



Universiteit Utrecht

A Soul without Frontiers

The would-be Social revolution &
Why Americans volunteered to fight during
the 1936-1939 Spanish Civil War

BACHELOR THESIS

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Course: OZS III – Cosmopolitanism

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Words: ~9500

Place: Utrecht

Date: 17-06-2016

Title: 'A Soul Without Frontiers'

Author: Arthur F. Rodenburg

Subject: The would-be Social Revolution & Why Americans volunteered to fight during the 1936-1939 Spanish Civil War

Abstract:

During the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939 almost 40.000 volunteers decided to leave everything behind and travel to Spain in order to assist the Republic in their struggle for survival against the Fascists. This force known as Las Brigadas Internacionales (The International Brigades) consisted of men and women from over fifty countries. The United States among them, some 2.800 Americans travelled to Spain and served in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. The members of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion possessed a fair amount of cosmopolitan consciousness. The mere fact that its members included African Americans atones this. A mixed race combat Battalion is an interesting exception in a time where segregation and outright discrimination was still a normality.

'I think learning about the Spanish Civil War, the Anarchist Revolution and the universally felt sympathy observable in the impressive amount of foreign volunteers is an excellent way to help spread cosmopolitan consciousness. Though Spanish history from 1936 to 1939 is yet another horrific display of mankind's destructive nature, it is also an inspiring tale of men and women from all corners of the globe that truly shows a seldom before seen communal effort, solidarity for strangers and a lust for freedom.'

Key words:

Universal Solidarity, Cosmopolitanism, Coudenhove-Kalergi, Cosmopolitan Consciousness, Kurasawa, Spanish Republic, Spanish Civil War, Bulloten, Social Revolution, Orwell, Anarchism, Anarcho-syndicalism, Puente, Communism, International Brigades, Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Anti-Fascism, Canute Frankson, Harry Melofsky, Witness

A Soul without Frontiers¹

The would-be Social revolution &
Why Americans volunteered to fight during
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1^{er} BATALLÓN AMERICANO
ABRAHAM LINCOLN
BRIGADA INTERNACIONAL

2

By Arthur F. Rodenburg
Utrecht, 17-06-2016

¹ Title inspired by Miguel Hernandez, who wrote a poem for those who went to Spain during the 1936-1939 Civil War: *To the International Soldier Fallen in Spain*

² Photographs have been retrieved from The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (ALBA) at: <http://www.alba-valb.org>

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Introduction: Athletes in a Revolutionary Game

Spain 1936, a breeding place for Cosmopolitan thoughts?

Thursday, July 16, 1936. A group of American athletes arrived in Barcelona three days before the opening ceremonies. These athletes were members of the American Olympic team that travelled to Spain with the intention to participate in the *Olimpiada Popular* (People's Olympiad) hosted by the Catalonians. On Friday they wandered through the city, enjoying the many sights the Catalanian capital has to offer. The next day they visited the brand new stadium and spent the remainder of the day rehearsing for the morning after. Formal speeches and introductions would fill their schedules on Sunday, but the Americans already sensed a tension in the air. While travelling through France on Bastille Day, they had heard warnings of a possible revolution. 'I didn't worry about it.'³ recalled Dorothy, a sprinter representing the Ladies Garment Workers Union in New York. 'We had no fear.'⁴ Rather, it was pre-competition nerves that disturbed their sleep.

The People's Olympiad was organised by the newly elected left-wing Popular front government with the goal to mock the actual and official Olympics that took place in Berlin that very same summer. The reason for the boycott was clear cut, it aimed to oppose Nazi-Germany's discriminative policies against labour unionists, communists, Jews, Catholics, and other minorities. People from all over the world protested against the Berlin spectacle – In New York alone some twenty-thousand people gathered to call for a boycott. One can understand why a non-violent sports event that is supposed to promote racial, cultural, and national interaction in order to create a sense of mutual understanding and solidarity across the globe – hosted by a regime, increasingly notorious for its dubious policies, is being boycotted. In spite, many countries attended the Olympics hosted by Nazi-Germany. Where governments failed to take a proper stand against outright oppression, many amateur athletes did not, and proved to be more emphatic.

Although most countries send their official teams to Germany, the People's Olympiad had all potential to become a great success. A total of six thousand athletes from twenty-two nations had signed up for the games. The largest contingents of athletes came from the United States, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Italy and Germany. The teams of the latter two were mostly made up of political exiles from those countries.⁵ Despite all the careful preparation and far-reaching efforts, the would-be People's Olympiad was never held.

³ Peter N. Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War* (Chicago 1994) 57.

⁴ Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 57.

⁵ Not entirely coincidental, a good number of foreigners who volunteered to fight alongside the Spanish Republic at a later stage in the war in Las Brigades Internacionales (The International Brigades) originated from the countries listed above.

What was to be the first day of a weeklong sports competition turned out to be the first day of a three year long brutal Civil War. And the American Olympians were right in the thick of it. At dawn on Sunday, July 19, 1936, the tumult of war suddenly drilled through the walls of the Olympic hotel. Frank Payton, an African-American sprinter recounted waking up to: ‘The rumbling of cannon, several thousand machine guns and rifles and the sound of marching feet.’⁶ In the city chaos was ubiquitous, one expecting joy and celebration now had to cope with whistling bullets overhead, the howling sound of incoming artillery and the occasional sight of death squads roaming the streets executing people at random. Certainly no small thing to digest, none remained unaffected by what they had seen – not only in a traumatising sense, some felt genuinely inspired by the worker’s spirit.

‘Peeking through the hotel windows, they could see workers tearing cobblestones from the streets to build barricades, but sporadic machine-gun fire forced them to keep their heads inside. When the shooting abated, two of the Americans dashed into the streets to find something to eat. Another went outside, grabbed a crowbar, and helped the Catalonians dismantle a roadway to build a defensive emplacement.’⁷

The Amateur athletes were the first Americans to become involved in the Spanish civil war. Before the war had even begun these athletes had already shown a great deal of solidarity by choosing to attend and participate the games in Barcelona rather than those in Berlin. Not surprisingly, when they got the chance most athletes decided to return home. There were quite some who felt obligated to share what they had witnessed those few short days in Spain and worked hard to raise awareness about the ongoing struggle of a democracy under siege. Others went beyond the call of duty and decided to stay and fight⁸ – they served as an example for many to follow.

There were young people, in their twenties from all over the world whom fought side by side against the fascists in Spain. Including some twenty-eight-hundred Americans with rarely before seen mixed social, gender and racial backgrounds unified in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. In the United States, this went against the wishes of the U.S. government and after the war, resulted in prosecutions and jail time for some of those involved. This makes one wonder, why were people willing to risk death or prison to fight a civil war in a country they didn’t even live in? What elements made the Spanish leftist Republic such an attractive cause worth defending? Truly, what drives one to pick up a crowbar in foreign land and help out total strangers whilst being under fire? What underlying ideal, if any, lies behind this brief and noble act of solidarity? Could it perhaps be Cosmopolitanism?

6 Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 57.

7 Ibid.

8 Two-Hundred of the Six-Thousand Athletes that travelled to Barcelona ended up fighting alongside the people’s militia’s for the Spanish Republic.

The following research question has been devised to help guide both the reader and the author throughout: *To what extent were American volunteers of the Lincoln Brigade whom went to Spain between 1936 and 1939 driven by cosmopolitan considerations?*

In an attempt to answer the hereinbefore raised questions we must first constitute what (moral) cosmopolitanism actually is,⁹ whether the ideal was popular during the Inter-war period (1918-1939), and how a consciousness of it can be defined and spread – this will be elaborated in Chapter One.

In Chapter Two a short account on the origins and course of the 1936-1939 Spanish Civil War in addition to an analysis of the Social revolution that took place will be provided. This event has been chosen for two reasons, firstly due to the potential cosmopolitan traits of this so called Social revolution. These traits and its cosmopolitan potential will be discussed herein. The second reason why this particular event in history has been chosen is because; not only the happening itself appears to be drenched in cosmopolitan consciousness, just learning about this period in time could stimulate and raise the cosmopolitan mindset of any human being.

