

## Rewriting the Myths of the Republic: *Liberté, égalité, fraternité* and Spanish Civil War Refugees in French Concentration Camps

FRANCIE CATE-ARRIES

The College of William & Mary

In 1941, the Spanish painter Remedios Varo (1908-1963), along with a group of European writers and artists including her companion, the French poet Benjamin Péret, and their friend André Breton, anxiously waited in the port city of Marseilles for passage to America, seeking sanctuary from the ravages of world war. During this period of uncertainty, facing an unknown future in exile, the small circle of Surrealist friends occasionally spent time by creating together a series of politically charged *cadaver exquis*. Among the collaborative pieces that remained in Varo's possession for decades following these months after Hitler's historic 1940 invasion of France and the fall of Paris to Nazi Germany, is a caricature of Marshal Pétain, the Führer's new puppet head of state of Vichy France. Its subversive caption, "le dernier Romantique a été enculé par le Maréchal Pétain" is scrawled alongside a deformed, cartoonish visage.<sup>1</sup> This ugly face of France's democratic ideals betrayed, so at odds with the beloved countenance of the *belle France* whose foundations for the modern nation state rested squarely on the notions of freedom, equality, and fraternity, is similarly evoked in the early literature of Spanish civil war exiles.

For thousands of Franco's vanquished, including supporters of the freely elected government that fell to the Nationalist troops in March of 1939, the France of non-intervention politics was guilty of facilitating the spread of European fascism. By failing to come to Spain's defense during the three-year war waged against the forces of Franco supported by Hitler and Mussolini, France unwittingly cleared the way at home for the Nazi invaders. One year after

---

<sup>1</sup> See Kaplan's biography of Remedios Varo for an account of this period of the painter's life (70-83). Such caricatures of Pétain among Spanish Civil War refugees living in French concentration camps in 1939 were also common; see, for example, the Catalan artist Josep Bartolí's parodic depiction of the aged French leader as Hitler's slavish lackey in his and Narcís Molins i Fàbrega's 1944 *Campos de concentració* (137).

wearily crossing the Pyrenees to escape Franco's newly installed military regime, tens of thousands of Spanish war veterans now watched the advent of World War II from behind the barbed-wire confines of France's brutal internment camps, viewing the French nation's precipitous fall to the enemy as an inevitable consequence of earlier political inaction and collective passivity in the face of advancing danger.

One of the pervasive features of the early postwar literature penned by many of the Spanish survivors of war and exile –especially those who wrote from the shores of the French refugee camps– is the representation of the French nation as a disfigured perversion of the Republican ideals that were once held dear by enlightened patriots.<sup>2</sup> Of all the leitmotifs that circulate through the memoirs regarding life in the concentration camps, none is more prevalent or insistent than the bitterly sardonic reference to the tripartite emblematic message of French nationality. It is rare if not impossible to find an account that does not make direct reference to the disjunction between this renowned symbol of France and the reality lived by internees in the camps. Initial allusions to the famous motto in Silvia Mistral's 1940 diary, however, are free of irony. She crosses the border into France with enormous relief: "Las mujeres han cesado de llorar y todas llevamos el pensamiento repleto de la Francia de la trilogía '*Liberté, égalité, fraternité*'"(46); one month later she writes upon learning of the great Spanish poet Antonio Machado's death just weeks after he crossed the border, that she now sees a very different France, "Tierra que olvidaba sus obligaciones, sus deberes, tierra indiferente, que lo [Machado] recibía con desprecio, como a todos los españoles"(85).

Enric Yugué Mariné, a former internee of the Bram camp, recalls the day he was assigned the absurd task of decorating the very barbed wires of his prison with the ridiculous message: "Cierta día, ¡oh paradoja!, mi tarea consistió en adornar con guijarros el macizo que había en la base de nuestras alambradas con la inscripción '*Liberté-Egalité-Fraternité*'" (Soriano 137). The poet and novelist Agustí Bartra savagely denounces the lost meaning of the now irrational phrase by putting it in the mouth of one of his most brutish characters, *Calibán*, an oafish refugee of Argelès-sur-Mer who in an alcoholic stupor screams the three words into the night air and promptly passes out (108). Such cartoonish parody was similarly replicated by non-Spanish

---

<sup>2</sup> For an in-depth study of the history and the literature of the French concentration camps for Spanish refugees, see my *Spanish Culture behind Barbed Wire*.

