

## **The Price of Popular Frontism: Spanish Armed Resistance in U.S. Visual Media (1936–1964)**

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As recent polemics in Spain have zeroed in on the problem of left-wing violence in the first months of the Civil War—with some prominent liberal historians passing a critical post-Cold War judgment on radical elements within the Republic, wielding arguments strangely resonant with the Right’s trusted playbook—it is easy to forget that the association with armed militancy was considered problematic among the Western Left even before the Spanish war broke out.<sup>1</sup> The essay that follows, a cursory analysis of the image of the militant Spanish Republican in the mainstream U.S. visual media—primarily in film and photojournalism—aims to assess how this problem was tackled in the United States by groups sympathizing with Loyalists. My main argument is simple: due in part to the political and representational dynamics of the Popular Front, pro-Loyalist organizations in the United States tended to privilege representations of the Spanish Republicans as apolitical, innocent, passive victims of violence rather than politicized, active militants in the fight against fascism. Similarly, the organizations preferred to present themselves as humanitarian rather than political enterprises. This approach certainly enhanced the pro-Loyalists’s capacity for fundraising and mass mobilization during and in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, but eventually it backfired. As the United States entered World War II, the general unease associated with the notion of the militant Spanish Republican made it more difficult to fit the Spaniards’s story into the epic narrative of Europe’s anti-fascist struggle, let alone to retroactively vindicate the Republic’s fight against Franco as part of that struggle. After the end of World War II, as pro-Loyalists tried to revive popular support for the exiled Republicans, it was relatively easy for American cold warriors to “expose” pro-Loyalist humanitarian efforts as

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covert, subversive political operations. Meanwhile, the American Left's discomfort with images of armed resistance against Franco would persist well into the 1960s.

### **Images as Weapons**

As we know, within hours of the attempted coup that unleashed the Spanish Civil War, intense media battles broke out in the Western democracies as groups sympathizing with one or the other of the warring camps desperately tried to sway public opinion to their side. Both factions used all means at their disposal and were quick to mobilize their constituencies's existing fears and stereotypes. The Nationalists were painted either as honorable defenders of the Catholic faith who aimed to save their country and its traditions, or as fascist mercenaries paving the way for Hitler's Nazi imperialism. The Republicans, in turn, appeared as bloodthirsty reds bent on rooting out religion or as upstanding citizens engaged in a desperate defense of a democratically elected government. In Spain, the war was fought with guns, bombs, and airplanes—elsewhere, images were the weapon of choice (Brothers 2). Literally so: after all, as the “first media war,” the Spanish conflict witnessed the birth of modern war photography and documentary filmmaking.<sup>2</sup> Photographers, filmmakers, editors and caption writers in France, Great Britain, the United States and other countries were well aware of their tremendous power, particularly if they worked for, or had access to, mass media outlets: commercial newsreels, national newspapers, Hollywood film or newly founded illustrated magazines such as *Picture Post*, *Regards*, or *Life*, whose immense popularity surprised even their founders.<sup>3</sup>

As Paul Preston and others have shown, news reporters covering the Spanish war had a hard time remaining neutral or dispassionate. Most of those involved in the production of visual media, too, ended up sympathizing with one side or the other—if they didn't already work for a pro-Loyalist or pro-Franco organization, that is—and going to great pains to produce, select, contextualize and distribute those images they deemed most favorable to their cause (Brothers 2). To the extent that all published photography and film on the war was carefully crafted—after passing through several layers of Spanish and domestic censorship—it can be argued that all media producers, whether they sympathized with the Republic or with Franco, resorted to manipulation and artifice. To call this phenomenon propaganda, however, is not particularly helpful. For one thing, the term implies a measure of duplicity; for another, it naively presumes the existence of more innocent or truthful forms of media production. In reality, of course, all mass forms of communication, particularly visual media, are products of careful deliberation, driven as they are by political, commercial, or cultural

interests.<sup>4</sup> If the visual coverage of the Spanish Civil War was different, that difference was a matter of scale, not category. Moreover, the convictions that drove photographers, filmmakers and editors were intense, but they were largely genuine. Their sense of responsibility was the result of a double commitment, professional and political, both equally serious and not necessarily perceived in tension with each other. If there was any deception at play, it was in the fact that most everyone chose to hide the manipulative aspect of their work, presenting it as an unmediated, direct record of reality (Vials, “Popular Front” 80–81). Such a tactic was necessary, on the other hand, given that the images in question had to be convincing—that is, authentic—enough to effectively shape public opinion.

The indignation and scandal that continue to surface in the debates about the relative truth or falsity of documentary evidence from the Spanish Civil War—witness, for instance, the latest bout of polemics about Robert Capa’s “Falling Militiaman”—is not very productive from an analytical point of view (Pingree, “Dilemma” 305).<sup>5</sup> The fact that a particular image is carefully crafted—selected, cropped, captioned, sometimes even staged—does not necessarily make it less real or historically accurate (Faber, “Truth”). In fact, studying the Spanish Civil War is a good antidote for dispelling simplistic or empiricist notions of historical truth and falsity (Pingree, “Dilemma”; Brothers; Nelson). Once these notions are out of the way, the war—as a historical event and as a subject of written or visual representation—offers a remarkable opportunity to reflect on the proportional presence, relative weight, and complex interaction of reality and artifice, history and fiction, form and content. Similarly, the war invites us to reflect on the concomitant discursive and political effects of those representations. Political effectiveness, indeed, is what I ultimately aim to assess here—keeping in mind the general considerations just sketched out—in my analysis of the image of the militant Spanish Republican in the U.S. visual media.