The Third Chapter will be devoted to finding out if the cosmopolitan dimensions of the Social revolution were indeed the driving force behind the decision of those twenty-eight-hundred Americans to travel to Spain. The author will try and achieve this by analysing personal letters, written by members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade between 1937 and 1939. These letters have been obtained through the online archives of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and the extensive compilation work by Cary Nelson & Jefferson Hendricks.¹⁰ The analysis will be qualitative in nature, ergo, finding out the *why* and *how* behind the decision making. The reasoning as to why the author has chosen to write only about the American volunteers of the International Brigade and not the 36.000 others from fifty-two countries is twofold. The first one is simple, the English language, in which most of the accessible letters are written, poses no translation barrier to the author. Secondly, the Americas have drawn immigrants from across the Globe, making the background of the volunteers more diverse than that of the, for example, French volunteers who were among the most numerical (some 9.000 – 10.000).

The conclusion will provide a concise answer to the hereinbefore introduced research question. This thesis is aimed to distil the cosmopolitan considerations of those who went beyond the call of duty and stood united in defiance to the oppressive status quo.¹¹

9 To the author that is, for cosmopolitanism for one could be something entirely else to another.

10 Cary Nelson & Jefferson Hendricks, *Madrid 1937: Letters of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade From the Spanish Civil War* (London 1996).

11 'Status quo' is Latin for the existing state of affairs, particularly with regards to social or political issues. In the sociological sense, it generally applies to maintain existing social structure and values. It comes down to keeping the things the way they presently are.

Chapter One: Moral Obligations & Solidarity

Cosmopolitanism, what is it, how did it develop, and how can it be spread?

Hereinbelow one can read about the development of cosmopolitanism, and what this term actually constitutes. In addition, an account is given on the question 'how alive' this concept was during the inter-war period, prior to the Spanish civil war. The chapter will continue with relevant discussions on cosmopolitanism within the History department since the end of the Cold war. It will be concluded with an adherence to the suggested act of 'bearing witness' as a suitable vehicle to spread cosmopolitan consciousness.

1.1 Cosmopolitanism in the Ancient world until the 19th Century

Universal solidarity, words that represents a feeling of unity between people based on just one important realization: we are all in the same boat and we all are members of the same race, the human one. Meaning, letting go of all notions of 'otherness' and instead embrace 'togetherness'.¹² This realization is often cited as a vital aspect and pre-condition for an ageless universalist thought project that has been coined cosmopolitanism. A word derived from the ancient Greek *Kosmopolitês*, meaning 'citizen of the world or universe'.¹³ An idea and practice first conceptualized by the philosophical school of Stoicism.¹⁴ These Stoics focused on 'development of the concept of the *kosmopolis*, the city of the universe, or the universe as a state. The basic concept was that all human beings, and the gods, are subject to a universal *moral* law. A cardinal feature of citizenship of a polis was the subjection of all citizens to the laws of the polis.¹⁵ The Stoics argued that the universe by virtue of its law, could be likened on a much vaster scale to a polis. Consequently, all are citizens of the universe. As such, human should live moral lives, recognizing all others as their kin.

Throughout the ages cosmopolitan vision remained fairly similar to the Stoic "original". At times the ideas were expanded by individuals like Jan Amos Comenius. In *Via Lucis* (1668) the 17th century thinker envisioned a super-state with global institutions. Solidarity and openness to what is 'strange' remained at the centre of cosmopolitan thinking. This can be seen in contemporary works by for example, Francis Bacon, who wrote *The New Atlantis* (1624)¹⁶ in which he stated: 'If a man be gracious and courteous to strangers, it shows he is a citizen of the world, and that his heart is no island cut off from other lands, but a continent that joins them.'¹⁷

12 Article 34 of the French Constitution of 1793 echoes the idea of solidarity adequately, it states: 'There is oppression against the social body when one of its members is oppressed. There is oppression against each member when the social body is oppressed.'

13 Pauline Kleingeld and Eric Brown, 'Cosmopolitanism' in: Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014).

14 Established in 310BC by Zeno of Citium. Name derived from the lessons given on his *Stoa Poikile* (Painted porch).

15 Derek Heater, *A history of education for citizenship* (London 2004) 219-220.

16 A novel that depicts an utopian land where generosity and enlightenment, dignity and splendour, piety and public spirit are the commonly held qualities of the inhabitants of this Utopia.

17 Francis Bacon, 'Essays, Civil and Moral', in: Eliot (ed.) *The Harvard Classics* (New York 1909).

Hereafter in 18th century varying ideas about cosmopolitanism have continuously boggled the minds of individuals like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant and Anacharsis Cloots. In *La république universelle ou adresse aux tyrannicides* (1792) Cloots advocated the abolition of all existing states and the establishment of a single world state under which all human individuals would be directly subsumed. This 'world-wide republic of united individuals' was meant to counter a plurality of states that find themselves in ever-lasting mood of rivalry. Furthermore, he argued that sovereignty should reside with the people, and that the concept of sovereignty itself, because it involves indivisibility, implies that there can be but one sovereign body in the world, namely, the human race as a whole.¹⁸

During the 19th century Academics (and historians in particular) have largely neglected cosmopolitanism, as they seemed more concerned with over glorifying the history of their own Nation State. Even those advocating a more 'scientific' approach to history, like Leopold von Ranke or Friedrich Meinecke, failed to look beyond the magnificence of Germany. In *Cosmopolitanism and the National State* (1907) Meinecke 'traced the interconnectedness between cosmopolitan and national ideologies [...] from the perspective of the necessary and inevitable dominance of nations and the equally inevitable decline of cosmopolitan states.'¹⁹ Although, cosmopolitan practices, especially in the form of peace initiatives, have been present throughout the second half of the 19th century.

1.2 Cosmopolitanism in the 20th Century

Cosmopolitan thought and strive for lasting peace and unity surged in the 20th century. The peace and solidarity movements during inter-war period being the most relevant example for this research. Having witnessed the horrors of modern warfare, the Great War had brought about countless popular Peace movements and noteworthy individual peace activists like Fannie Fern Andrews, who wrote *The World Family* (1918). Andrews stressed the importance of peace education in helping people realize the oneness of mankind. More so, it was during this period that the nationalistic mode of historiography began to fade. The professionalization and specialisation of history in twentieth century Europe 'helped sift a more consistent cosmopolitanism from the nationalistic chaff of nineteenth century historiography.'²⁰ The transition of nationalistic toned writing towards a recognition of all other as kin during the inter-war period is exemplified in the person of Count Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi. An Austrian-Japanese Professor of Philosophy, who is recognized as the founder of the first popular movement for an united Europe. He wrote *Pan-Europa* (1923) where singled out nationalism and national boundaries as a primary cause of war and human misery. Coudenhove-Kalergi envisioned an united Europe as part of a broader world-governmental fabric.

18 Also in: Anacharsis Cloots, *Bases constitutionnelles de la république du genre humain* (Paris 1793).

19 Glenda Sluga and Julia Horne, 'Cosmopolitanism: its pasts and practices', *Journal of World History* 21:3 (2010) 369.

20 David Long and Peter Wilson, 'J.A. Hobson and Economic Internationalism', *Thinkers of the Twenty Years' Crisis: Inter-War Idealism Revisited* (Oxford 1995) 88.

He was an enthusiastic advocate of the League of Nations (1920) seeing it as ‘the foundation stone’ of a united global community, ‘A World Republic should be its final step.’²¹ Moreover, he wrote in opposition to simplistic racial theories²², hatred towards Jews²³ and warned against the rise of Fascism and National-Socialism. Topics that, as shall be shown later in thesis, reflect the *Zeitgeist* of the American volunteers who went to Spain. In *The Totalitarian State Against Man* (1937) he stated: ‘We are experiencing the most dangerous revolution in world history: the revolution of the State against man. We are [witnessing] the worst idolatry of all time: the deification of the state.’²⁴ Such a deification was taking place in Spain for example under Franco and his ‘Nationalists’. Synchronically, International Socialism underwent cosmopolitan reform between the Second (1889-1917) and Third (1919-43) Internationals. Whereas western European socialists of the First and Second Internationals generally supported colonialism, characterised non-Europeans as ‘too backward for socialist revolution’, and gave primary loyalty to their own nation-states, the Third International was a truly global, cosmopolitan project.²⁵ A surge in cosmopolitan consciousness within international socialist movements can be witnessed during the Spanish Civil War, the Forty-thousand volunteers of the International Brigades were largely organised through socialist and communist parties.

During and after the Second World War cosmopolitan strive once again surged. The United Nations (UN) was founded in 1945, and in Europe the path towards unification continued in the form of the European Economy Community (EEC). However, unification of Europe, and the World as a whole was overshadowed by the ever-present Capitalist/Communist antagonism.

