

2017

# From Hooligans to Disciplined Students: Displacement, Resettlement, and Role Modelling of Spanish Civil War Children in the Soviet Union, 1937-51

Karl D. Qualls  
*Dickinson College*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://scholar.dickinson.edu/faculty\\_publications](http://scholar.dickinson.edu/faculty_publications)

 Part of the [European History Commons](#), [Military History Commons](#), [Place and Environment Commons](#), [Politics and Social Change Commons](#), [Social History Commons](#), and the [Sociology of Culture Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Qualls, Karl D. "From Hooligans to Disciplined Students: Displacement, Resettlement, and Role Modelling of Spanish Civil War Children in the Soviet Union, 1937-51." In *Displaced Children in Russia and Eastern Europe, 1915-1953: Ideologies, Identities, Experiences*, edited by Nick Baron, 131-154. Boston: Brill, 2017.

This article is brought to you for free and open access by Dickinson Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator. For more information, please contact [scholar@dickinson.edu](mailto:scholar@dickinson.edu).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### From Hooligans to Disciplined Students: Displacement, Resettlement, and Role Modelling of Spanish Civil War Children in the Soviet Union, 1937-51

Karl D. Qualls

Many of us were little hooligans. With our Spanish temperament  
imagine what might have happened if there was no discipline.

Memoir of one of the Spanish *niños* evacuated to the USSR<sup>1</sup>

This recollection from one of the nearly 3,000 children who fled Spain during its civil war and were raised in the Soviet Union underscores a key challenge that faced administrators in the special Soviet homes for Spanish children, which functioned as boarding schools for the *niños*: how to merge Spanish culture into Soviet values. The children were leaving a childhood marked often by chaos and violence. They had received little education and were now separated from parents and thrust into a new and foreign land. Their new boarding schools in the Soviet Union were tasked with restoring their physical health, improving their academic performance, providing political training, and maintaining their connection with Spanish culture. But, as the quotation

---

The Howard Foundation and Dickinson College have graciously helped fund this project. I would also like to thank Larry Holmes, the History Faculty at Dickinson College, and members of the first Russian Children's History Workshop (Paris, 2012) who read and commented on early drafts of this chapter. My thanks also go to Nick Baron for his careful and thoughtful editorial responses and for inviting me to join this volume.

<sup>1</sup> Immaculada Colomina, *Dos Patrias, Tres Mil Destinos: Vida y Exilio de los Niños de la Guerra de España Refugiados en la Unión Soviética* (Madrid: Cinca, 2010), pp. 46-47.

above acknowledges, and as their Soviet hosts understood at the time, little could be achieved without first disciplining the children into a culture far different from their own. In 1937, when the first wave of Spanish kids arrived, the Soviet homes and schools where they were placed, in line with wider pedagogical shifts, spent as much time teaching children values such as self-discipline, comradely behaviour, respect for authority, and diligence in study, as on academic subjects. Proper adult role models in the boarding schools were seen as crucial in effecting the displaced Spanish children's transformation into Soviet Spaniards, and for their re-placement in Soviet society as functioning citizens. This chapter examines the experience of the Spanish displaced children between 1937 and 1951, with a special focus on the use of role models in their upbringing. It also considers the Soviet values and behavioural norms the institutions strove to instil in their pupils, and the problems encountered in this process of cultural and social 'reforging'.

In 1936 the Spanish Republic came under siege from a coup led by several military leaders, including Francisco Franco. During the war, and well beyond Franco's victory in 1939, the nationalist forces - with the aid of German and Italian forces in particular - terrorized the civilians who remained loyal to the Republic. Spain's north coast, comprising the Basque lands and Asturias to its west, where mining and metallurgy were as prominent as leftist politics, suffered disproportionately highly. Pablo Picasso's famous painting 'Guernica' reminds us of the indiscriminate German bombing in this region. Many parents, fearing for their children's lives, sought temporary refuge with or for their children in countries such as France, Great Britain and Belgium. Between 1937 and 1939, the Soviet Union took in 2,895 Spanish children, accompanied by approximately 130 adult carers and educators. Nearly all the children were unaccompanied by their parents.