### **The American Left and the Shifty Spanish Militant**

In the thirty years following the end of the Spanish Civil War, only two Hollywood films dared to take on armed anti-fascist resistance in Spain as their central topic: Sam Wood’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1943), based on Ernest Hemingway’s 1940 novel about the American volunteer Robert Jordan who, with the help of a group of Spanish guerrilleros, blows up a strategic bridge behind enemy lines; and Fred Zinneman’s *Behold a Pale Horse* (1964), inspired by Emeric Pressburger’s *Killing a Mouse on Sunday* (1961).<sup>6</sup> Set two decades after Franco’s victory, it recounts the final raid and death of Manuel Artíguez, the Republic’s last maquis. Americans of solid anti-fascist, pro-Republican convictions were involved in the making of both

films. While both in their own way are remarkable productions, as representations of Spanish history they are peculiar if not problematic. For one, neither film provides much historical context for its story. Wood, whose 1943 audience could perhaps be expected to remember the conflict reasonably well, limits himself to a single intertitle, “Spain, 1937”; Zinneman, addressing a generation of viewers twenty-five years removed from the war, merely inserts a sparse five-sentence prologue.<sup>7</sup> Both films largely eschew the political complexity of the war, reducing it to a simple fight of “us” against “them,” of winners and losers, without explaining in much detail precisely what motivated its participants to put their lives on the line, let alone giving any insight into their political ideas (Sternberg 117–18; Sinyard 124). Affiliations are simplified or non-existent; the use of political terminology (fascism, communism, socialism, democracy) is reduced to a minimum.<sup>8</sup> In both films, moreover, history is crowded out by romance or suspense, generic narrative ingredients that are meant to increase the stories’s entertainment values but ultimately damage their verisimilitude, undermining the claims to realism that both nevertheless insist on making.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting problem of both films, however, is that despite their allegorical narrative structure, neither manages to portray the figure of the militant Spanish Republican in a positive light. To the contrary: the image that emerges of the men engaged in armed resistance against Franco is deeply ambivalent. Rather than the heroic *résistants* we are used to seeing in Hollywood coverage of the anti-fascist struggle in the rest of Europe, Wood’s and Zinneman’s Spanish guerrillas are tainted not only by the epic failure of Republican defeat but by deeper flaws of a moral nature—laziness, cowardice, capriciousness, and an inability to assess when particular acts of violence are legitimate or not. Wood’s Pablo (Akim Tamiroff), in particular, is a shifty, neurotic and unpredictable character who stands in sharp contrast to the macho poise of the American volunteer Robert Jordan (Gary Cooper). In moral terms, the two actually function as polar opposites. The fact that, toward the end of the film, Pablo proves willing—even eager to shoot a group of fellow guerrillas in the back just to make sure there are enough horses for a clean getaway stands in sharp contrast to the clear moral justification of Robert Jordan’s own cold-blooded killing of a wounded comrade in the movie’s opening scene (a coup de grâce delivered at his buddy’s request, to avoid falling into enemy hands). More important, Pablo’s extremely restricted sense of loyalty—so limited that it excludes even Republicans outside of his own band—helps underscore the boundless generosity of Jordan’s internationalist solidarity, which drives him to another country to risk his life for a political ideal. Strangely, this ideal is never fully explained: “A man fights for what he believes in,” Jordan states succinctly, without going into further detail.<sup>10</sup>

Zinneman’s aged freedom fighter Manuel Artíguez (Gregory Peck), while certainly better than Pablo, is not precisely likeable either. An old and

grumpy drunk who spends his days lounging on his bed, he is a shadow of his legendary former self. He feels guilty for not going to see his dying mother in Spain, but when, after his mother's death, he finally conjures up the strength for a last incursion into Franco's Spain to face his arch enemy—a useless adventure on which he knows he will likely meet his death—it is not clear to the viewer whether he is driven by honor, revenge, a suicidal urge, sheer stubbornness or an undefined political ideal (Sternberg 117–18). The movie suggests that Manuel himself may not know, either. Like Pablo, he seems to lack a clear political understanding of the world. His actions seem primarily dictated by vague urges of a personal nature, and the armed resistance to which he has dedicated his life appears random if not pathological.<sup>11</sup>

Given the generally anti-fascist profile of the film crews, these negative portrayals present an enigma worth exploring. In what follows, I will suggest that the ambivalent representation of the militant Spanish Republican in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *Behold a Pale Horse* is symptomatic of a structural problem on the part of the American Left during and after the years of the Popular Front: as pro-Loyalist groups in the United States and the cultural producers affiliated with them mobilized all their intellectual, organizational and financial resources in their attempt to shape U.S. public opinion favorably toward the Spanish Republic, the notion of the Spanish Republican as weapon-wielding, independent agent, especially when operating outside of the framework of the state (that is, the regular army), proved very hard to accommodate. To be sure, this difficulty can be explained partly as a result of the milieu in which the intense public debates about Spain took place. There was a clear need to respond to conservative campaigns painting the Republicans as bloodthirsty hordes, for example. In addition, pro-Republican groups had to work around restrictions imposed by neutrality legislation, the Hays Office, and political pressure from the Spanish Right and their allies. At the same time, however, this difficulty also must be understood as the result of a consciously adopted tactic on the part of the Popular Frontist Left, a tactic that privileged the representation of Spanish Republicans as helpless, innocent and apolitical victims of fascist aggression rather than as active combatants against it.

### **Münzenberg and the Popular Front**

The tactic I am referring to evolved from a set of innovative media and propaganda strategies that were pioneered in the 1920s by Willi Münzenberg, the public-relations genius of the Communist International.<sup>12</sup> These strategies would become central to the organizing efforts of the Left during the years of the Popular Front (1935–1939).<sup>13</sup> They included a

deliberate effort to introduce the Left's agenda into the mainstream public sphere, in part by adopting existing generic forms of popular culture and in part through the creative use of new forms, particularly film and photography.<sup>14</sup> More notably, at the level of image-building, Münzenberg largely succeeded in detaching the Left from its long-time connection with violence and armed struggle, associating it instead with the desire for peace, the defense of culture and, particularly, the organization of relief efforts for victims of natural disasters, persecution or war (Koestler 201). This shift in focus allowed, in turn, the institution of a new kind of charity-based mass mobilization inspired by well-defined causes that emphasized humanitarian over political concerns and was managed by a transnational infrastructure of organizations—leagues, associations, committees—in charge of fundraising and publicity campaigns.

It was Münzenberg's model that, from the moment the war in Spain broke out, inspired the large-scale mobilization of Americans in support of the Spanish Republic, through organizations such as the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy, its Medical Bureau, and the American League against War and Fascism.<sup>15</sup> All of these organizations were national in scope, represented in countless local branches, and strengthened by transnational links to central coordinating committees in Europe.<sup>16</sup> Given the debt to the Münzenberg model, the failures and successes of the American pro-Loyalist efforts during and in the wake of the Spanish Civil War can at least partly be understood as a function of that same model. What follows, therefore, is not only a critical analysis of the pro-Loyalist image of the Spanish Republican militant in the U.S. visual media, but also the beginning of a more general reflection on the representation of leftist armed struggle within the media universe of the Popular Front.