national camp inmates in France like the German Karl Schwesig; this anti-fascist internee of Gurs created a series of mock postage stamps portraying the *liberté, fraternité, égalité* of camp life (Feinstein 165). For the most part, the camp references to the motto provide a vehicle for the Spanish Republican exiles to insist once again that their people, and not the official French nation, are the true defenders of freedom, equality, and brotherhood. Angel Sánchez Ramírez, a Republican soldier who spent four tormenting months as a prisoner in Collioure, recalls his arrival in 1939 of his very first day in the medieval castle-fortress, watching as more than a hundred starving and cowed prisoners shuffled into the common patio area: “Y no podía por menos de recordar aquella otra Francia de la Revolución, de sus hombres y de su lema: *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*. ¡Aquellos que yo contemplaba habían cometido el crimen de luchar tres años por la Libertad!” (*Los de Collioure* 36). Writing in his diary in the camp of Barcares on an especially historic Bastille Day (July 14, 1939), Eulalio Ferrer notes the central paradox of the occasion given the circumstances of the thousands of refugees imprisoned in France:

Hoy es la fiesta nacional de Francia. Todos nos sumamos a ella. Es la fiesta de la libertad, simbolizada en la toma de la Bastilla. Por la libertad hemos peleado. Por la libertad, sin poder gozarla todavía, estamos aquí, entre alambradas y barracas, soldados y gendarmes que no pueden aprisionar nuestro amor a la libertad (*Entre alambradas* 105).

He observes that despite some shouts of *¡cabrones!*, for the most part the incongruous festivities in the camp go on without incident, though not without irony: “Quien viera a estos descamisados, que somos nosotros, evocaría a los descamisados de la revolución francesa. Frente a los uniformes de gala de nuestros cuidadores, el espectáculo que ofrecemos debe ser impresionante” (105).

In his discussion focusing on the politics of collective memory, Edward Said highlights the essential function of the stories that members of a nation-group tell themselves and others about their shared experiences, a role that Said defines as the “power of narrative history to mobilize people around a common goal” (“Invention, Memory, Place” 184). For political exiles, one of the primary goals of the community, in fact the “paramount issue” according to Yossi Shain, is to establish and maintain legal and official authority (71). The Spanish Republican war

exiles that eventually relocate to Mexico will develop powerful narratives of the French concentration camp experiences to build a persuasive case defending their own moral and legal authority as the only legitimate Spanish political entity still standing after the Spanish war and present it to an international audience. Key to this portrayal of the Spanish Republic that they champion from the distant shores of exile, is the concomitant depiction of the French Republic as a pale reflection, as an adulterated version, of the democratic ideals that *la España Peregrina* has been able to preserve in the face of fascism, unlike the Gallic nation who capitulated to Hitler without a worthy fight.

Before considering how the supporters of the Spanish Republic attempt to achieve their rhetorical objectives through the discursive vehicle of both stories and references to the French camps, I introduce an important historical text that directly addresses the topic of the crisis of the political legitimacy of the Spanish Republic. I refer to the speech given by the Republic's Prime Minister Juan Negrín on February 1, 1939, during the last session on Spanish soil of the *Cortes* hastily assembled in Figueras –with full attendance of government ministers, but less than a quarter of the four hundred seventy-three deputies elected in 1936– as the nation was on the verge of exile and dissolution. Just days after Barcelona had fallen to Franco, the meeting was called to order in the name of the “legítima y auténtica representación del pueblo” with both national and international audiences in mind, in order that “el Parlamento (...) al cumplir su compromiso constitucional dijera al pueblo español y al mundo cuál era su pensamiento político en este instante dramático de la Historia de España” (“Actas” 333). In his final speech to Parliament on Spanish soil, Negrín organized his remarks around two fundamental ideas: first, that even in crisis the Spanish Republic has retained its power and authority as the sole legitimate voice of the people; and secondly, the fate of the Spanish Republic is the fate of freedom-loving peoples everywhere threatened by the ever advancing forces of totalitarianism.