As new arrivals, these refugees had no knowledge of Soviet standards for children's or students' conduct. Soon, however, Franco's victory and the beginning of the Second World War in 1939 meant that the Spanish children became more than just temporary refugees. It was at this point that the Soviet state, via the special boarding schools for Spanish children, began actively to seek to remake the *niños* into Soviet-Spanish hybrids. Researching the displacement of these children and their experience of geographical, social and cultural re-placement in the USSR provides scholars with a window into the Soviet project of forging the 'new man and new woman'. By considering the Soviet provision of adult role models to cultivate the children's development of correct character traits, this chapter examines one aspect of the regime's wider strategy of social and cultural transformation.

As yet we have no proper history of these children. Several Spanish scholars have collected oral testimonies in an attempt to show how the children remembered their experiences decades later.<sup>2</sup> Historians, however, must be cognizant of the limits of oral history sources that were first collected fifty years after the childhoods in question. Granted, traumatic events might take hold in memory in ways that prosaic events might not, but for children as young as four and five to remember events in detail five to seven decades after the fact must betray elements of constructed memory as much as if not more so than unmediated recall (on issues relating to trauma and memory, see the chapters in this volume by Kaznelson and Baron and by Finder). In addition, without complete biographical knowledge of narrators in oral history projects it is hard fully to interpret their responses. Only two authors have used Soviet archives extensively. A. V.

---

<sup>2</sup> Alicia Alted et al. (eds), *Los Niños de la Guerra de España en la Unión Soviética: De la Evacuación al Retorno (1937-1999)* (Madrid: Fundación Francisco Largo Caballero, 1999); Colomina, *Dos Patrias, Tres Mil Destinos*; Marie Jose Devillard et al. (eds), *Los Niños Españoles en la URSS, 1937-1997: Narración y Memoria* (Barcelona: Ariel, 2001); Susana Castillo Rodríguez, 'Memoria, Educación e Historia: El Caso de los Niños Españoles a la Unión Soviética durante la Guerra Civil Española', unpublished PhD dissertation (Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1999); Enrique Zafra, Rosalía Crego and Carmen Heredia, *Los Niños Españoles Evacuados a la URSS (1937)* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre, 1989).

Elpat'evskii, writing about Spanish exiles in general, has a small section on child refugees, but he takes a 'top-down' approach and limits his investigation mainly to political and institutional questions.<sup>3</sup> Daniel Kowalsky's study of Soviet intervention in the Spanish Civil War deals broadly with war, diplomacy, and politics and has only one chapter specifically about the children.<sup>4</sup>

Historians who have investigated the interplay between Soviet individuals and the Stalinist state have provided many insights into this period and how people constructed their personas. Stephen Kotkin has called this construction and projection of the self 'speaking Bolshevik', a process in which people learn the rules (and language) of the game and are thus able to meet the expectations of a Soviet citizen.<sup>5</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick and a number of her students have discussed how people fashioned 'masks' that allowed them to have private feelings toward the regime without running afoul of authorities.<sup>6</sup> Lynne Viola has raised the idea of hybridity, in which some citizens fill a space between state and society and function as a type of mediator.<sup>7</sup> More recently, through the study of diaries, Jochen Hellbeck has shown how some individuals wrote themselves into becoming good Soviet subjects.<sup>8</sup> Conforming to the regime's standards and internalizing its norms and values was for them a work in progress, and some citizens embraced the struggle to improve character (see also the discussion of Soviet

---

<sup>3</sup> A. V. Elpat'evskii, *Ispanskaia emigratsiia v SSSR: istoriografiia i istochniki, popytka interpretatsii* (Moscow: GERS, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). Available online: <http://www.gutenberg-e.org/kod01/frames/fkoding.html> [accessed 2 August 2015].

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!: Identity and Imposture in Twentieth Century Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Lynne Viola has noted that 'the "state" cannot easily be distinguished from its social and cultural surroundings. Borders break down; binaries dissolve; and hybrid formations evolve'. See 'Introduction', in Lynne Viola (ed.), *Contending with Stalinism: Soviet Power and Popular Resistance in the 1930s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 12. Viola and several of the contributors discuss how Soviet officials and citizens often take on hybrid identities as a way of negotiating past and present and dominant and local cultures and traditions.

<sup>8</sup> Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

‘subjectivities’ in the chapter by Kaznelson and Baron). Lacking diaries by the Spanish children, and having scant other unmediated voices, here we seek to reconstruct their world from a mix of letters, recollections, and official, archived documents.