1.3 Cosmopolitanism since the end of the Cold War

Hopes and dreams of a peaceful and unified world community resurfaced with the fall of the Soviet Union. Academics followed subtly and rediscovered the merits of ageless cosmopolitan visionaries. It was Martha Nussbaum (1997) who opted a return to the Stoic presentation of the concept of world citizenship and the pursued of self-knowledge. ‘Through cosmopolitan education, we learn more about ourselves, we make headway solving problems that require international cooperation, we recognize moral obligations to the rest of the world and we make a consistent and coherent argument based on distinctions we are prepared to defend.’²⁶ Despite many similar writings of like-minded individuals genuine cosmopolitan practical implementation have remained rare ever since. ‘Cosmopolitanism’ was (and in the common tongue, often, still is) equated with the (Western) globalized capitalist market economy and the superficial materialistic (urban) lifestyle that comes

21 Carl H. Pegg, *The Evolution of the European Idea, 1914-1932* (Chapel Hill & London 1983) 29.

22 Graf R. N. von Coudenhof-Kalergi, *Praktischer Idealismus* (1925).

23 Graf R. N. von Coudenhof-Kalergi, *Judenhaß von heute: Das Wesen des Antisemitismus* (1935).

24 Graf R. N. von Coudenhof-Kalergi, *Totaler Staat - totaler Mensch* (1937).

25 Alejandro Colas, ‘Putting Cosmopolitanism into Practice: the Case of Socialist Internationalism’ *Millennium* Vol.23 (1994) 523-7.

26 Martha Nussbaum, ‘Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism’, *Boston Review* Vol. XIX No. 5 (1994).

with it. Craig Calhoun (2002) argued that cosmopolitanism should be disassociated with neoliberal capitalism if it wants genuine cosmopolitan democracy to flourish. He stated: 'It needs to approach both cross-cultural relations and the construction of social solidarities with deeper recognition of the significance of diverse starting points and potential outcomes. It needs more discursive engagement across lines of difference, more commitment to reduction of material inequality, and more openness to radical change.'²⁷ Gerard Delanty (2012) affirms this point of view, he stated: 'cosmopolitanism is about the extension of the moral and political horizons of people, societies, organization and institutions. It implies an attitude of openness as opposed to closure.' He adds by saying cosmopolitanism is: 'the exploration of alternatives to the status quo.'²⁸

This tension between the status quo and the imaginary of an alternative has resulted in the view of cosmopolitanism as a purely ideal aspiration not rooted in reality. Which should come to no surprise, since those in power will do everything to maintain this so called status quo. The powers that be will therefore continuously try and convince the whole of mankind that a world without rulers, a harmonious community in which solidarity, cooperation and peace can thrive – will not be possible, not now, not ever. Those maintaining the status quo are hell bound on creating hate and division amongst the people of the world. Living in a constant climate of mental distraction, material neediness and outright fear assures that the common man is left fighting with one another over the spilled bread crumbs.

1.4 Spreading Cosmopolitan Consciousness through Bearing Witness

Some of those involved in cosmopolitan writing since the 1990's have wholeheartedly tried to find ways to defy the status quo by coming up with methods to help spread genuine cosmopolitan consciousness. Steven Vertovec & Robin Cohen (2002) reposed the most basic questions every human with a cosmopolitan mindset has: Can we ever live peacefully with one another? What do we share, collectively, as human beings?²⁹ In other words, what connects the struggles of a Spanish factory worker to that of an American university student? What creates 'solidarity'? A word so often used, yet rarely truly understood.

A plausible candidate for being the method for raising a cosmopolitan awareness is discussed by Fuyuki Kurasawa (2009). He argues that the act of *bearing witness* is an excellent method to inform and educate populations across the globe about atrocities committed *against* fellow human-beings

27 Craig Calhoun, 'The class consciousness of frequent travelers: toward a critique of actually existing cosmopolitanism', *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 10:4 (2002) 893.

28 Gerard Delanty, 'Introduction. The emerging field of cosmopolitanism studies' in: Delanty (ed.) *Routledge Handbook of Cosmopolitanism Studies* (New York 2012) 2.

29 Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, *Conceiving cosmopolitanism: theory, context and practice* (Oxford 2002) 1.

by fellow human-beings. The ideal here being that the sharing of tragedy leads to compassion for the victims and universal solidarity.³⁰ Of course, in the last three decades or so mankind has been overflowed by atrocity in HD quality, often creating the opposite of what it (ideally) hopes to accomplish – apathy and universal carelessness. Therefore the idea of bearing witness should be applied in a different, somewhat more positive, or rather, inspiring way. Needless to say the Spanish Civil War was a time full of tragedy but only shedding light on the atrocities that took place during this time will not do any good other than making one feel miserable and affirm one's view of the world as a place filled with horror.

During the introduction of this thesis the reader learned about the People's Olympiad. The participating athletes were the first to raise awareness about the ongoing struggle of the Spanish people. When Frank Payton, the black athlete, returned to the U.S. he addressed a crowd of Twenty-thousand people at Madison Square Garden (New York) about the worker's defiance against oppression and fascism in the Spanish Republic. He was not alone in his efforts trying to raise awareness for the Spanish cause. The famous (black) poet Langston Hughes addressed his listeners in a radio broadcast, stating: 'If Fascism creeps across Spain, across Europe, and then across the world, there will be no place left for intelligent young Negroes at all. In fact no decent place left for any Negroes – because Fascism preaches the creed of Nordic supremacy and a world for whites alone.'³¹

The famous writer, Ernest Hemingway, who ventured into Spain regularly during the Civil War, expressed similar concern for the spread of Fascism. He tried to stress the relevance of the struggle to American readers, after visiting a field hospital he wrote: 'It still isn't you that gets hit, but it is your countryman now...' Referring to volunteer Robert Raven, a former student at the University of Pittsburgh, who had been blinded by a grenade attack. To familiarize the Spanish with the American Civil War he said: '...your countryman from Pennsylvania, where once we fought at Gettysburg..³² Back in the U.S. Hemingway addressed a crowd at the Writer's Congress in 1937 where he spoke about the moral stakes of the war: 'A writer who will not lie cannot live and work under fascism.'³³ He even arranged for a screening of *Spanish Earth* in the White House, a documentary he had made in collaboration with Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens. President Roosevelt appreciated the effort but it did not sway the administration's policy, it remained firm to its non-interventionist stance.³⁴

30 Fuyuki Kurasawa, 'A message in a bottle. Bearing witness as a mode of transnational practice', *Theory, Culture & Society* 26:1 (2009) 97.

31 Langston Hughes, 'Negroes in Spain' *Volunteer for Liberty* 1st issue (September 13, 1937).

32 William White, (ed.), *By-Line: Ernest Hemingway* (New York, 1967) 266.

33 White, *Ernest Hemingway*, 266.

34 Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 78.

1.5 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen that genuine cosmopolitanism has remained largely unaltered since the Stoics first conceptualized the idea. An idea based on an inner-feeling that regulates the notions of 'right' and 'wrong'. Arguably, a feeling that has been present since the dawn of mankind and closely resembles the core of pretty much any religion that preaches unconditional love for and duty to your fellow-man. To measure cosmopolitan consideration in the motivation of those Americans who volunteered for the Spanish republic it is important what aspects to look for. In essence, moral cosmopolitanism comes down to a willingness to engage with the 'other', a calling to bring peace and prosperity for all, an exploration for an alternative to the status-quo, a need to unite humanity as a whole, solidarity for strangers in despair, and above all, a sense of moral obligation to help those strangers.

We have discussed Kurasawa's notion of bearing witness as a means to spread cosmopolitan consciousness. Payton, Hughes, Hemingway, and many others like them picked up the 'bottles washed up on land,' deciphered the 'enclosed messages,' pondered them and intervened 'accordingly with the aim of alerting the world, cultivating empathy.'³⁵ Now it is up to us to make sense of what took place during the Spanish Civil War, it is up to us to remember, and, in a sense, through the telling of history, bear witness. The Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939) was a place where cosmopolitan ideals seemed to thrive. With the 1936 Social revolution being a great accumulation of radical change, reduction of material inequality and social solidarity. Truly, an account of this revolution shows us a refreshing alternative to the status-quo – to which we now turn.