Thanks to Münzenberg and his assistants, the public discourse of the Left throughout the 1930s—as materialized in newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, demonstrations, associations and campaigns—achieved an unprecedented level of sophistication, exposure and message control, helping the causes he championed attain high levels of support among the general public.<sup>17</sup> Yet even Münzenberg's genius could not, in the end, prevent the continuous surfacing of deep-seated tensions and contradictions flowing out of unresolved dilemmas undermining the broad anti-fascist alliance that the Popular Front was meant to foster—tensions that the Spanish Civil War brought sharply to the fore. These dilemmas were philosophical and political, a question of both strategy and tactics: was the Left to primarily advocate pacifism, or armed resistance and struggle? Was it to glorify some forms of violence, accept them as unfortunate but necessary, or condemn them outright? Was it to limit its internationalist commitment to social and humanitarian aid, or include political and military intervention?

The importance of Münzenberg's contribution to Popular Frontism cannot be overstated. Although the first decade or so of his work was focused on galvanizing the German radical Left—in line with the pre-1935 policy of the Communist International—it was his ideas and inventions, his understanding of media dynamics and civil society that allowed for the rapid and effective forging of the Popular Front's wide, progressive anti-fascist coalition across the Western world, as well as its tremendous public-relations success. His first large public relations enterprise, the Internationale Arbeiter-Hilfe (Workers's International Relief; IAH or WIR), founded in 1921 at Lenin's suggestion to bring relief to the famine-stricken Volga region, contains the seed of much of what would later follow (Cuevas-Wolf 187). "Münzenberg," his one-time collaborator Arthur Koestler would later write about the IAH, "had hit on a new technique in mass propaganda, based on a simple observation: if a person gives money to a cause, he becomes emotionally involved in that cause":

The greater the sacrifice, the stronger the bond; provided, of course, that the cause for which you are asked to make the sacrifice is brought to life in a vivid and imaginative manner—and that was Willy's specialty. He did not, for instance, ask the workers for charitable alms; he asked them to donate one day's wages "as an act of solidarity with the Russian people." "Solidarity" instead of "charity" became the keyword of his campaign, and the key-slogan of the [WIR]. Contributors were given [WIR] stamps, badges, medals, pictures of life in the U.S.S.R., busts of Marx and Lenin—each donation was forged into a link. Willy had found the pattern which he was to repeat in founding the "World Committee for the Relief of the Victims of German Fascism" and in his various Chinese, Spanish and other relief campaigns: charity as a vehicle for political action. (252)

Through the IAH, which quickly turned into an all-purpose relief organization, Münzenberg came to understand the mobilizing power of the written and visual media; in the years following he assumed an increasingly central role as the founder and director of newspapers and journals, film production and distribution companies, as well as illustrated magazines (Cuevas-Wolf 190). Among his most salient contributions to the history of Western art and journalism, in fact, is the *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* (1924–1936), the "German equivalent of Life magazine" (Scammell), which after Hitler's rise to power was produced in exile as *Die Volks-Illustrierte* (1936–1938) (Cuevas-Wolf 185–86).

By the time the Spanish Civil War broke out, Münzenberg's emphasis on pacifism and victims's relief was the dominant mode in mainstream Left discourse. When the American Left began organizing its support for the beleaguered Spanish Republic, this mode dovetailed remarkably well with

the restrictions imposed by the Neutrality Acts adopted by the U.S. Congress in 1935 and 1937, which explicitly limited all fundraising to humanitarian relief (Tierney 115–133; Taylor 75–116). The North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy, its Medical Bureau, the American League against War and Fascism, and other pro-Loyalist organizations were generally coordinated by a core group of executives with politically radical credentials.<sup>18</sup> Yet they worked diligently—and quite successfully—to mobilize the American population around depoliticized notions of aid, relief, and assistance, almost always understood to be of a humanitarian nature.<sup>19</sup> The large quantities of publicity these organizations and their hundreds of local chapters very quickly began generating—and in which images occupied a central place—naturally aimed to present the Spanish Republicans as both in need and worthy of American aid.<sup>20</sup> The publicity therefore strongly privileged images not of defiant militants, but of despairing women, children, and elderly; refugees; wounded soldiers; and civilian casualties.<sup>21</sup> To be sure, in more specifically Left outlets (*The Daily Worker*, *The New Masses*, *The New Republic*, *The Nation*) Republicans were admirably portrayed as political agents, heroic anti-fascists fighting for social transformation. In the pro-Loyalist mainstream media, however, the predominant image was of the Republican as needy victim—a tendency further strengthened when, after Franco's victory, the 500,000 Spanish refugees in France made massive fundraising campaigns more urgent than ever.

### Coalitions and Concessions

In its desire to appeal to a wide-ranging audience and forge broad progressive coalitions, Popular Frontism also initiated a period of concessions and compromises—an unprecedented willingness on the part of the radical Left to modify its message in both form and content, adding water to the political wine and adapting its language, terminology, style, and frame of reference in order to make its causes more widely appealing. This adaptation was careful and deliberate. It occurred at all levels, and often involved the adoption or activation of existing, even traditional concepts, ideas, genres, or cultural and political elements, including nationalism and folk culture (Faber, “*Exile*” 59–61). Well aware of the divisive effects of radicalism, the Left—again following Münzenberg's lead—modified its discourse to reflect mainstream values and goals: instead of revolution, the key notions were peace, progress, justice, culture, freedom, and democracy. Cultural producers on the Left who, up to the early 1930s, had distinguished themselves by their formal innovations now proved willing to return to more traditional forms for the sake of political efficacy, driven by a sense of

urgency in the face of the rise of fascism and the Spanish Civil War. Thus, when Joris Ivens and Helen van Dongen set out to film what would become *The Spanish Earth*, they purposely departed from Ivens's previous artistic trajectory. "The abandonment of the modernist-derived editing strategies of the young Ivens in his avant-garde days," Thomas Waugh writes, "was a price that the couple were willing to pay to achieve the Popular Front goal of speaking the narrative film language of the people" (Waugh 146; see also Denning 118–136).