### Departure and Displacement of ‘The Little Spanish Heroes’

A research team headed by Marie Jose Devillard has provided us with the best, if imperfect, statistical understanding of the *niños* evacuated to the Soviet Union. The historians’ best estimates suggest that the 2,895 evacuated children came overwhelmingly from industrial provinces in northern Spain: Asturias (896 children) and País Vasco (1,315 children) account for over 76 per cent of the total number of evacuated children. Almost one-quarter (700) were born in Bilbao, the capital city of Vizcaya in País Vasco.<sup>9</sup> Although a Soviet government representative proposed to the Basque government that only children between the ages of seven and twelve were to be evacuated, a few refugees were as young as three.<sup>10</sup> Oral testimonies confirm that there was much obfuscation about age as parents tried to get their children out of war-torn Spain.<sup>11</sup> About three-quarters of the children travelled with at least one sibling - fewer than 800 were entirely alone. We lack conclusive data on social origins, but we do know that many children reported being of working class origins: sons and daughters of miners, dockworkers, and metal workers. Yet we also know that among the children in the Spanish homes were the offspring of elites, including the children of prominent political and military figures on the republican side. These children came primarily on

---

<sup>9</sup> País Vasco is also known as the Basque Country, which extends across several provinces. Devillard’s team sourced most of the quantitative material used to create a demographic picture of the children in records held by the Centro Español (Spanish Cultural Institute) in Moscow. Because most of these data were based on surveys of Spanish émigrés conducted by the Centro forty years after the *niños*’ arrival, we need to take account of the lack of precision when memory alone is the source. (This particular collection is thus more valuable in providing a picture of the *niños* as adults in the USSR than of their childhood in the Soviet Spanish homes.) Devillard, *Los Niños Españoles en la URSS, 1937-1997*, pp. 225-58.

<sup>10</sup> Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation: Basque Refugee Children of the Spanish Civil War* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1984), p. 160.

<sup>11</sup> Colomina, *Dos Patrias, Tres Mil Destinos*, p. 20.

the first and last ships to the Soviet Union. Some of the children on the last ship, which departed in 1939, were evacuated with their parents, were re-united with parents already in Moscow, or were joined by them later in the USSR.

Between March 1937 and December 1938, five ships took the Spanish children from their homeland to the Soviet Union.<sup>12</sup> Their voyages were certainly not holiday cruises. The children's natural fear of change and sense of loss were matched by the real threat from hostile planes, ships, and submarines. For the first group of seventy-two children, who were evacuated from Valencia in southern Spain to the Crimean Peninsula, even the relatively placid Mediterranean Sea proved turbulent. The next four much larger contingents, comprising over 2,000 children in total, embarked on Spain's north coast and sailed via the notoriously rough North Sea to Leningrad.<sup>13</sup> These northern evacuations were organized by the Basque Government's Department of Social Assistance and Culture [*Departamento de Asistencia Social y de Cultura*] along with the Communist Party of Euskadi [*Partido Comunista de Euskadi*] and the Communist International (Comintern) affiliated International Red Aid [*Socorro Rojo Internacional*]. Evacuation presented real dangers as the Republic's enemies had no intention of letting Spanish children leave the country. A child on the second expedition recalled, 'I remember the day we had to leave they were constantly bombarding the port and we could not go. We left the next day escorted by a Soviet submarine.'<sup>14</sup>

The evacuated children left behind everything they knew. Although many were

---

<sup>12</sup> All the journeys were covered thoroughly in the Soviet press. For example, see. N. Tokarev, 'Ispanskie deti v Arteke', *Pravda*, 1 April 1937, p. 6; B. Kamir, 'Ispanskie deti na otdyke v Suuk-Su', *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 1 April 1937, p. 4; 'V Artek priekhali ispanskie deti', *Izvestiia*, 2 April 1937, p. 3; V. Solov'ev, 'Baskskie deti u leningradskikh pionerov', *Pravda*, 25 June 1937, p. 6; 'Parakhod 'Santai' priblihaetsia k beregam SSSR', *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 21 June 1937, p. 4; 'Leningrad gotovitsia k priemu baskskikh detei', 21 June 1937, p. 4; 'Stolitsa zhdet detei geroicheskoi ispanii', *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 5 October 1937, p. 1; 'Ispanskie deti pribyli v Leningrad', *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 15 July 1938, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> There was also one smaller evacuation in 1939. As the Spanish Republic collapsed, children of Spanish Communist Party leaders were sent to live with their parents in Moscow.