In the midst of the massive movement towards the French border already undertaken by thousands of fellow Spaniards, Negrín emphasizes throughout his speech that his government has lost neither its head nor its control, even in the face of widespread panic and fear among the population who flee the advancing enemy invaders. For those who would read the confused exodus of the retreating Republicans as a “signo de falta de autoridad del poder estatal” (337), Negrín interprets the emigration in a very different light. It is nothing less than a referendum

from the people, he argues, a vote of confidence in the moral and political legitimacy of the current government under siege:

El éxodo de la población civil –hombres, mujeres, y niños– ante las fuerzas rebeldes e invasoras es el mejor plebiscito que puede producirse a favor del Gobierno. Desafiando las inclemencias de la estación, los sufrimientos y privaciones, abandonando su patrimonio, condenándose a la expatriación y a la miseria, millares, millones de ciudadanos nuestros, de españoles, huyen del invasor y de las huestes a su servicio. ¿Se quiere una prueba más fehaciente de con quién está el sentimiento de nuestro pueblo? (336).

The session of Parliament will subsequently ratify this professed will of the people by unanimously offering a “voto de confianza al Gobierno” (347). Following Negrín’s call for unity and loyalty to the Republican government, the Parliamentary representatives publicly declare their official adhesion to this position: “Las Cortes de la Nación, elegidas y convocadas con sujeción estricta a la Constitución del país, ratifican a su pueblo, y ante la opinión universal, el derecho legítimo de España a conservar la integridad de su territorio y la libre soberanía de su destino político” (348).

The second theme touched on by Negrín in the vigorous statements that he pronounces from the liminal territory of the border, on the threshold of expatriation and exile, is his insistence on the international significance of the Spanish democracy’s struggle and the ramifications of its imminent defeat. Placing the events of the civil war squarely in the context of Hitler’s and Mussolini’s increasing acts of aggression against other nations, Negrín decries the lack of solidarity and material aid that these same countries have afforded the Republic. Bitterly denouncing the policy of non-intervention adopted by other democratic governments like France and England, Negrín points out that in the name of European peace, Austria has been “devoured” (342), Czechoslovakia has been “carved up” (342), and Spain teeters on the brink of being offered up as “una sacrificada más” (343). Prefiguring the theme of *ceguera* that will predominate in early Spanish exile indictments of European (especially French) apathy in the face of totalitarian aggression, Negrín warns that by turning a blind eye to the armed attack on

the Spanish Republic, other nations risk a similar fate.<sup>26</sup> Committed to the fight for social justice and democratic ideals, he says, even risking annihilation for these causes, the Republicans will accept defeat and death before accepting tyranny. Though refusing to give up the fight, Negrín introduces both the notion of dignity in defeat as well as the motif of national regeneration from the ashes of destruction that will soon be disseminated in the literature of exile:

En último término, los pueblos no viven solamente de las victorias, sino que viven también del ejemplo que hayan sabido dar las generaciones en momentos de adversidad y en momentos de desgracia, y el ejemplo que de la Historia se recoge es fecundo para la vida de un pueblo y es también, a veces, indispensable para que vuelva a resucitar lo aparentemente muerto (347).

To a large extent, the themes sounded by Negrín in his farewell address to Parliament – the defense of the moral and political legitimacy of the Republican government; the status of the Republic as a courageous, even martyred, leader in an international struggle against fascism – are taken up by the exiled writers in Mexico that begin documenting accounts of French concentration camps within a year of Negrín’s speech. By the time the radical Socialist Margarita Nelken (1898-1976), publishes the prologue to the previously cited book of testimony *Los de Collioure (Relatos de un crimen)* in February of 1940, World War II has been raging since September, and France is only months away from signing the armistice that will cede half of the nation over to Hitler’s occupation. Nelken’s prologue, which prefaces the hair-raising first-person reports of four Collioure survivors now living in Mexico, chronicles the brutal treatment the hundreds of prisoners receive at the hands of their French tormentors as proof

---

<sup>26</sup> Four months before France finally declared war on Germany, Negrín would return to this theme in his May 1939 address to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York: “France and England never acted as their Imperial interests dictated. Some day, there may be a rude awakening, and they will look for aid to the very people whom they helped destroy through Non-Intervention” (qtd. By Alvarez del Vayo 76). For an eyewitness account of the Allied Forces’ August 26, 1944 triumphant march through Nazi-occupied Paris five years later, with a contingent of Spanish Republicans at the forefront, see Victoria Kent’s 1947 book *Cuatro años en París (1940-1944)*: “¿Y esos tanques? ¿Veo claro? ¿Son ellos? Sí; son ellos. Son los españoles. Veo la bandera tricolor; son los que, atravesando el Africa, llegan hasta los Campos Eliseos. Los tanques llevan nombres que son una evocación: ‘Guadalajara,’ ‘Teruel,’ y son los primeros que desfilan por la gran avenida” (Kent 189).

positive of the moral bankruptcy of this so-called defender of democracy:

Con secuestrar a un oficial o a un intelectual español, y obligarle a acarrear todo el día un recipiente de excrementos que le salpicaba ropas y rostro; o con tenerle condenado a trabajos cuyas condiciones han desaparecido del mundo civilizado desde los tiempos de las galeras; o con permitir que unos rufianes uniformados distrajeran su vileza, o su borrachera, insultándoles y maltratándoles hasta casi matarles; o con impedir que les llegaran medicamentos, o alimentos, o ropas, o haciendo que unos mutilados, unos enfermos graves, o unos chiquillos de quince años, cayeran desvanecidos de dolor, de agotamiento o de hambre, ¿qué obtenía, qué perseguía el gobierno de Daladier? (12).

Nelken proceeds to answer the question she poses by contrasting the reactionary regime of “official” France “al servicio de la alta burguesía francesa y del capitalismo internacional” (9), with the “authentic” France of the people, who embody the progressive spirit of “la Francia legendaria de los grandes principios revolucionarios” (10). According to Nelken, the Republican ex-combatants are a political scapegoat for a conservative government who seeks to punish, even “annihilate” (10) their infectious example for the “real” France of the revolutionary fervor they embodied throughout the civil war. Ultimately, the scandal of Collioure provides Nelken with a powerful weapon in the ideological warfare she wages against the nation who abandoned the cause of the Spanish Republic in the name of non-intervention. Nelken uses Collioure in order to expose and denounce the true political allegiances of Daladier’s France:

Y el trato infligido a los refugiados españoles por las autoridades francesas, no fue sino el Primer Acto de la implantación, en Francia, de un programa de gobierno y unos procedimientos represivos netamente fascistas; parejos en absoluto . . . de aquellos regímenes a cuyo sostenimiento . . . la Francia . . . había contribuido tan eficazmente: el régimen de un Mussolini y un Hitler, consolidados por la guerra de España, el de un Franco, vencedor gracias al apoyo prestado por la ‘No Intervención’ (11).

By invoking the memory of the castle of Collioure, which at the time of Nelken’s writing had already been closed down for two months, Nelken effectively aligns the Daladier government

with the reprehensible political forces of Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco. In contrast, the Spanish Republic, still viable in these early months of world war, is strongly configured as the true bastion of progressive social ideals. Its martyrs, the prisoners at Collioure, will represent a powerful legacy; they will be remembered always as the finest example of “lo que la firmeza en un Ideal Progresivo, la certeza de servir de pioneros a un mundo mejor, pueden hacer soportar, sin depresión de ánimo, a los que, después de haberse enfrentado valientemente con la Injusticia y la Opresión, han elegido, de una vez para siempre, el áspero, espinoso y magnífico camino de la lucha por la liberación y el progreso de todos” (13-14).<sup>27</sup>

The idea of the righteousness of the Spanish Republican struggle against the Nationalist insurgency – and the Republican cause as the common cause of freedom-loving peoples worldwide – is one of the unifying threads running through a fascinating diary account of the fall of the French Republic in June of 1940. The diary, published in 1942 in Mexico City with the title *Ballet de sangre: la caída de Francia*, was written not by a Spanish exile, but by a Mexican diplomat to France who was a stalwart supporter of the exiled Republican nation and outspoken witness to the atrocious living conditions in the French concentration camps. Luis I. Rodríguez had served as President Lázaro Cárdenas’s secretary during the Spanish Civil War and as president of the powerful *Partido de la Revolución Mexicana* (whose name was changed to the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* in 1947). Finally, he had formed part of the official receiving committee that on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1939 had welcomed home a group of Mexican volunteers in the International Brigades recently evacuated from Spain (Matesanz 301). On that occasion, Rodríguez had emotionally praised the courage of the returning Mexican soldiers (a group that included the famous muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros), and extolled the fighting spirit of the Spanish Republicans who had struggled so valiantly against the forces of fascism.<sup>28</sup> The

---

<sup>27</sup> A few years after Nelken published these impassioned remarks, her own son Santiago de Paúl would be counted as one of the exiled Republic’s martyred fighters for freedom as part of the Allied military campaign against Hitler’s forces. Leading a Russian battery of soldiers in the siege of Berlin, de Paúl was killed in battle near the Reichstag; he was posthumously awarded Russia’s Medal of the Order of the Red Flag (Gómez Molina 71).