³⁵ Kurasawa, *Bearing Witness*, 97.

Chapter Two: Social Reform & Civil War

What cosmopolitan aspects and reforms did the Social revolution encompass?

When one engages in the practice of 'bearing witness' through history telling it is important to provide essential background information on the causes of the Civil war, and of course, the proceedings of this war. In addition the Cosmopolitan scope of the Social revolution will be analysed. Furthermore, this chapter will briefly discuss whether this subject in particular played a big part in attracting the foreign volunteers on the side of the Spanish Socialist Republic.

2.1 Causes of the Spanish Civil War

Spain was once the World's most powerful empire. By the 20th century it was a poor and backward country where corruption was rife. It had lost nearly all of its overseas possessions (e.g. Cuba, the Philippines) and great extremes of wealth and poverty caused severe social tensions. Spain was essentially an agricultural country, industry was confined mainly to Barcelona and the Basque country. The South harboured vast private-estates or 'latifundia', worked by landless labourers. A model that had remained practically unaltered since the Roman era. A mere seven-thousand individuals owned fifteen Million acres of land, an impressive figure considering Spain's total size amounts to hundred and twenty-five Million acres, of which only a third was actually useful for agricultural purposes in the 1930s.³⁶ In the North small farmers worked farms that were in many cases not economically viable. It is estimated that half of the agricultural workers lived on the edge of starvation. The former granary of the Roman Empire had the lowest agricultural productivity in Europe. The enormous wealth and power of the Catholic Church was greatly frowned upon by many. It was closely associated with the wealthy classes and was seen as an enemy of change. Although the majority of Spaniards did not go to mass it had a strong following in the countryside where religious devotion was still significant. It had a virtual monopoly of education. Curbing the power of the church was seen as essential by those who were looking to reform the status quo if a fairer Spain was to be created. The military was ridiculously over-officered, with about one general to every hundred ill equipped soldiers. It had grown progressively conservative and was prone to interfere in politics.³⁷

In 1923, Spain experienced a bloodless coup when King Alfonso XII agreed that General Primo de Rivera should take control of Spain. He ruled as a military dictator until 1930. Rivera's approach to leadership was fully supported by Alfonso XII. Under Rivera industrial production increased by three times from 1923 to 1930. However, the Great Depression of the 1930's hit Spain hard. Unemployment rose and Rivera did not have the ability to sort out Spain's financial mess.

³⁶ Kevin Cahill, *Who Owns the World: The Hidden Facts Behind Landownership* (Edinburgh 2006).

³⁷ Paul Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War* (London 1996) 9-32.

In 1930 the military dictatorship of General Rivera was overthrown and the King decided to abdicate as he feared that if he stayed on, Spain would plummet into turmoil. Those who wanted to confront the status-quo and reform the country, the liberals, social-democrats, communists, and to some extent anarchist labour unions like the CNT³⁸ formed a coalition and aspired the formation of a Republic, this coalition is often referred to simply as the 'Republicans'. The status-quo is embodied in the large-land owners, industrialists, high ranking army officers and the catholic clergy.

In April 1931, elections were held in Spain which resulted in a Republican victory in all the major cities in Spain. The Spanish Second Republic was proclaimed in April 1931 and a new constitution came into effect in December that same year. The new constitution brought about freedom of speech, freedom of association, extended suffrage to women, allowed divorce and stripped the Spanish nobility of any special legal status. Under the new Constitution, all of Spain's regions had the right to autonomy. Catalonia (1932) and the Basque Country (1936) exercised this right, with Andalucía, Aragón, and Galicia engaged in negotiations with the government before the outbreak of the Civil War. Moreover, The constitution established legal procedures for the nationalisation of public services and land, banks, railways etcetera, and imposed stringent controls on Church property and barred religious orders from the ranks of educators. A move that satisfied the masses but simultaneously alienated those representing the status-quo – all frightened by the prospect of losing their positions of power and influence.³⁹

In 1936 the Falange (a fascist party representing the land-owning classes), the CEDA (a catholic right-wing party dedicated to anti-marxism), the Alfonsists (a party that aspired to restore the monarchy), and other right-wing parties threatened by the social reforms, formed an alliance of their own and made plans to remove the Republican government and reverse the social reforms. This alliance is later referred to as the 'Nationalists'. High ranking army officers with powerful ties to the capital and land-holding elites were to execute such a plan in the form of a swift coup. Fully convinced that a mere display of arms all over Spain (at the same time) would be enough to seize power and take over the country. History tells us it would not be, instead, events turned out rather different.

Ultimately then, 'the Spanish Civil War was to grow out of the efforts of the progressive leaders of the Republic to carry out reform against the wishes of the most powerful sections of society.'⁴⁰

38 CNT stands for Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, or National Confederation of Labour, founded 1910. Anarchist labour union, that was outlawed under Rivera and later by the Second Republic as well. The CNT wanted more radical reforms and preferred not to be part of any government, since this went against their Anarchist principles. In their view, governments merely exist to protect the established order.

39 Preston, *Spanish Civil War*, 9-32.

40 Preston, *Spanish Civil War*, 25.

2.2 Eruption of the Social (Anarchist) Revolution

The attempted military coup of July the 17th 1936 provoked the very thing it had intended to forestall: revolution. While the Republican government stood by paralysed and helpless, in many towns and cities the working class rose up against the army.

*'Men and women armed only with sticks of dynamite rushed across the open squares and stormed stone buildings held by trained soldiers with machine-guns. Machine-gun nests that the Fascists had placed at strategic spots were smashed by rushing taxis at them at sixty miles an hour.'*⁴¹

After fierce fighting they had managed to quell the armed insurrection in most of Spain's major cities, Madrid, Valencia, and Barcelona included. What had been envisaged as a straightforward seizure of power, almost as a technical exercise, ended with the army defeated in two thirds of Spain's national territory and the country plunged into revolution and civil war. A popular uprising had dealt the generals an unprecedented blow that makes the failure of the July coup one of the most heartening events in modern (working class) history. Only the assistance forthcoming from Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany prevented Franco's cause from speedily collapsing in total disarray. The success of the spontaneous people militias against the army had motivated the people to transcend their defiance and unleashed a Social revolution in many Republican areas. A Social revolution that far exceeded the already ongoing social reforms and those planned by Republican government. The CNT and the FAI⁴², combined had over a Million-and-a-half associates at the time of the outbreak, and are seen as the main organisers behind the far-reaching reforms.

This revolution put the idea of libertarian communism, also known as Anarcho-syndicalism, into practice. This ideology advocates the abolition of the state, capitalism, wage labour, and private property (while retaining respect for personal property), and favours common ownership of the means of production, direct democracy, and a horizontal network of voluntary associations and workers' councils. In Spain 1936 almost instantly 'more than sixty percent of the land was collectively cultivated by the peasants themselves, without landlords, without bosses, and without instituting capitalist competition to spur production. In almost all the industries, factories, mills, workshops, transportation services, public services, and utilities, the rank and file workers, their revolutionary committees, and their syndicates reorganized and administered production, distribution, and public services without capitalists, high salaried managers, or the authority of the state.'⁴³

41 Peter Davison, *Orwell in Spain* (London 2001) 172.

42 FAI stands for Federación Anarquista Ibérica, or Iberian Anarchist Federation, founded in 1927. Radical spin-off of the CNT. But always remained closely affiliated. Banned under Franco, resurfaced in 1977, still active today.

43 Sam Dolgoff, *The Anarchist Collectives: Workers' Self-management in the Spanish Revolution, 1936-1939*. (Montreal 1974).

Juan Romero, an anarchist militant at the time of the revolution stated: 'The rich said that there were Five-hundred workers too many. The workers said that there were five too many. When those five disappeared, there was work for everyone.'⁴⁴ Even more, the various agrarian and industrial collectives immediately instituted economic equality in accordance with the essential principle of communism, 'From each according to his ability and to each according to his needs.'⁴⁵ As opposed to Stalinism, what had become an abomination of genuine communism (practically another scheme to exploit the masses to benefit the few) – the Anarchists coordinated their efforts through free association, created new wealth, increased production (especially in agriculture), built more schools, and improved public services. They instituted not bourgeois formal democracy but genuine grass roots functional libertarian democracy, where each individual participated directly in the revolutionary reorganization of social life.