The de-radicalization of content and the popularization of form that characterized progressive cultural production in the years of the Popular Front both strengthened and weakened the Left. On the positive side, Popular Frontism resulted in a significant expansion in terms of audience, as progressive cultural producers managed to gain a foothold in areas of mainstream mass culture that had until then been largely conservative territory, ranging from Hollywood to the media empire of Henry Luce, notably *Time* and *Life* magazines (Vials, "Popular Front"). The Popular Front also sparked a renewed interest in realism as the artistic mode most fit for cultural forms of social critique that were accessible or appealing to a wide audience.<sup>22</sup> Paradoxically, however, at times the desire to make cultural products more palatable or mass-marketable tempted cultural producers into introducing narrative elements that ended up weakening the critical-realist potential of their books, reportages, photographs, or films.<sup>23</sup> The Spanish Civil War in particular inspired some curiously hybrid configurations of this kind. A case in point is precisely *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, the novel as much as the film.<sup>24</sup> A second example is the one other major Hollywood production about the topic, *Blockade* (1938).<sup>25</sup>

### ***Life* and Robert Capa**

Although many on the Left found *Blockade* a disappointment, the fact that it could be produced in the first place represented a triumph of sorts.<sup>26</sup> For the first time, a group of pro-Loyalist producers managed to work through a mass-cultural, conservative media channel to produce a politically charged film commenting on current affairs from a liberal point of view (Koppes and Black 25). A very similar argument can be made with reference to *Life* magazine. Founded in November 1936, it quickly became the most popular and widely read publication in Henry Luce's growing media empire.<sup>27</sup> Central to *Life*'s extensive coverage of the Spanish Civil War was star photographer Robert Capa—a Jewish anti-fascist exile from Hungary and well-known Republican sympathizer.<sup>28</sup>

In almost all of the eleven Spain-related stories that Capa and his partner Gerda Taro filed for *Life* between 1936 and 1944, victims take center stage;

their most dramatic images are of refugees and other civilians affected by armed violence. Capa's five-page, nine-photo reportage on the battle for Teruel, for instance (January 1938), includes four images of dead or wounded soldiers, one half-page photograph of a column of fleeing women and children, and a full-page, dramatic print of a man carrying a wounded boy to safety. Looking straight into the lens, the man's expression is of an urgent earnestness; the boy looks backward over the man's shoulder, exposing the bloody cloth that covers part of his pantless leg. "A boy in his teens," the dramatic caption reads,

his thigh wound crudely bandaged, is carried painfully to the rear by his father whose cigarette is dead and forgotten. The boy has averted his tear-streaked face from the photographer. The father's problem was to get the boy out of Teruel, which remained a military objective, and back to the safety of Sagunto, sixty-five miles away. (Capa, "The World's")

To be sure, Capa was interested in soldiers as well; the magazine frequently touted the fearlessness with which he covered battle action from up close ("Life's Camera" 28). But even his battlefield shots tended to focus on the dead and wounded, ranging from the iconic *Loyalist Militiaman at the Moment of Death, Cerro Muriano, September 5, 1936*, published in the July 12, 1937 issue, to images of soldiers being carried away by medics or their friends ("Loyal Spaniards" 46–47; "Life's Camera" 28–29). At a more general level, Capa's work for *Life* also illustrates the extent to which the Popular Front years allowed for an infiltration of leftist perspectives into an otherwise conservative cultural apparatus.<sup>29</sup> Henry Luce was, if anything, pro-Franco; very soon after his victory, *Life* fêted the caudillo with an eight-page spread that portrayed him as a just and gentle leader and family man, a "dictator in spite of himself" (Robson 49). Until then, *Life's* editors had presented the Spanish Civil War rather dispassionately as an instructive example of the horrors of modern warfare, fearlessly and proudly covered by modern media (Hayes 64–66). "Americans's noble and sensible dislike of war," the editors wrote in the text accompanying Capa's images from Teruel,

is largely based on ignorance of what modern war really is. The trouble with that kind of cloudy idealism is that it can too easily be overthrown and converted into an active will to fight a specific "good" war. The love of peace has no meaning or no stamina unless it is based on a knowledge of war's terrors. Only then, by contrast, can the benefits and blessings of the absence of war be fully appreciated and maintained. Dead men have indeed died in vain if live men refuse to look at them. (Capa, "The World's" 9)

And yet at key moments someone manages to sneak in a brazenly pro-Loyalist narrative. In July 1937, for instance, the editors responsible for the text below Capa's *Loyalist Militiaman*—as if buoyed by the dramatic power of image—come out squarely on the side of the underdog Republic, decrying the immorality and lack of economic sense of Spain's ruling classes and the unproductive, top-heavy hierarchies of its army and Church.<sup>30</sup>

### Why Not Call Them Fascists

The period between August 1939 and the attack on Pearl Harbor some two years later proved challenging for Popular Frontist Left in the United States, as the Hitler-Stalin non-aggression pact tore deep rifts into the progressive community. Spain, meanwhile, was displaced from the public's attention by the coming of World War II. The appearance of Hemingway's much-anticipated novel in October 1940 briefly brought the war back on the public radar, albeit in a different light—and in a different section of the newspaper: the literary or even variety pages. In this sense, the publication of the novel signaled a tipping point. From history, the Spanish Civil War had now entered the realm of fiction and commerce, retaining just enough historical weight to enhance its marketability.

It is from this perspective that we should read *Life's* coverage, in its January 6, 1941 issue, of Hemingway's marriage to Martha Gellhorn and the news that his bestselling Spanish Civil War novel had been bought up by Paramount, at a record price, to be made into a major Hollywood film. The magazine sent the novelist's friend Robert Capa to Idaho to capture the Hemingways's daily life (hunting, writing, entertaining). But the editors had also asked the novelist to go through several portfolios of Spanish war photography and pick those images that he thought best illustrated his novel. Hemingway chose twenty-six, which *Life* printed in a six-page spread—more space than the magazine had ever dedicated to the actual events of the war.<sup>31</sup>

The reportage is interesting and unsettling in several ways. For one, it gives *Life's* readers a rare peek into the kitchen, revealing that its visual coverage of the news is the result of a careful selection process—one photo shows Hemingway in the company of an editor, going through prints. For another, the magazine all but admits that the writing of captions is a creative, manipulative process. In the end, the whole exercise highlights the fluidity between fiction and the "facts" as recorded by the presumed objectivity of *Life's* news photography (Vials, "Popular Front" 80).<sup>32</sup> *Life* clearly aims to underscore the raw, faithful realism of Hemingway's bestselling account—

but the piece can just as easily be read as an admission of the novelist's endless creative license.<sup>33</sup>