<sup>28</sup> According to the former Argelès-sur-Mer internee and longtime resident of Mexico City, Juan Renau, Siqueiros cut a colorful figure during the war in Spain. Renau recalls a memorable lecture about Mexican muralist art sponsored by the University of Valencia: “La disertación es todo un espectáculo. Además de conferenciante, Siqueiros se revela como actor excelso. Habla apasionadamente, con todo su cuerpo, y conoce el arte de la Pintura como pocos. Su decir extasía a los oyentes y, a medida que se enciende el

memoir that Rodríguez writes one year later –after assuming his ministerial post at the Mexican embassy in Paris on April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1940– is similarly infused with the author’s abiding admiration for the Spanish people.

In a little known preface written for *Ballet de sangre*, the great Chilean poet Pablo Neruda introduces Rodríguez’s story of France’s fall to Hitler by echoing a now familiar theme: the Spanish Republic’s vindication on the world stage via its precursor role as warrior in the “good fight” waged against fascism. Neruda opens his remarks by describing two contrasting “geografías” of Europe, one beautiful and good, the other a nefarious web of deadly international collusion that ties together “una población de asesinos y de espías; una tela de venenosas arañas que desde Berlín a Roma, a París, a Vichy, a Madrid, extiende hilos cargados de traiciones y muertes”(v). Neruda describes the “araña feroz” of fascism in the process of gobbling up Europe, and resting on the rubble of a ruined landscape in Spain: “Franco está sentado sobre un millón de cadáveres; las cárceles están apretadas de seres humanos; el destierro divide a España con una cicatriz inolvidable . . .”(vi). Neruda, like Negrín and Nelken before him, holds up the example of Spain as a first case study of what the unleashed forces of fascism are capable of (“España es la primera víctima de una conspiración criminal” vi) and warns his fellow American nations that they may be next. Rodríguez’s chilling narrative, Neruda says, reminds the reader “lo que mañana harán en nuestra América el aislacionista, el franquista, el simple simpatizante del fascismo, ante una pequeña coyuntura, debilidad o derrota. Saldrán de sus cuevas, vendrán al aire libre con garrote y horca, y con ellos el espíritu de la fuerza violenta entrará en nuestras patrias a desarrollar el mismo ‘Ballet de sangre’ aquí descrito con pasión y dolor” (vi).<sup>29</sup>

---

verbo, se transfigura y sus facciones descubren su secreto destino de mascarón de proa en nave de conquista” (Renau 389).

<sup>29</sup> The threat of the spread of Nazism through the Americas had been disseminated two years earlier in Bernal de León’s 1940 Mexican publication, *La Quinta Columna en el continente americano*. The author, who completed the research and writing of his book on the eve of Germany’s invasion of Poland (1939), warned his Mexican readership: “El hecho de que la colonia alemana sea relativamente pequeña, no es obstáculo, sin embargo, para que el régimen nazi ponga sus ojos en México como posible país colonial. Antes el contrario, las intenciones del nazismo sobre México desde los comienzos de su poder en Alemania, son más señalados que las que se refieren a los Estados sudamericanos” (Bernal de León 142). Similarly, the day after his arrival to Mexico City on February 18, 1939 from a diplomatic tour of Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay, Negrín’s former Minister of Defense Indalecio Prieto gave a newspaper interview in which he voiced his views on the increasing danger of fascist forces taking hold in Spanish America. (Matesanz 300).

The second preface to Rodríguez's book is written by a Spanish *exiliado* to Mexico, Justo Rocha, who introduces the Mexican author as a champion of the Spanish refugees still trapped in camps in both Occupied and Vichy France following the Nazi invasion and armistice. Rocha presents Rodríguez as a kind of messiah-like figure who has worked tirelessly on behalf of the most bereft sectors of the exile community, "los desheredados de todo amparo . . . los hombres—guñapos de parias—, clavados en cruz, como sobre su propia tumba innominada, en los campos de concentración franceses" (ix). As President Lázaro Cárdenas's official representative in France, Rodríguez's efforts to help record numbers of camp inmates emigrate to Mexico is a noble enterprise that Rocha attributes to a Quijote-like hero, "el visionario de México—caballero andante de la nueva aventura—, velando las armas de su inteligencia, para abrir los senderos de la liberación y los surcos de la nueva vida, sembrando horizontes en el alma trémula de los refugiados" (xiii). The souls that Rodríguez brings back to life ("restituyéndoles la dignidad de seres humanos" xi) are none other than the walking dead in the wake of the Spanish, now European, war's devastation, "las víctimas vivientes del fascismo" (xi).

