereas the Spanish colonizers enforced new racial and social divisions of colonialism from Abya Yala to Turtle Island—what is now referred to as the Americas—the Zapatistas wanted spread their rebellion against racial and capitalist exploitation to the communities of Spain and throughout Europe.¹³ In his communique, Galeano explained the significance of the voyage, which is set to arrive at Vigo Port in Pontevedra, Autonomous Community of Galicia, sometime in June 2021:

If we are unable to disembark, whether it be because of COVID, immigration laws, straight up discrimination, chauvinism, or because we ended up at the wrong port or with the wrong host, we have come prepared.

We’re ready to wait there in front of the European coast and unfold a larger banner that reads **“Wake up!”** We will wait there to see if anyone reads the message, then wait a little longer to see if anyone wakes up, and then a little longer to see [if] anyone responds.

If those from Europe from below are unwilling or unable to welcome us, then, always prepared, we have brought 4 canoes, each with their own oars, upon which we would begin our return back home. It will of course take awhile before we can see the lands of the house of Ixchel once again...

But if we do manage to disembark and embrace with our words those who fight, resist, and rebel there, then there will be a celebration with dancing, songs, and

¹² Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano, “The Route of Ixchel,” *Enlace Zapatista* (April 29, 2021). http://enlacezapatista.czln.org.mx/2021/04/29/the-route-of-ixchel/#_ednref1.

¹³ For more on the origins of Zapatista struggle in Chiapas, see: John Womack, *Rebellion in Chiapas: An Historical Reader* (New York: New Press, 1999); Adela Cedillo, “Armed Struggle without Revolution: The Organizing Process of the National Liberation Forces (FLN) and the Genesis of Neo-Zapatismo, 1969-1983,” in *Challenging Authoritarianism in Mexico*, 148-166; Fernando Matamoros, *Memoria y utopía en México: Imaginarios en la genesis del neozapatismo* (Xalapa: Universidad Veracruzana, 2005).

cumbias and the movement of hips will shake heaven and earth and all that's in between.

And on both sides of the ocean, a short message will inundate the electromagnetic spectrum and cyberspace and echo in our hearts: the invasion has started.¹⁴

Upon arrival, the communique explained, a thirty-nine-year-old trans woman named Marijose would be the first to speak on behalf of the Zapatista delegation. Galeano's communique maintained his well-known sense of humor, purposing that Marijose's first words to the Europeans should declare: “*Surrender hetero-patriarchal pale-faces who persecute those who are different!*” Nah, just kidding, but that would be cool, wouldn't it?”¹⁵



Figure 28: (Left) Zapatista insurgents “aboard” one of the canoes constructed for the “invasion.” (Right) The seven EZLN delegates onboard *La Montaña* (from left to right): Bernal, Darío, Marijose, Ximena, Carolina, Lupita, and Yuli.¹⁶

¹⁴ Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano, “The Route of Ixchel,” *Enlace Zapatista* (April 29, 2021).

¹⁵ Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano, “421st Squadron,” *Enlace Zapatista* (April 20, 2021), accessed May 24, 2021. <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2021/04/20/421st-squadron/>. In interviews, Subcomandante Galeano, despite his anonymity, has made references that his parents were Spanish immigrants and rural teachers. For more on Galeano's alleged familial lineage, see: Subcomandante Marcos, “The Punch Card and the Hourglass,” Interviewed by Gabriel García Márquez and Roberto Pombo, *New Left Review* 2, no. 9 (2001): 77; Nick Henck, *Subcommander Marcos: The Man and the Mask* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 13-20; Alex Saragoza, Ana Paula Ambrosi, Silvia Dolores Zárate, eds., *Mexico Today: An Encyclopedia of Life in the Republic, Volume 1* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2012), 244; Paul Gillingham and Benjamin T. Smith, “Introduction: The Paradoxes of Revolution,” in *Dictablanda*, 16.

¹⁶ Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano “The Route of Ixchel,” *Enlace Zapatista* (April 29, 2021); Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano, “421st Squadron,” *Enlace Zapatista* (April 20, 2021).

Rather, Marijose will declare the following:

In the name of the Zapatista women, children, men, elderly, and of course, others, I declare that from now on this place, currently referred to as “Europe” by those who live here, be called: SLUMIL K’AJXEMK’OP, which means “Rebellious Land” or “Land which does not give in nor give up.” And that is how it will be known by its own people and by others for as long as there is at least someone here who does not surrender, sell out, or give up.¹⁷

The Zapatista’s use of symbolism and pragmatism to appeal to those they encounter could potentially be the beginning of yet another chapter in the long history of transnational communitarian encounters between Mexicans and Spaniards. Much like the histories detailed in this dissertation, the Zapatistas seek to reimagine Indigenous peoples’ relationships to their former colonizers through and within racial, class, and national differences. How such encounters from below manifest within the current geopolitical climate remains to be seen.

¹⁷ Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano, “421st Squadron,” *Enlace Zapatista* (April 20, 2021).

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