Gaston Leval, an Anarcho-syndicalist author, wrote *Collectives in Spain* (1945) wherein he reflected on the revolution: 'They replaced the war between men, 'survival of the fittest,' by the universal practice of mutual aid, and replaced rivalry by the principle of solidarity [...] This experience, [...] opened a new way of life to those who sought an alternative to anti-social capitalism on the one hand, and totalitarian state bogus socialism on the other.'⁴⁶

2.3 Anarcho-syndicalism, Cosmopolitanism put to practice?

Leval's description of the Social revolution closely resembles the statements made by Calhoun (2002) and Delanty (2012) as to what should constitute genuine cosmopolitanism. Namely, the seeking of an alternative to the status-quo, the openness to radical change, the construction of social solidarities, and the commitment to reduction of material inequality.⁴⁷ Furthermore, if we dig deeper into the ideals behind that what we know as *Anarchism*, a word derived from the ancient Greek: *Anarchos*, meaning without (An) rulers (Archos), we find out that Anarchism in essence closely relates to Cosmopolitanism. Better yet, it is perhaps the kind of organization best suited to put Cosmopolitan ideals into practice. Emma Goldman, cited as the 'spiritual mother' of the CNT-FAI led reforms, called Anarchism a *Living force*, that is constantly 'creating and re-creating itself in accordance with the needs of the people, the needs of each place and clime, and is not some set program to be carried to fulfilment.'⁴⁸

44 Juan Romero in: *Vivir la utopía. El anarquismo en España* (1997) by Juan Gamero. [48:20-49:00].

45 Louis Blanc, *Plus de Girondins* (1851) 92, and Frank E. Manuel 'In Memoriam: Critique of the Gotha Program, 1875-1975' (1976).

46 Gaston Leval, *Collectives in Spain* (London 1945) ; Sam Dolgoff, *The Anarchist Collectives: Workers' Self-management in the Spanish Revolution, 1936-1939* (Montreal 1974).

47 Craig Calhoun, 'The class consciousness of frequent travelers: toward a critique of actually existing cosmopolitanism', *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 10:4 (2002) 893 ; Gerard Delanty, 'Introduction. The emerging field of cosmopolitanism studies' in: Delanty (ed.) *Routledge Handbook of Cosmopolitanism Studies* (New York 2012) 2.

48 Emma Goldman, 'Anarchism What it Really Stands for' in: Alix Kates Shulman, *Red Emma Speaks* (New York 2012) 60.

In this sense, anarchism can be regarded as a society in which coercive authority (the state, land-owning elites, and other capital) are replaced by the free union in all places of work and the free assembly at local and global levels. Furthermore, anarchism; often equated with chaos due to the fact that it has no 'strict written laws to abide by', is actually quite the opposite of disorder. Absence of order is more apparent in a society that needs to write down and cover (literally) every single aspect of daily life to make sure its people stay in line. Every sense of moral obligation and solidarity in this regard is completely absent, for it is man-made law that rules over the people (which again serves no other purpose than to exploit the masses and serve a small elite) and not as the ideal describes, in both cosmopolitanism and anarchism – the *inner-moral* that guides the people. What holds these (anarchist) societies together is not compulsion of law, but man's social need for mutual aid which meets with the ability of human-beings to make improvements spontaneously to their social organization. Truly, a free society subjected to no laws, other than the universal *moral law*.

That being said, in anarchist theory freedom is not merely the absence of restrictions – it is responsibility, choice, and the free assumption of social obligations.⁴⁹ Rather than coercive laws, it is human sympathies and solidarities that are considered the effectual barrier to anti-social behaviours and form the basis for positive social cohesion. This allows for 'a certain fluidity in social organisation rather than the immobility of [man-made] law that has a tendency to crystallise what in principle should be constantly modified and developed.'⁵⁰ In the same sense that culture, mankind, the planet, and ultimately the universe, constantly evolves. In this way, the problematic between individual freedom on the one hand and group solidarity on the other are enmeshed. The very nature of *political power* – understood as the means by which individuals or groups pursue their interests – is radically transformed toward the notion of *social power* in which people voluntary cooperate through mutual agreement.⁵¹ An anarchist society is something that cannot be enforced from the top-down, by default, there is no top. Therefore it will always come from 'bottom-up' and its organization scope will never exceed the locale, by avoiding centralization of 'power' the chances of corruption, abuse and exploitation are greatly reduced. As explained by Isaac Puente, member of the CNT-FAI and author of *Libertarian Communism* (1932) 'anarchist social organisation runs on federal and democratic principles – the only obligation being that all communities federate with one another for communications, production and cultural concerns based on the mutual agreement between localities.'⁵²

49 David Thoreau Wieck, 'From Politics to Social revolution', *Resistance*, XII, (1954) 3.

50 Peter Kropotkin, 'Law and Authority' in: Baldwin (ed.) *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets* (New York, 1970).

51 Shannon Brincat and Leah Aylward, *Overcoming the Cosmopolitan/Communitarian Divide through Anarchism: La Via Campesina and the Principles of Anarchism* (Bristol 2010) 20.

52 Isaac Puente, *Libertarian Communism* (Bilbao 1932) 3 ; Brincat and Aylward, *Overcoming the Cosmopolitan*, 20.

Organising the global community in this way assures that local, smaller communities continue to exist, and maintain cultural diversity without (in an ideal scenario) running the risk of being conquered and bossed around by others who cannot control their urge to expand “their” national borders and enforce their beliefs on their neighbours.⁵³ Thus allowing for a system that respects individual rights, is open to cultural diversity, flexible towards change, and promotes material equality without neglecting one’s duty to those around you and those in need. A system that assures equality for all people, right to life and liberty, and the pursuit of happiness deserves the Cosmopolitan label.

It should be noted that it is this loose form of federalism (focussed on the locale) that led Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to disparage anarchism because of its weakness in dealing with counter-revolutionary threats. Sadly, their prognosis has proven correct.⁵⁴

2.4 Camouflaging and countering the Anarchist Revolution

Burnett Bolloten, a Professor of History and dedicated researcher on the subject, wrote in *The Grand Camouflage* (1961): ‘Although the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936 was followed by a far-reaching Social revolution in the anti-Franco camp – more profound in some respects than the Bolshevik Revolution in its early stages – millions of discerning people outside Spain were kept in ignorance, not only of its depth and range but even of its existence, by virtue of a policy of duplicity and dissimulation of which there is no parallel in history.’⁵⁵ Contrary to what one would expect, the biggest threat to the Social revolution did not come from the fascists, nor did it come from the capitalist nations who, for obvious reasons saw no merit in the revolution. It would mean, at the very least, loss of capital investments in Spain, more so, the story of a successful worker’s revolution could spark the minds of the many million economically deprived and disgruntled wage labourers (in countries like England or France). Paradoxically, the ultimate (genuine) communist revolution was reversed by the largest proponent of the communist theory, the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics).

The USSR was extremely slow to come to the aid of the Spanish Republic and, even when it did, the guiding policy could hardly have been further removed from the goal of spreading revolution.⁵⁶ On the contrary, it’s policy was aimed to **contain** the revolution led by Anarchists and quasi-Trotskyists.⁵⁷

53 A homogenous World culture is not Cosmopolitan. See for example the article of Ulf Hannerz, ‘Cosmopolitans and locals in world culture’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 7 (1990) 237-251.

54 Frederick Engels, ‘Letter to Philipp Van Patten, 18th April 1883’, in: Sally Ryan (ed.) *Marx and Engels Correspondence* (New York 1968).

55 Burnett Bolloten, *The Grand Camouflage* (1961).

56 Preston, *Spanish Civil War*, 104.

57 A nickname given to any communist not agreeing with the official party guidelines set out by Stalin.

Soviet military aid was not without cost. In return, the Republic (besides a whole lot of gold) had to submit to the Soviet agenda. George Esenwein, Professor of History, states in *Spain at War* (1995): 'the communists managed to exercise a great deal of power and influence because of the republicans' overwhelming dependence on Soviet aid.'⁵⁸ The Soviets used their control of arms to empower those who sought to reverse the changes of the revolution and weaken those who wished to continue in a revolutionary direction. The Soviets adopted this policy because it was concerned about its military security, the USSR sought to build ties with the West to unite against the rising 'Axis of Evil'. Leon Trotsky, the communist 'dissident' writes that: 'Moscow feared above all that the disturbances of private property in the Iberian Peninsula would bring London and Paris nearer to Berlin against the USSR.'⁵⁹ The Communist party claimed that time was not ripe for revolution. The most important thing was to win the war. Revolution would alienate middle classes that who would otherwise side with the republic. In order to win the war Spain needed a strong central government and centralized army.⁶⁰

In pursuit of this aim the USSR greatly simplified things to pretend that no such revolution had ever happened. Communist papers in Spain discredited the revolution by framing it as a fascist plot to divide the Republic, outside of Spain the existence of the revolution was ignored altogether.⁶¹ Attempts to expunge it from the record of history go back to time of the Civil War itself. In this light, it is somewhat understandable that many historians ignored the revolution during the Cold War when many primary sources deny that it occurred.