Hemingway did not see it this way. The extent to which he thought of his novel as a faithful representation of the war is illustrated in his indignant reaction, in March of the following year, to a draft of the film script by Dudley Nichols. In a series of letters to the agent Donald Friede, unearthed in the mid-1990s by Peter N. Carroll, Hemingway balks at Nichols's work, peppering Friede (and, through him, Nichols) with complaints and detailed suggestions for improvement. Many of his comments go to the heart of what I have been signaling as the symptomatic difficulties of the U.S. visual media in the treatment of armed Republican militants. As far as the representation of the guerrilleros is concerned, for example, Hemingway warns Friede to avoid making them look silly. "[T]he Spaniards in this book are not out of Carmen," he seethes, "the clothes should be dignified and hard. The whole note is dignity":

The idea of making them simply ridiculous figures in order to make Jordan more of a man is part of the whole silliness of the treatment of the Spaniards which insists that any foreigner must be a fool. Remember that practically all the people in this picture except Jordan are Spaniards and these are the people you are fighting a battle with and you should not make them idiots at this stage simply for the sake of a misplaced laugh. (Carroll, "Hemingway")

In terms of the story's politics, Hemingway argues passionately for the use of the word "Fascist"—which, as we have seen, had not proven possible during the production of *Blockade*:

And now skip to page A-17 where Pablo says, "But every day the vermin gets stronger." Why not say Fascists instead of vermin. We are at present engaged in fighting a war against the Fascists. It was always the Fascists that were referred to in Spain and to make the issue clear it is best to use this term. No one in America knows what a Falangist is but everyone should, or will by the time the picture comes out, know what a Fascist is [ . . . ] Throughout the picture the enemy should be called the Fascists and the Republic should be called the Republic, not simply ourselves and the enemy [ . . . ] You take a much greater chance of ruining the picture by not having the names clearly stated and issues clearly drawn than you do in trying to muddle along in order to appease the enemies of our country. (Carroll, "Hemingway")

In the end, only some of Hemingway's suggestions were honored. While Pilar and María do invoke the Republic, the word "Fascist" is not used once. More importantly, Nichols and Wood failed to address one of

Hemingway's most central points, echoing the critique that can be leveled against *Blockade* and *Behold a Pale Horse*: the almost complete lack of historical and political context to explain what motivates the characters's often violent actions.<sup>34</sup> As a result, the flashbacks recalling the massacre of right-wing notables in Pilar's village, which help explain Pablo's emasculated cowardice, appear as the random actions of a raging mob—or, as Hemingway puts it, “a meaningless butchery”—only confirming the extreme ambivalence attached to the notion of Republican armed resistance.

Hemingway was not the only Loyalist sympathizer in the United States to realize that the country's entry in the war provided a new opportunity to vindicate the Spanish Republicans's struggle as a crucial first battle in the world's fight against fascism. The case seemed obvious. In fact, Hollywood had pledged to do what it could to help in the war effort; and as early as December 17, 1941, President Roosevelt had appointed a coordinator of government films who, among others, was charged with making sure Hollywood took that pledge seriously (Koppes and Black 56). And yet, somehow, the narrative of the militant Spanish Republican as a brave antifascist failed to catch on.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, the mainstream media fell in love with other European guerrillas. In May 1942, Luce's *Time* magazine dedicated its cover and a 1,700-word story to Draja Mihailovich, the “Eagle of Yugoslavia,” who was reported to run “the greatest guerrilla operation in history.” “It is a misfortune,” the piece said, “that conquered Europe cannot learn detail by detail the effective methods used by the gaunt, hard, bronzed fighter on *Time*'s cover.”<sup>36</sup> No similar story about a Spanish Republican leader would have made it into *Time* or *Life*.

To be sure, Capa tried. In October 1944, still in France after having covered D-Day and the liberation of Paris, he went down to southern France in search of the Spanish guerrillas who had reportedly tried to invade Spain at the Aran Valley. The trip got him a page in *Life*, in which Capa was allowed to tell his own story, linking the Spanish Civil War with World War II, and emphasizing the Spaniards's brave part in the fight against the Nazis (Capa “*Road to Madrid*” 4). Ironically, however, the images accompanying Capa's piece were minimal—his text left room for no more than three small photos at the bottom of the page—and once more they primarily expressed victimhood, showing Spanish fighters in a hospital bed, one with a nun at his side.

## After World War II

The end of the Second World War found some two hundred thousand Spanish Republican exiles still stranded in France. Pro-Loyalist groups in the United States once again championed their cause—and once again, the

image of the Spaniards as helpless victims predominated in the media. In March 1947, *Liberty* magazine published a reportage about the refugees with images shot by the young American photographer Walter Rosenblum, who had been hired in the spring of the year before by the Unitarian Service Committee (USC) in Boston to document its extensive refugee relief work in Europe (Faber, “Scenes”). Rosenblum was a Leftist: born in 1919 into a poor Jewish immigrant family living on New York’s Lower East Side, he had begun to photograph his neighborhood as a teenager, using a borrowed camera. In 1937 he joined the Photo League, a vibrant community of New York photographers, where he met Lewis Hine, Berenice Abbott, and Elizabeth McCausland, and studied with Paul Strand. Enlisted during the war, like Capa he had shot D-Day. His images in *Liberty* manifest a high level of aesthetic and political purpose. While the captions mention the Spaniards’s role in the anti-Nazi resistance, the images themselves avoid the association of the Republicans with political militancy or armed struggle, emphasizing instead their material needs and social respectability.<sup>37</sup> The reportage opened with a full-page print of two endearing refugee boys showering. The other photographs showed one-armed men stitching espadrilles (“badly disabled exiles, like these who lost arms fighting the Nazis, will do any kind of work to keep their self-respect”); happy children eating, playing, and receiving donated clothes; Spanish surgeons administering a spinal puncture; and a perfectly composed image of a father-like doctor in a pinstripe suit (he “served with the maquis, then returned to help his fellow exiles”) giving friendly advice to a four-year-old girl—an image more resonant of an advertisement than of news photography (“Eight Years”).<sup>38</sup>

The story of the Unitarian Service Committee, the agency that hired Rosenblum, is in fact illustrative of the difficulties pro-Loyalist groups faced in postwar America. Established in 1940 by the American Unitarian Association, the USC was one of the most important U.S.-based refugee organizations working in Europe during and following the Second World War, assisting numerous refugee communities throughout the continent. At its height, the USC had an operating budget of more than a million dollars. This money came from a variety of different sources, not only the National War Fund, the War Refugee Board, and the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees but also the Spanish Refugee Appeal of the Joint Antifascist Refugee Committee (JAFRC), which contributed close to \$300,000 over several years. Many members of the JAFRC, including its leader, Dr. Edward Barsky, had come out of the North American Committee and the Medical Bureau, but split off from the Spanish Refugee Relief Campaign over political differences (Faber, “Images”).