The diary entries that comprise Luis Rodríguez's book chronicle events that begin on June 1, 1940 in Paris, amidst the confusion of aerial bombings, sirens, and streams of European refugees; the final diary entry is July 10, 1940, which serves as an epitaph to the free nation of France. He writes his version of the dissolution of the Third Republic of France under the following epigraph: "Los que mueren con honra, siempre viven. Los que viven sin honra, son los muertos" (1). Interestingly, Rodríguez does structure his entire account according to the heroic example of those who have lived and many who have died with honor and integrity (the Spanish Republicans) versus those who have survived without a committed struggle, without honor (the Vichy French). A key narrative strategy that Rodríguez uses in this text is to counter pose the memory of the Spanish Republic under siege by fascists to the current case of the French Republic's wildly different response to Nazi aggression. A June 5<sup>th</sup> entry refers to the despised Edouard Daladier as a man without principles, "el falso demócrata y amigo incondicional de las clases patronales" (26); the next day's entry condemns the approaching German army's skillful maneuvers that were well-honed at the expense of thousands of courageous war-dead "en la España de García Lorca" (30). Later, he pays tribute to a Spanish Civil War hero he meets in

---

Paris, the fighter pilot Emilio Herrera, whom he admires as the embodiment of “un pueblo heroico, al que se le impide respirar ahora, pero que conserva intactos sus pulmones con el mejor oxígeno: la fe en su destino” (37). This notion of keeping the faith, of fighting on with an unbroken spirit, is further illustrated by one of Carlos González’s drawings inserted after the description of the June 7<sup>th</sup> meeting with Herrera in which Don Quijote battles a series of huge windmills with swastika blades (45). Both the paean to Herrera and the image of the quixotic struggle, form a striking contrast to the French nation’s lack of will to resist, to dig in and fight, that will be responsible for the easy capitulation of Paris to the enemy forces. Even more damning than the imminent fall of the capital to the Nazi invasion, says Rodríguez, has been the French government’s smug, self-serving complacency in recent years, to the point of passive complicity, in the face of ever increasing acts of aggression by German and Italian armies against its European neighbors. The June 11<sup>th</sup> entry records Italy’s declaration of war on France, the evacuation of the Mexican embassy in Paris, the flight of civilians towards the south, and Rodríguez’s furious assessment of the role the French government has played in its own sorry fate:

Unos cuantos años de falsa prosperidad, de suicida abundancia, de egoísmo nacional, de indiferencia ante el dolor extraño, de soberbia y de libertinaje; unos cuantos años de vida regalada y superficial; durmiendo confiadamente sobre la almohada de la línea Maginot; de fingida paz bucólica; de vacuo turismo sobre la piel del alma; de avaricia colectiva; de sustantiva miopía frente al peligro lógico, inminente, inaplezable, unos cuantos años de aparente orden, pero de profundo desorden, hasta con los estratos de la conciencia popular, bastaron para perder siglos de victoria, de austeridad, de limpio orgullo y de admiración universal (65).

It is at this juncture that the diarist again recalls, “en vigoroso contraste” (66), the more heroic example of the Spanish Republic’s actions during its recent war. On this day in 1940 that Rodríguez and thousands of Parisians evacuate the French capital, the author includes in his diary a heartfelt elegy to the noble resistance of Madrid that held her enemies at bay for two and a half years:

Madrid, solo, único, enhiesto sobre la árida estepa castellana, cercado por varios cuerpos de ejército; . . . con una nutrida lista de víctimas y de mártires en cada-hoja de su calendario trágico, lanzada al viento cada día, con olor de pólvora y resplandor de llamas. Madrid, con sus niños arrancados del árbol de la vida, en una floración sangrienta del crimen y de la barbarie. ¡Madrid!: la eternidad de un nombre y de una época. Aquí es otro ritmo. París sucumbe sin lanzar una queja (66).

The mythologization of Madrid's defiant spirit and strength would warmly resonate among Rodríguez's Spanish Republican readers in Mexico; his words rang in their ears as proof of their vindication against an indifferent French leadership that had, they felt, turned its back on them in war and turned them over *en masse* to concentration camp guards in exile.