2.5 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter we've discussed some of the underlying causes of the Spanish Civil War. We've seen how years of deprivation and social inequality can bring about radical changes initiated from the 'bottom up'. We have seen that the Social revolution, and Anarchism in general, have essential Cosmopolitan traits and deserve to be regarded as such. Furthermore, we've seen how the efforts of the Spanish people were suppressed, most notably by the Soviet-Union, and how Stalinist-Communist agent silently reversed many of the social reforms that ultimately benefitted the people. Now remains the only question, were the American volunteers, who largely did not know (and for the most part, could not know) about the ongoing Social revolution, driven by Cosmopolitan considerations regardless? Let us find out.

58 George Esenwein and Adrian Shubert, *Spain at War* (London 1995) 205.

59 Leon Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution 1937-39* (New York 1973) 350.

60 George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, Secker & Warburg (London 1938) 59.

61Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 51.

Chapter Three: The Abraham Lincoln Brigade⁶²

Did those who went have cosmopolitan considerations?

In this chapter the reader will be presented with the results of the research on the presence of cosmopolitan considerations in the reasoning of those Americans who went to Spain between 1937-1939. This will be an accumulation of paraphrases taken from a small selection of letters that stood out the most in this regard. In addition to information obtained through the work of Peter Carroll, who provided essential insights on the demographic consistency, and the political climate in which the ALB came to be.

3.1 Demographic make-up

Approximately 2.600 Americans would take up arms to defend the Spanish Republic and serve in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (ALB) . Another 150 would serve as doctors, nurses, technicians, and drivers in the American Medical Bureau. It was an unit based on ideology, motivated by principles. They were no soldiers of fortune or mere adventure seekers, they earned nothing for their efforts. The volunteers came from virtually every state in the Union and seemingly from every walk of life. Some went to university and had a well-paid job, others did not finish high school and earned their living in the factories or worked as an artist. Group photographs from Spain illustrate the self-conscious racial mix that included blacks and whites, several full-blooded American Indians, and Americans with Asian roots.⁶³ While Propagandists used these photos to increase the base of political and financial support for the Spanish Republic, it must be said that they did reflect an authentic commitment to racial equality, as opposed to the fascist ideals of a (white) master race. Almost a hundred African-Americans eventually served in Spain. These blacks would rise to leadership positions and command white troops for the first time in American history, affirming the disregard of the colour of one's skin within the ALB – a truly cosmopolitan trait indeed.

Furthermore, the majority of the volunteers were the offspring of recent immigrants. Eighty percent had at least one parent who had been born abroad and about one third was born in Europe themselves and had moved to the United States before the age of fifteen.⁶⁴ Such statistics help explain their internationalist orientation and sensitivity towards the problems of their fellow human-beings on the other side of the Atlantic. However, there were millions of Americans with similar cultural, racial and social backgrounds. What distinguished the men and women of the ALB was a high degree of political consciousness.

⁶² The name Brigade is a misnomer. In the Spanish Civil War, a brigade consisted of four to six battalions. American volunteers mostly joined the two battalions (the Lincoln Battalion and the Washington Battalion) within XV International Brigade. The XV International Brigade was made up of six battalions of volunteers from nations around the globe, topped up with Spanish conscripts.

⁶³ See Group Photograph in Appendix A.

⁶⁴ Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 16.

3.2 Political Consciousness

The median age of the volunteers was about 26.5 years, this is important to note, for it shows that most of the volunteers had been born on the eve of the Great War and matured around the time the Great Depression took place (1929-1933).⁶⁵ It was during the Great Depression that most future ALB volunteers were confronted with the 'ills of society'. They were frustrated and angry at the failure of the capitalist system, it was during these tough years that they first participated in protest activities like unemployment demonstrations, hunger marches, militant labour strikes and anti-discrimination campaigns. A prominent instigator behind such protests was the Communist Party USA (CPUSA), their readiness to condemn the economic conditions in combination with their proposals for concrete alternatives assured the support of many unemployed, future ALB members among them. In addition, the communist party in America operated within the lines set out by the Third International, non-whites and non-Europeans were no longer regarded as too backward to participate in the revolution of the proletariat. Racial equality became an important topic in the CPUSA, a notion that explains the unusual interracial camaraderie uniquely attributed to the ALB.

When the Civil war erupted the most successful recruiter for the Spanish cause in America proved to be the Communist Party. The most detailed surviving roster of the Lincoln Brigade, obtained via the Soviet Archives on the International Brigade, lists 1.745 American volunteers, of whom 999 were members of the Communist party and 249 members of the Young Communist League (YCL), about 72 percent of the total.⁶⁶ The Communists' numerical dominance reflected the party's organizational zeal and its distinct ideological position, one that was militantly anti-fascist and international in scope. Even though the most progressive section of the Republic was omitted in the propaganda (namely the anarchist revolution), the social reforms implemented by the Republic government between 1931-1936 (see chapter 2.1) were refreshing on itself indeed. The ALB volunteers shared a belief that 'the cause of Republican Spain is the cause of all progressive mankind.' Words uttered by no one other than Josef Stalin when he called upon the international proletariat to help the Socialist Spanish Republic.

We can learn a lot about the motivations of the Americans who went to Spain by looking at the mobilization rhetoric of the Communist Party. We know by now that it did not encompass the fulfilment of the Social revolution, for this endeavour had been largely suppressed. Instead the ruling sentiment was an anti-fascist one, the entire raison d'être of the People's Olympiad atones this. The war in Spain was framed as the combined struggle of the communists, socialists, liberal, and other democracy loving people against the rising might of world-wide fascism and oppression.

⁶⁵ Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 19.

⁶⁶ Leonard Levenson, 'U.S. Communists in Spain: A Profile,' *Political Affairs* 65 (August 1986).

Volunteer, Wallace Floyd Burton (1901-1937), explained in one of his letters to the home front 'the party is making use of the World-wide sentiment against Fascism to fight its main enemy, just as many people whose only desire is to protect Democracy are working with the Party. Most people here believe the defeat of Fascism is the most important thing regardless of political future desires.'⁶⁷

3.3 Anti-fascist sentiment, synonymous to the status-quo?

Whilst analysing the reasoning of the volunteers special attention was paid to those who felt that it was their inherent duty, a moral obligation that is, to help their kin in Spain in their struggle against fascism. Rabbi Hyman Katz (1914-1938) exemplifies this attitude, in a letter to his mother he wrote: 'If we sit by and let them grow stronger by taking Spain, they will [...] not stop there, and it won't be long before they get to America [...] If I permitted such a time to come [...] all I could do then would be to curse myself and say, "Why didn't I wake-up when the alarm-clock rang?"'...⁶⁸ Katz died fighting on March 3rd 1938 during the 2nd Battle of Belchite.

During the analysis it became clear that 'fascism' was essentially synonymous with outright oppression of the status quo world-wide. In Burton's letter for example, when he shares his personal motivation for being in Spain: 'I would have been here regardless of my political affiliations, because a war is a break in the monotonous economic system, because I detest Fascism in theory, Mussolini and Hitler in particular, monarchy, clerical supremacy, landowners with feudal ideas, and the idea that Hitler and Mussolini might possibly obtain another part of the world to foster their silly ideas on.'⁶⁹ Here, other than being anti-fascist he displays his distaste for the status-quo, and he clearly desires an alternative system of living. Sadly we will never find out what Burton's alternative to the status-quo would entail, as this was his last letter – he was killed by a sniper only three weeks later.⁷⁰ Although, it appears as if his alternative would not be very different from the communist ideal and the anarchist practice.