The period following World War II was challenging for the USC and the JAFRC, as sympathizers of Republican Spain were singled out for anti-Communist investigations. When, at the end of 1945, the JAFRC became a

target of the Wood-Rankin House Un-American Activities Committee, the USC, as the sole distributor JAFRC funds in Europe, soon found itself in the spotlight as well. In mid-1945, accusations arose that the JAFRC and the USC were not only dominated by Communist Party members and sympathizers but that they were using their funds to help Communists over other refugees. In October 1946, a seven-man USC delegation testified in a closed session before the HUAC, stating that they helped all refugees in need, regardless of their political affiliation, “as long as there was no attempt to make use of the relief for political purposes” (United States Congress 126). At the same time, they were forced to admit that they had no policy preventing the hiring of Communists as personnel. When the House Un-American Activities Committee asked the JAFRC to hand over its records, Barsky and his board refused, sparking a long legal battle that ended in prison sentences for eleven board members (Deery 167–196). The USC, meanwhile, had hurriedly purged the radicals from its ranks in an attempt to save its reputation. Nonetheless, both organizations saw their fundraising severely damaged by the political controversy.

## Conclusion

Ever since July 1936, representations of the Spanish Civil War have been extraordinarily unstable and politically charged.<sup>39</sup> While the Right demonized the Republic from the outset as tainted by illegitimate violence (a major element in the justification of the attempted coup), for the Left in Spain and elsewhere the notion of political militancy—armed resistance, revolutionary violence—proved much more difficult to accommodate in the pro-Loyalist narratives of the war than the image of the Republicans as apolitical victims. As I have tried to argue here, this tendency was not solely a reaction to the Right’s emphasis on Republican politicized violence. It was also part of a deliberate media strategy among the Popular Frontist Left—an international network characterized by a high level of awareness and sophistication in organizational infrastructure and public relations, particularly the use of film and photography—that had been initiated by Willi Münzenberg in the 1920s. In the United States and elsewhere this strategy proved quite successful at creating wide popular interest and support for the Loyalist cause, but it also had significant drawbacks. After December 1941, armed resistance against fascism became politically acceptable and anti-Nazi guerrillas were granted a hero’s role in the narrative of World War II. By then, however, it was too late to modify the story of the Spanish Republicans, whose armed militancy would remain problematic during the decades following. When in the early 1960s, Fred Zinneman—the Vienna-born, liberal emigré filmmaker—decided to adapt

Pressburger's *To Kill a Mouse on Sunday*, aiming for a realist account of the Loyalists's struggle, the result was profoundly ambivalent.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, a Columbia employee in Barcelona who saw the film screened in Paris sent a reassuring note to one of the company's executives: "There will be no critic or spectator that can honestly say that the Spanish political system is attacked" (qtd. in Sternberg 119).

## Notes

1. Santos Juliá, for instance, wrote in June 2010: "Muchos miles de asesinados en las semanas de revolución no lo fueron por franquistas ni por apoyar a los rebeldes: de lo primero no tuvieron tiempo ni de lo segundo, ocasión. Murieron porque quienes los mataron creían que una verdadera revolución—que es una conquista violenta de poder político y social—solo puede avanzar amontonando cadáveres y cenizas en su camino. Fue en ese marco y movidos por estas ideologías y estrategias por lo que se cometieron en territorio de la República, durante los primeros meses de la guerra, crímenes en cantidades no muy diferentes y con idéntico propósito que en el territorio controlado por los rebeldes: la conquista, por medio del exterminio del enemigo, de todo el poder en el campo, en el pueblo, en la ciudad" (n.p.) (Many thousands of those who were assassinated in the weeks of revolution were not killed because they were Francoists or because they supported the rebels: for the first thing they did not have time; for the second, they had no opportunity. They died because those who killed them believed that a true revolution—which is a violent takeover of political and social power—can only advance by piling up bodies and ashes in its wake. It was through this framework, and moved by these ideologies and strategies, that crimes were committed in Republican territory during the first months of the war, which were not very different than those committed in the territory controlled by the rebels, and which were committed with an identical purpose: the complete conquest of power in the countryside, the villages, and the cities, through the extermination of the enemy). To which the neo-Francoist historian Pío Moa replied: "Santos Juliá parece que empieza a enterarse de que en la 'república,' como bautiza, según tradición propagandística, al Frente Popular, los republicanos eran pocos e impotentes frente a los partidos revolucionarios, a quienes culpa, con cierta injusticia, de los incontables crímenes perpetrados por entonces. ¡Algo es algo!" (n.p.) (It seems that Santos Juliá is beginning to figure out that within the "republic," as, following the propagandistic tradition, the Popular Front is being called, the Republicans were few in number and impotent in the face of the revolutionary parties, which he blames, with a certain unfairness, of the innumerable crimes committed then. But it's better than nothing!). As Josep Fontana commented, Juliá's argument is not new: "Es la de los sublevados—que pretendían que su objetivo era prevenir una imaginaria insurrección comunista—la de la carta colectiva de los obispos o la del revisionismo neofranquista de nuestros días" (It is the argument of the insurgents, who purported that their objective was to prevent an imaginary Communist insurrection, and also that of the collective letter of the bishops and that of the neo-Francoist revisionism of today). See also the contributions to the debate by Cercas, Grandes, Leguina, and Savater. See Gómez López-Quñones (105–196) for a lucid analysis of post-Francoist attempts by Spanish novelists and filmmakers