The remaining diary entries, following the June 14<sup>th</sup> notation that Paris has fallen to the Germans (96), are filled with sympathetic references to well-known exiled leaders of the Spanish Republic: Juan Negrín, Manuel Azaña, and Julián Zugazagoitia. Rodríguez recalls animated conversations with Negrín in Burdeos when he urged the stubbornly reluctant *presidente del consejo* to leave France in order to avoid certain extradition to Franco's Spain. The primary concern, he insistently reminds Negrín, is to act in a prudent way (i.e. emigrate) in order to best serve his nation's future efforts to win back Spain: "Su causa, su gente, su país, lo reclaman en plenitud de vida, comandando las nuevas trincheras" (139); the next day Rodríguez reports Negrín's departure for England under heavy Nazi bombing. His fears for Negrín's safety are unfortunately realized in the case of the journalist and former government minister Zugazagoitia, who according to the July 6<sup>th</sup> entry is arrested in Paris; Rodríguez notes that the former correspondent for Buenos Aires' *La Vanguardia* had a visa for Argentina, but had refused to leave (227). Zugazagoitia's execution in Spain on Franco's orders will soon follow.<sup>30</sup> The

---

<sup>30</sup> Spanish exile Mariano Granados lists Zugazagoitia's name among other well-known Republican political refugees in France that the author identifies as victims of illegal extraditions demanded by Franco and sanctioned by the French authorities between 1940 and 1944 (Granados 62). Granados published in Mexico City his detailed 1946 summary of French jurisprudence related to questions of extradition and political asylum, in order to prove that Vichy France's deportations of former Republican leaders violated long-standing accords between France and Spain (specifically, the International Treaty of 1877 and the supplementary Law of March 10, 1927): "[N]o puede hablarse jurídicamente en estos casos de extradiciones,

looming death of another patriot, Manuel Azaña, is alluded to on July 2<sup>nd</sup> following Rodríguez's visit in Montauban with the weak and ailing former prime minister of the Spanish Republic. The Mexican diplomat remembers Azaña's description of his flight by ambulance from Pyla-sur-Mer at the end of June while being pursued by the Gestapo and Francoist police, and his emotional conclusion: "Aquí me tiene, mi ilustre amigo, convertido en un despojo humano . . . sin arraigo, expuesto a todas las contingencias; moribundo, sin afectos ni dinero, sin perspectivas ni tranquilidad" (212). Rodríguez would return to Montauban in September in an unsuccessful effort to get Azaña out of France; too frail to be moved, Azaña remained in the French town until his death in November of 1940 (ix).

The climactic event of Rodríguez's diary is not the Nazi invasion of France, the fall of Paris, or the mass exodus of refugees towards the south, but rather the author's audience on July 8 with Mariscal Petáin to discuss the evacuation of Spanish refugees to Mexico. Overwhelmed by the plight of the thousands of Republicans left behind in Spain at the mercy of Franco's retaliation and of those who will remain in France's camps, Rodríguez pledges his nation's solidarity with the group Petáin labels "gentes indeseables": "un ferviente deseo de beneficiar y amparar a elementos que llevan nuestra sangre y nuestro espíritu" (233). In a pattern now familiar in the early postwar discourse that commemorates the anonymous exiled martyrs of the Republic, memories of the camps and their ragged inmates fill Rodríguez's thoughts as he leaves the meeting with Petáin:

Al calor del recuerdo, las imágenes cobraban su vida propia y desfilaban por mi pensamiento con sus silhuetas derrotadas, titanes de la abnegación y del sacrificio, seres ignorados, suprimidos ya del censo de la vida, con el nombre deshecho en un temblor de harapos, a merced de la mano brutal de algún gendarme; seres sin cédula, y aun sin número—garantía mínimo de los presidiarios—, que realizan a diario el acto heroico de no pasar por héroes (234).

As far as Rodríguez is concerned, the French officials who have orchestrated the miserable

---

sino de raptos perpetrados *in fraudem legis* burlando los preceptos legales y las estipulaciones del estatuto internacional" (63).

confinement of refugees into the camps, despise their victims for possessing the idealism and faith in their political cause (“¡Ellos sí tienen fe!” 237) that they themselves lack: “Les molesta ver . . . tanta riqueza de espíritu; por eso les indigna contemplar una serenidad, una fortaleza, un egregio coraje y una dignidad que ellos, los opresores, han olvidado en esta hora de prueba para el mundo” (235-236). An early entry in Rodríguez’s diary recorded the telegram message sent to him by President Lázaro Cárdenas in support of France on the occasion of Italy’s declaration of war on the Gallic nation: “Ese gran pueblo francés que legendariamente ha sido portavoz de las libertades humanas y de los derechos del hombre, así como de la moralidad internacional” (63). Cárdenas’s words echo now ironically in the conclusion of Rodríguez’s diary one month later, as the author sarcastically underscores the empty rhetoric of the most famous slogan of the French nation: *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*; so has official France shown her true colors in the concentration camps founded on behalf of a fellow Republic’s people: “En nombre de su trilogía vital. . . en nombre de la Libertad. . . en nombre de la Igualdad . . . en nombre de la Fraternidad” (235).