Volunteer Eugene Wolman (1913-1937) wrote shortly before he died in battle: 'For the first time in history, for the first time since Fascism began systematically throttling and rending all we hold dear – we are getting the opportunity to fight back. Mussolini rode unopposed...to Rome. Hitler boasts that he took power without bloodshed ... In Ethiopia the Fascist machine was again able to work its will without any unified opposition.' Again a clear example of Anti-fascist sentiment, Wolman hints more clearly that Fascism serves as a synonym to the status-quo, not just in Spain, Italy or Germany, but

67 Wallace Burton, 'I would have', Letter to Millie Bennett, August 12, 1937; Carroll, *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 74.

68 Hyman Katz, 'If we sit by', Letter to Mother, November 25, 1937; Carroll, *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 75.

69 Wallace Burton, 'I would have', Letter to Millie Bennett, August 12, 1937; Carroll, *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 74.

70 Ibid.

also in the United States as well as the rest of the world. He states: 'Even in democratic America the majority have had to undergo every sort of oppression without being able to fight back...Here finally, the oppressed of the Earth are united, here finally we have weapons, here we can fight back' He ends his letter, stressing the importance of fighting in Spain: 'Here, even if we lose, in the fight itself, in the weakening of Fascism, we will have won.'⁷¹

Harold Melofsky (1914-1937) a comedian from New York and member of the YCL in his writing shows that he was equally aware and is even more distinct in pointing out those representing the status-quo. He wrote: 'When I first came here, I didn't give a damn about death. None of us did [...] Now we do care. At least I do. I want to live very much, because I want to bring that lesson of unity I learned in this Spanish "University" to the States. It was an uppercut that smacked unity into every cell of my head and heart. And when I read of things like the steel strike murders, it is then that my veins pump furiously and while being cries out "Look to Spain! Unity, unity will rid you of Gunman Girdler, Franco, Ford, Hitler, Hearts and Mussolini! It's unity, Sam and nothing else. Unity is the biggest army, navy and air force. Yes, it is even greater than that, because Unity has the power to give the will to fight.'⁷² Melofsky clearly desires the oneness of mankind. He too, died shortly after writing this letter.

The letter that stood out the most was one written by Canute Oliver Frankson (1890-1939), an African-American fighting at the front. He writes to an undisclosed 'friend' about his decision to go to Spain: 'On the battlefields of Spain we fight for the preservation of democracy. Here, we're laying the foundation for world peace, and for the liberation of my people, and of the human race. Here, where we're engaged in one of the most bitter struggles of human history, there is no color line, no discrimination, no race hatred. There's only one hate, and that is the hate for fascism. We know who our enemies are'⁷³ He does not hate the common soldier fighting for the other side, or the Caucasian KKK simpleton. He is completely conscious, he sees right through the efforts of those trying to maintain the status quo, those who are hell bound on creating hate and division amongst the people of the world. 'All because of a hate created in the minds of men and women by their masters who keep us all under their heels while they suck our blood, while they live in their bed of ease by exploiting us.'⁷⁴ Frankson goes on by asking 'his friend': 'But these people who howl like hungry wolves for our blood, must we hate them? Must we keep the flame which these mastered kindled constantly fed? Are these men and women responsible for the programs of their masters, and the conditions which force them to such degraded depths? I think not. They are tools in the hands of unscrupulous masters.' Frankson has dropped all notions of 'Otherness' and embraced togetherness

⁷¹ Gene Wolman, 'For the first time', Letter to Family Wolman, June 22, 1937.

⁷² Harry Malofsky, 'It's Unity' in *Defending Spanish Democracy, Belchite 1937*, October 15, 1937.

⁷³ Canute Frankson, 'That is why I am in Spain', Letter to Friend, July 6, 1937. For full letter see: Appendix B.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

instead, he realizes that those fighting on the other side are but mere puppets of the status-quo. Truly, it does not get any more (genuine) cosmopolitan than Canute Frankson. Robert Fine (2012) states: 'Cosmopolitan solidarity is a struggle against power tendencies in the modern age to divide the world into camps and to idealise one camp as much as we demonise the other.'⁷⁵

Frankson left Spain after the ALB had been demobilized on September 23rd, 1938. Juan Negrín, prime-minister of Republic Spain at the time, announced the decision in the League of Nations on 21 September 1938 after the Non-Intervention Committee ordered the withdrawal of the International Brigades. The disbandment was part of an ill-advised effort to get the Nationalists' foreign backers to withdraw their troops and to persuade the Western democracies such as France and Britain to end their arms embargo on the Republic.

3.4 American Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy

It wasn't just fighting men that went to Spain, the American contingent was also known for its well equipped medical unit. In October 1936 the *American Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy* was formed by a small group of politically concerned physicians. This bureau managed to obtain several hundred thousand dollars through fund-raising campaigns and donated an impressive amount of medical supplies to the Spanish Republic. Furthermore, they had plans to establish a fully equipped American hospital in Spain, along with a staff of physicians, nurses, pharmacists, technicians, and drivers. The Spanish cause enjoyed immense sympathy among medical students, however, taking the next step and actually going to Spain proved to be one too far for many.

Yet still, by mid-January 1937 the medical team was large enough to make the hospital a reality, albeit it being a small one. Five doctors, eight nurses, a druggist, a bacteriologist, two ambulance drivers, and a translator were ready to pack their stuff, leave their families and go to Spain. A widowed nurse and mother of one, named Lini de Vries (1905-1982), then a graduate student in public health at Columbia, volunteered herself. 'I felt I had to go,' she recalled, justifying leaving her own child behind, 'to play my little part toward shaping a decent world.'⁷⁶

Another nurse, the African-American Salaria Kea (1913-1991), had offered her skills to the American Red Cross to help flood victims in her native Ohio. 'They told me they had no place for me, the color of my skin would make me more trouble than I would be worth to them.' When she repeated the

⁷⁵ Robert Fine, 'The idea of cosmopolitan solidarity' in: Delanty (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Cosmopolitanism Studies* (New York 2012) 383.

⁷⁶ Lini de Vries, *Up from the Cellar* (Minneapolis 1979) 174, 189.

story to a friend, the response was: 'Why not Spain?' She enrolled the next day, her motivation being nothing other than using her skill as a nurse to help people in need.⁷⁷

One of the drivers who had volunteered to go was Evelyn Hutchins (1910-1982). She was raised by a 'Suffragette' mother and was eager to challenge the men who denied her equality, she would not hesitate to put her life in danger to prove she was as good as any man. Hutchins, inspired by tales of Spanish Men and Women fighting side by side against Franco's troops, not only went to prove her equality but also went to help put a halt to the rise of Fascism and Nazism. Hutchins expressed her revulsion at the Nazi policy of using women as breeders of racially superior stock. 'That strikes at my very most innermost desire for freedom and self-expression,' she explained. 'Just being an ordinary human being I couldn't tolerate a thing like that.'⁷⁸

3.5 Chapter Conclusion

The members of the American Lincoln Brigade were certainly drawn to the ideas and practices of the Spanish Social revolution. However, tragic as it sounds, most Americans who went did not realize what was happening, and sadly by the time the first Americans arrived in Spain (January 1937) the revolutionary minded anarchists were already being cast aside and the revolution itself silently neutralized from within. The predominant reason for going to Spain was to fight Fascism, those at the top decided that the war took priority over realizing and sustaining the radical social reforms, resulting in the fact that their presence ultimately helped stabilize the revolution rather than accelerating it.

Regardless, the Americans who went to Spain between 1936-1939 all understood that the Spanish war encapsulated a world crisis that would affect all nations, all people. If the fascist dictators could be stopped in Spain, then perhaps history could continue to unfold toward what some believed would be an inevitable conclusion: the ultimate worldwide revolution of the oppressed. In this sense Fascism had become a synonym to oppression world-wide and the Americans showed clear cosmopolitan considerations. Evidently some more than others, but as a whole, unified, that is, the American Lincoln Brigade could be considered a cosmopolitan conscious unit.

77 Langston Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander: An Autobiographical Journey* (New York, 1956) 382.

78 Leland Stowe, 'Evelyn the Truck Driver, An American girl with the Spanish armies' *Harper's Magazine* 178 (February 1939) 279-280.

Conclusion: United in defiance to the Status Quo

The history telling on the Spanish Civil War has long been dwarfed by the immensity of the Second World War which (officially) kicked off in Europe with the Invasion of Poland by Nazi-Germany on September 1, 1939, several months after Franco and the Spanish Nationalists had achieved ultimate victory over the Republicans on April 1, 1939.