- to legitimize leftist violence during and after the Civil War as constructive acts of cohesive communities with particular political and ideological objectives.
2. Visual media were crucial components in the battle for public opinion. On the production end, newly portable film and photography equipment allowed for unprecedented quantity and quality of image generation; on the reception end, newsreels, movie theaters, and illustrated magazines provided access to a wider public. As Susan Sontag famously wrote, the Spanish Civil War “was the first war to be witnessed (“covered”) in the modern sense: by a corps of professional photographers at the lines of military engagement and in the towns under bombardment, whose work was immediately seen in newspapers and magazines in Spain and abroad” (21). See also Brothers (2); Pingree, “Dilemma”; Shubert; and Wasson.
  3. *Life* was founded in November 1936 and immediately became hugely popular. According to Vials, “By 1940, it had a circulation of 2.86 million and a high ‘pass along rate,’ multiplying its actual readership” (“Popular Front” 74). Kozol writes that *Life*’s estimated readership in the 1940s and 1950s was twenty million (5). See also Hayes. *Picture Post*, founded in late 1938, which had a circulation of almost 1.2 million by 1940 (Brothers 5).
  4. Caroline Brothers argues that the differences between the way in which the Spanish Civil War was covered visually in the British and French media, and the ideological function that Spanish images played, was “subservient to and determined by a broader web of culturally specific beliefs upon which ideology must draw in order to take effect, whether by undermining or reaffirming those preconceptions” (12).
  5. The debate was widely covered in the Spanish, British, and U.S. press in the summer of 2009. For an overview, see Pingree, “What Spain”; and Faber, “Truth.”
  6. For a comprehensive overview of Hollywood’s engagement with the Spanish Civil War, see Oriol Porta’s 2008 documentary *Hollywood contra Franco*. Also see Gubern and Sonia García López’s dissertation “Spain is Us: La Guerra Civil Española en el cine del Popular Front, 1936–1939” (Universitat de València 2008).
  7. “In 1936 a thousand years of history exploded in Spain. The forces of nationalism joined together against the forces of the Republic. Soon the whole world found itself involved in the struggle; the whole world looked toward Spain. In 1939 the Spanish Civil War came to an end. These were the men who lost, crossing the border into France, and exile” (*Behold a Pale Horse*).
  8. The dialogue in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* contains not one reference to fascism, falangism, democracy, Socialism, Communism or anarchism. To be sure, at a handful of moments characters are referred to as Nationalists and Republicans—terms that in and of themselves have little meaning in an American context—but only in passing. The exception is María’s account of her parents’s death: “And when the Nationalists took the town, they lined up all the Republicans against the wall.”
  9. These claims to realism manifest themselves, among other places, in the film’s opening sequences. Wood’s intertitle “Spain, 1937” has already been mentioned. Zinneman’s film—entirely shot in black and white—opens with several minutes of archival Civil War footage, concluding with historical images of the Spanish Republican exodus that seamlessly transition into a scene at the French border in which we see Gregory Peck appear (Sternberg 116).
  10. Pilar: “Where are the three men from the band of Elias?” Agustín: “What were you shooting in the gorge? Why don’t you say you shot them?” Pablo: “Shut up!” Agustín: “Answer me!” Pablo: “I look after my own people.” Agustín: “And the men of Elias?” Pablo: “They were not our people. I provide horses for my people!”

11. Thus, his clear distrust of the character of Father Francisco—a monk warns Manuel of the trap that the police have set for him—is not explained in the framework of Republican anti-clericalism. As Linda Ehrlich writes: “Throughout much of the film, Manuel Artíguez appears to be motivated primarily by impulses of revenge, nostalgia, and machismo. It is difficult to recognize in him the (dormant) passion of a former resistance fighter [ . . . ] By glossing over the political complexities of the Spanish Civil War, Zinneman fails to fully establish the kind of background setting that would make his characters more comprehensible” (142, 146).
12. On Münzenberg, see Gross; McMeekin; Scammell; Koch; and Cuevas-Wolf.
13. The Popular Front strategy was formally ratified by Dimitrov’s Communist International at its 1935 Congress; it never fully recovered from the non-aggression pact between Hitler and Stalin, signed in August 1939.
14. As Cuevas-Wolf writes, “Münzenberg realized early on that visual propaganda could convince doubtful sympathizers more effectively than dogmatic pamphlets” (189).
15. According to Scammell, it was Münzenberg who “[launched] antifascist propaganda blitz . . . to support the Republican cause in Spain.” See also Rey García (88–89).
16. The North American Committee was linked with the Paris-based *Comité international de coordination et d’information pour l’aide à l’Espagne républicaine*. The American League Against War and Fascism was connected with the *Comité mondial contre la guerre et le fascisme*, also in Paris, and headed up by Henri Barbusse. For more details on the history and functioning of the NAC, see Rey García (87–112). On the ALAWF, see Ottanelli (173–174).
17. In Michael Scammell’s words, Münzenberg was “ahead of both the American and Soviet governments when it came to influencing public opinion, especially in Western Europe. He, more than any other single person, might be said to be the original father of the cultural cold war, pioneering, with his committees, his congresses, his front magazines, and his international petitions, methods that were to become commonplace during the post–World War II conflict between the CIA and the KGB.”
18. The North American Committee and the Medical Bureau fused in January 1938 (Rey García 104–08).
19. As Rey García writes: “El éxito de todas las plataformas frentepopulistas impulsadas por el CPUSA durante estos años radicó en la elección de motivaciones tan vagas como positivas, de las que era casi imposible no sentirse partícipe: la paz, el antifascismo, la democracia. La causa republicana encajaba en todos estos motivos a la perfección” (88) (The success of all the Popular-Frontist platforms promoted by the CPUSA during these years was rooted in the fact that they chose to focus on motivations that were as vague as they were positive, which it was almost impossible not to share: peace, antifascism, democracy. The Republican cause dovetailed perfectly with these motifs).
20. By the end of 1938, the North American Committee and Medical Bureau had distributed some three million brochures, leaflets, publications, pamphlets, and bulletins (Rey García 109).
21. At the same time, the need to show the public that its money was being put to good use sparked the distribution of photographs and films—such as *Heart of Spain* and *Return to Life*—illustrating the Republic’s well-functioning medical services and children’s colonies.
22. Vials speaks of “mass-mediate realisms”: “[T]he culture created by the Popular Front,” Vials writes, “cultivated a predilection for realist-inspired literature, drama, film, and radio. Indeed, the ubiquity of realism in American culture by 1941 can be