Despite the Spanish Republicans’ indictments –and those of their political supporters like Rodríguez– against the French during the early days of world war, the exiled writers would finally embrace their neighbors to the north as members of the French Resistance took up arms against the fascists. In his *Campos de concentración*, French camp survivor Narcís Molins i Fàbrega concludes his work with an epilogue dedicated “A Francia,” written in March 1944 as the war raged in Europe. The author makes the characteristic distinction between the hated “official” France and the “true France” of the Resistance. Now brave Spanish combatants in France’s own resistance movement fight shoulder to shoulder with their French counterparts united at last in a common cause. The Republican exiles living in Mexico in 1944 share the author’s hope and conviction that a Europe free of fascism in the near future will include not only France, but their own beloved, long-suffering Spain as well: “A esta verdadera Francia no la atacamos ni le podemos guardar rencor. Esta es también nuestra, y más después que en su suelo ha sido derramada tanta sangre de los nuestros, víctimas del mismo enemigo que traicionó y vendió al pueblo francés” (160). Shared memories of the past and shared dreams for the future sustained the national imagination of a Spanish Republican community that awaited in exile the chance to go home again.

## WORKS CITED

- Alvarez del Vayo, Julio. *Freedom's Battle*. Trans. Eileen E. Brooke. NY: Hill & Wang, 1971.
- Barтолí, Josep and Narcís Molins i Fábrega. *Campos de concentración, 1939-194....* Mexico City: Iberia, 1944.
- Bartra, Agustí. *Cristo de 200.000 brazos (Campos de Argeles)*. Mexico City: Editorial Novaro-Mexico, 1958.
- Bernal de León, José. *La Quinta Columna en el continente americano*. Mexico City: Ediciones Culturales Mexicanas, 1940.
- Cate-Arries, Francie. *Spanish Culture behind Barbed Wire: Memory and Representation of the French Concentration Camps, 1939-1945*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004.
- Feinstein, Stephen. "Art after Auschwitz." *Problems Unique to the Holocaust*. Ed. Harry Cargas. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999.
- Ferrer, Eulalio. *Entre alambradas*. Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1988.
- Gómez-Molina, Ramón. *Qué son los exiliados*. Barcelona: La Gaya Ciencia, 1977.
- Granados, Mariano. *La extradición de los refugiados españoles*. Mexico City: Agrupación de Universitarios Españoles, 1946.
- Kaplan, Janet. *Unexpected Journeys: The Art and Life of Remedios Varo*. NY: Abbeville Press, 1988.
- Kent, Victoria. *Cuatro años en París (1940-1944)*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Sur, 1947.
- Matesanz, José Antonio. *Las raíces del exilio. México ante la guerra civil española, 1936-1939*. Mexico City: El Colegio de México/UNAM, 1999.
- Mistral, Silvia. *Exodo*. Mexico City: Editorial Minerva, 1940.
- Nelken, Margarita. "Prólogo." *Los de Collioure (Relatos de un crimen)*. Mexico City: Editorial Morelos, 1940.
- Renau, Juan. *Pasos y sombras. Autopsia*. Mexico City: Colección Aquelarre, 1953.
- Rodríguez, Luis. *Ballet de sangre: la caída de Francia*. Prologue by Pablo Neruda. Mexico City: Ediciones Nigromante, 1942.
- Said, Edward. "Invention, Memory, Place." *Critical Inquiry* 26.2 (2000): 175-92.
- Shain, Yossi. *The Frontier of Loyalty: Political Exiles in the Age of the Nation-State*.

Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1989.

Soriano, Antonio. *Exodos: Historia oral del exilio republicano en Francia, 1939-1945*.

Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 1989.

Tellado Vázquez, Antonio and Antonio Sánchez-Bravo Cenjor. "Actas de la última sesión parlamentaria de la Segunda República Española." *El peso de la derrota, 1939-1944. La tragedia de medio millón de españoles en el exilio*. Madrid: Edifrans, 1974. 333-35.