This thesis started with a group of American athletes witnessing the outbreak of a brutal civil war. They saw how a spontaneous people's militia unexpectedly managed to hold back trained soldiers. Their initial tales, and the tales of their fellow athletes from across the globe helped bring about one of the largest and most diverse volunteer army in history.

In the introduction the following central question was articulated: *To what extent were American volunteers of the Lincoln Brigade whom went to Spain between 1936 and 1939 driven by cosmopolitan considerations?*

The first chapter elaborated on the subject of (Moral) Cosmopolitanism. Which in essence comes down to a willingness to engage with the 'other', a calling to bring peace and prosperity for all, an exploration for an alternative to the status-quo, a need to unite humanity as a whole, solidarity for strangers in despair, and above all, a sense of moral obligation to help those strangers. We then witnessed how years of deprivation and social inequality can bring about radical changes initiated from the 'bottom up'. We have seen that the Social revolution, and Anarchism in general, have essential Cosmopolitan traits and deserve to be regarded as such. In addition, we learned that the Social revolution was subverted by Stalin's agents. And therefore did not play a part in the motivations of the American volunteers. In spite of this fact, we learned that the Americans displayed cosmopolitan consideration. They volunteered not only to defend the Spanish Republic but to defend humanity from the impending and growing threat of Fascism. A word that in the minds of the American volunteers encompassed more than the political movements led by Franco, Mussolini or Hitler. It had become synonymous with defying world-wide oppression of the status quo.

The Americans in Spain show us what Universal solidarity truly means. 'Cosmopolitan solidarity is, if you like, the politics of phenomenology [...] It takes the side of those who oppose the dualisms of our age – racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, xenophobia, national exclusivity, the subordination of women – in whichever camp they find themselves.'⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Fine, 'The Idea of cosmopolitan solidarity', 384.

I think learning about the Spanish Civil War, the Anarchist Revolution and the universally felt sympathy observable in the impressive amount of foreign volunteers is an excellent way to help spread cosmopolitan consciousness. Though Spanish history from 1936 to 1939 is yet another horrific display of mankind's destructive nature, it is also an inspiring tale of men and women from all corners of the globe that truly shows a seldom before seen communal effort, solidarity for strangers and a lust for freedom.

*'There's always been an image of the anarchist as someone wielding a gun. It wasn't so. Yes, the gun was used, but mainly anarchism was based on raising people's awareness through education, in order to create what we wanted, a new world.'*⁸⁰

*'Above all, there was a belief in the revolution and the future, a feeling of having suddenly emerged into an era of equality and freedom. Human beings were trying to behave as human beings and not as cogs in the capitalist machine.'*⁸¹

⁸⁰ José Urzaiz in: *Vivir la utopía. El anarquismo en España* (1997) documentary by Juan Gamero [7:45-8:00].

⁸¹ Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 53.

Appendix A: Interracial Camaraderie in the ALB



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82 Photographs have been retrieved from The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (ALBA) at: <http://www.alba-valb.org>.

Appendix B: Letters from the Front⁸³

from CANUTE FRANKSON

Albacete, Spain
July 6, 1937

My Dear Friend,

I'm sure that by this time you are still waiting for a detailed explanation of what has this international struggle to do with my being here. Since this is a war between whites who for centuries have held us in slavery, and have heaped every kind of insult and abuse upon us, segregated and jim-crowed us; why I, a Negro, who have fought through these years for the rights of my people am here in Spain today.

Because we are no longer an isolated minority group fighting hopelessly against an immense giant, because, my dear, we have joined with, and become an active part of, a great progressive force, on whose shoulders rests the responsibility of saving human civilization from the planned destruction of a small group of degenerates gone mad in their lust for power. Because if we crush Fascism here, we'll save our people in America, and in other parts of the world, from the vicious prosecution, wholesale imprisonment, and slaughter which the Jewish people suffered and are suffering under Hitler's Fascist heels.

All we have to do is to think of the lynching of our people. We can but look back at the pages of American history stained with the blood of Negroes, stink with the burning bodies of our people hanging from trees; bitter with the groans of our tortured loved ones from whose living bodies, ears, fingers, toes, have been cut for souvenirs — living bodies into which red-hot pokers have been thrust. All because of a hate created in the minds of men and women by their masters who keep us all under their heels while they suck our blood, while they live in their bed of ease by exploiting us.

But these people who howl like hungry wolves for our blood, must we hate them? Must we keep the flame which these mastered kindled constantly fed? Are these men and women responsible for the programs of their masters, and the conditions which force them to such degraded depths? I think not. They are tools in the hands of unscrupulous masters. These same people are as hungry as we are. They live in dives and wear rags the same as we do. They too are robbed by the masters, and their faces kept down in the filth of a decayed system. They are our fellowmen. Soon and very soon they and we will understand. Soon many Angelo Herndons⁸⁴ will rise from among them, and from among us, and will lead us both against those who live by the stench of our bunt flesh. We will crush them. We will build us a new society—a society of peace and plenty. There will be no color line, no jim- crow trains, no lynching. That is why, my dear, I'm here in Spain.

On the battlefields of Spain we fight for the preservation of democracy. Here, we're laying the foundation for world peace, and for the liberation of my people, and of the human race. Here, where we're engaged in one of the most bitter struggles of human history, there is no color line, no discrimination, no race hatred. There's only one hate, and that is the hate for fascism. We know who our enemies are. The Spanish people are very sympathetic towards us. They are lovely people. I'll tell you about them later.

⁸³ Retrieved from The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (ALBA) at: <http://www.alba-valb.org>.

⁸⁴ Angelo Herndon was an African American communist convicted for violating Georgia's criminal insurrection law after he helped organize an interracial hunger march in Atlanta in 1932. In 1937 the United States Supreme Court found Georgia's insurrection law to be unconstitutional.

I promised not to preach, but by all indications this seems more like a sermon than a letter to an old friend. But how can I help it, being face to face with such trying circumstances? I'm quite conscious of the clumsiness of my effort to write you an intimate letter, but your knowledge of my earnestness and sincerity, with your intelligence and patience will enable you to understand and be tolerant. Later, after I've overcome this strain, I'm sure I'll be able to write more intimately. The consciousness of my responsibility for my actions has kept me under terrific strain. Because I think it has caused you a lot of unpleasantness.

Don't think for one moment that the strain of this terrible war or the many miles between us has changed my feelings towards you. Our friendship has meant a great deal to me, and still means much to me. I appreciate it because it has always been a friendship of devoted mutual interest. And I'll do whatever is within my power to maintain it.

No one knows the time he'll die, even under the most favorable conditions. So I, a soldier in active service, must know far less about how far or how close is death. But as long as I hold out I'll keep you in touch with events. Sometimes when I go to the front the shells drop pretty close. Then I think it is only a matter of minutes. After I return here to the base I seem to see life from a new angle. Somehow it seems to be more beautiful. I'd think of you, home and all my friends, then get to working more feverishly than ever. Each of us must give all we have if this Fascist beast is to be destroyed.

After this is over I hope to share my happiness with you. It will be a happiness which could not have been achieved in any other way than having served in a cause so worthy. I hope that the apparent wrong which I committed may be compensated for by the service I'm giving here for the cause of democracy. I hope that you're well, and that you will, or have, forgiven me. My sincere desire is that you are happy, and when this is over that we meet again. But if a Fascist bullet stops me don't worry about it. If I am conscious before I die I don't think I'll be afraid. Of one thing I'm certain: I'll be satisfied that I've done my part.

So long. Until some future date. One never knows when there'll be time to write. There's so much to do, and so little time in which to do it. Love.

Salude,
Canute

Appendix C: Poem by Miguel Hernandez

To the International Soldier Fallen in Spain

If there are men who contain a soul without frontiers,
a brow scattered with universal hair,
covered with horizons, ships, and mountain chains,
with sand and with snow, then you are one of those.

Fatherlands called to you with all their banners,
so that your breath filled with beautiful movements.
You wanted to quench the thirst of panthers
and fluttered full against their abuses.

With a taste of all suns and seas,
Spain beckons you because in her you realize
your majesty like a tree that embraces a continent.

Around your bones, the olive groves will grow,
unfolding their iron roots in the ground,
embracing men universally, faithfully.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Miguel Hernandez, 'To the International Soldier Fallen in Spain', in: Genoways (ed.) *The Selected Poems of Miguel Hernández* (Chicago 2001).

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