- seen as a marker of the success of the Popular Front social movement. Popular Front writers and artists who strongly drew from the tradition of American realism and who self-identified as realists injected their work into U.S. mass culture in the 1930s and 1940s like never before” (“*Realism*” xv).
23. Vials: “The realism of the 1930s and 1940s was in actuality a hybrid genre permeated by mass-culture forms and tropes to a much greater extent than its nineteenth-century incarnation . . .” (xvi).
  24. American participants in the Spanish Civil War, particularly the veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, were furious with Hemingway for what they considered a blatantly romanticized and largely inaccurate portrayal of the war in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. “What emerges from your book,” they declared in an open letter to Hemingway, “is a picture so drastically mutilated and distorted (by errors of both omission and commission) as to slander the cause for which we fought, which the great majority of the democratic people in the world supported, and which you yourself honorably sustained both by your writing and your personal action” (qtd in Carroll, “*Odyssey*” 237–238).
  25. Directed by William Dieterle and produced by Walter Wanger for United Artists, *Blockade* illustrates quite clearly the strengths and weaknesses of American Popular Frontism when it came to representing the Spanish Civil War. Its visual elements—the landscape, the handsome Anglo protagonist, the extras—purposely avoid Spanish referents; the opening title “Spain, Spring of 1936” was only included in some versions. Much like *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *Behold a Pale Horse*, the plot of *Blockade* omits any mention of contemporary political positions, groups, or ideologies. The “good guys” are apolitical townspeople, vaguely connected with a beleaguered government. Inspired by the peasant-turned-soldier Marco (Henry Fonda), the townspeople desperately defend their land from a nameless and largely invisible enemy that seeks to steal, kill, and destroy whatever it finds in its path. Meanwhile, Marco, accentless and well-spoken, literally and figuratively towers above fellow peasants such as Luis, the lazy, wine-drinking and accented shepherd who functions as Marco’s comic sidekick.
  26. For Otis Ferguson, writing in *The New Republic*, the film achieved “a deadly numb level of shameless hokum out of which anything true or decent rises for a second only to confound itself. When it comes to what *Blockade* has to say for Spain to the common bewildered man, identification has been so smoothly rubbed out that to protest its content, as some of our hair-trigger Catholic friends are already naively doing, is to give away the fact of a deep and abounding ignorant, or of a stinking guilty conscience, and very probably of both” (Ferguson 217). On the reception, see also Smith, Ceplair and Englund (308–310); Roffman and Purdy (205–208); and Gubern (55–57).
  27. He already owned *Time* and *Fortune* magazines and the *March of Time* newsreels.
  28. According to Hayes, between November 1936 and May 1939, *Life* published 379 photos on the Spanish war in 61 separate articles and features (64). See also “Spanish Civil War Events in *Life* Magazine,” University of Texas, Austin Library.
  29. Chris Vials argues that the left-leaning *Life* editor Ralph Ingersoll—later founder of the Popular Frontist *P.M.*—managed “to [carve] out a space for a Popular Front, antifascist position on the Spanish Civil War within the pages of *Life*” (“*Realism*” 180).
  30. “When the war started, most U.S. citizens looked on the Loyalists as a half-crazy, irresponsible, murderous scum that had turned on its honorable betters. A year of war has taught the United States more of Spain. The ruling classes of Spain were probably the world’s worst bosses—irresponsible, arrogant, vain, ignorant, shiftless

- and incompetent [ . . . ] The reason for the Civil War was simply that the people of Spain had fired their bosses for flagrant incompetence and the bosses had refused to be fired” (“Death in Spain” 19–25).
31. The one exception is the July 12, 1937 issue featuring the *Loyalist Militiaman* and stills from *Spanish Earth*.
  32. Four close-up portraits of anonymous Spaniards at the top of the second page, taken by Capa and Taro, are labeled “the old guide,” “the young girl,” and “the guerrilla leader”; but “the American volunteer”—Robert Jordan—is a stock portrait of Gary Cooper.
  33. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* had sold 400,000 copies, at a rate of 50,000 per week. “In *The Bell* Hemingway’s amazing literary talent reaches its culmination,” the *Life* piece stated. “Here at its best is his genius for conveying every subtle sensory impression. Here is his dead-true ear for dialogue, so sharp that even in English one catches the rhythms of the Spanish languages. Here is his astonishing knowledge of warfare and maneuvers, a favorite subject since his youth, now handled with the assurance of a strategist.” Some of the photographs “show almost the precise spot in the Guadarrama mountains where the action takes place.” “The skirmish at the bridge between Robert Jordan’s guerrillas and the Rebels is an amazing achievement in writing, so graphic and exact, so true to the terrain, that it might well be used by Paramount as a shooting script.” “Life Documents His New Novel” 52–57.
  34. “Where [Nichols’s] script fails is that it gives nothing of the reason for which a man will die and know it is well for him to die. It gives nothing of Pilar’s true feeling for the Republic which is the animating motif for the whole band” (Carroll, “Ernest Hemingway” 265).
  35. Interestingly, the Office of War Information’s review of the script of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* noted: “Now it is necessary that we see the democratic-fascist battle as a whole and recognize that what the Loyalists were fighting for is essentially the same thing that we are” (qtd. in Koppes and Black 71).
  36. “[H]e has already become the great symbol of the unknown thousands of supposedly conquered Europeans who still resist Adolf Hitler. As he watches from his mountain walls, he stands for every European saboteur who awaits the moment to jam the machine, plant the bomb, or pry up the railroad rail.” (“Eagle of Yugoslavia”).
  37. Only a few of Rosenblum’s 1946 photos made it into the press at the time. A fuller collection is held by the Tamiment Library at New York University.
  38. In a speech to the Unitarians after his return to the United States, Rosenblum had praised his employers for “giving help to the finest elements of society, those people who began to fight back when we didn’t even know the meaning of the word” (“Liberal Principles Reaffirmed” 257).
  39. As Cary Nelson writes, “the fundamental historical meaning (and legacy) of the war has remained exceptionally unresolved” (76).
  40. Zinneman and his crew spent several months in southern France interviewing some of the hundred thousand Spanish refugees that still lived in exile (Sternberg 117).

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