<sup>14</sup> Colomina, *Dos Patrias, Tres Mil Destinos*, p. 24.

accompanied by brothers or sisters, their wider families and friends usually remained in war-ravaged Spain, leaving these children initially with nothing but hunger and tears. Their sense of displacement and loss was palpable, even decades later. ‘We missed everything’, one child recalled, ‘we missed our homeland, we missed our parents, we missed our religion, we missed a Spanish education, we missed everything because we were very little’.<sup>15</sup> The voyages were arduous. Narrators remembered the dark of the cargo holds, which had most recently carried coal, where they bedded down on mats to the sounds of crying children all around. Retching was frequent as people tried to overcome loss and seasickness. The ocean was ‘as bad as the Germans’, an evacuee recalled.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately for Ana del Bosque Arín, who had just seen the film *The Mask of Fu Manchu*, the crew of the *Sontay*, the ship which took her to Leningrad, was mostly Chinese. Like others, Ana remembered the discomfort of the rolling waters, uncomfortable mats, and the feeling of being trapped because the Chinese mariners frightened her too much to walk the corridors of the ship.<sup>17</sup> One child in the cargo claimed: ‘The treatment in the Chinese ship was horrible, we were all in the hold, everyone vomited. All the time they gave us rice to eat and the rats that were in the ship were like cats. Moreover, the whole way we could not change clothes or anything.’ Another remembered being ‘dizzy all the time’ and asking to go home.<sup>18</sup> Many simply could not eat in such conditions.

Some of the other children evacuated from northern Spain to Leningrad were transferred to Soviet ships in the French port of Bordeaux. Many children wrote or remembered decades later that their living conditions improved greatly after this. In a letter home just two weeks after landing in the USSR, Raimundo García reported that

---

<sup>15</sup> Devillard, *Los Niños Españoles en la URSS, 1937-1997*, p. 78.

<sup>16</sup> Zafra, *Los Niños Españoles Evacuados a la URSS*, p. 44.

<sup>17</sup> Alted, *Los Niños de la Guerra de España en la Unión Soviética*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>18</sup> Colomina, *Dos Patrias, Tres Mil Destinos*, pp. 25, 24.

the Soviet sailors had treated the children well.<sup>19</sup> Others focused on the good food the Soviets provided on-board in contrast to the hunger that they felt in France while waiting to change ships.

Fear and a sense of loss as well as hope and joy at prospective security and abundance ebbed and flowed among the young children. Eleven year-old Charita Bruno, daughter of a republican air force pilot, arrived in the USSR in late March 1937 and was the first Spanish child to speak in the Soviet press. Her story became something of a template for the media's reporting on this first wave of refugees. The story began with the problems in Spain. Children were not able to study because of the war. Charita's mother sent her and her brother from Madrid and its bombing to Alicante. It was here that she joined the children's communist organization, the Young Pioneers, which had not existed before the war. Charita's story brought fascist violence and brutality into Soviet kitchens. She told the reporter about witnessing shootings and explosions and watching as republicans killed fascists after the latter had gunned down her people. Germans and Italians shelled Alicante from offshore as bombs fell from above, which made her last night in the city 'frightful' [*strashno*]. The routine and everyday existence of this young child had been inexorably altered, but it had also given her purpose and focus. She now dreamt of one day becoming a communist and flying like her father (the author did not tell us that this was an aspiration that would have been impossible for a woman in patriarchal Spain). She very much liked how Soviet children lived: 'Here children are pleased and merry, but in Spain there is no kind of merriment possible for children because of the fascists.'<sup>20</sup> Soviet protection and concern equalled a happy childhood where children could dream of becoming something. Her story suggested that the Soviet Union was a land of opportunity where light could overcome darkness. In

---

<sup>19</sup> AGC-Salamanca, PS Santander '0' 49/3 in Alted, *Los Niños de la Guerra de España en la Unión Soviética*, p. 59.

<sup>20</sup> 'Rasskaz ispanskoi pionerki', *Pravda*, 4 April 1937, p. 6.

this single story we can see the process of re-placing the children, discursively, in a world of hope and opportunity that war and evacuation had ripped from them.

A week after the first reports of the Spanish arrivals, the Soviet newspaper *Izvestiia* provided the first indication that the horrors of war had traumatized some of its young victims, establishing an alternative narrative that Elena Kononenko would develop further in her book *Malen'kie ispantsy* [*Little Spaniards*] in November 1937.<sup>21</sup> 'Spanish children are sleeping in their bedrooms', wrote journalist A. Gudimov. 'Occasionally a frightened cry is heard—the children dream of home [Spain] with shells, machine gun fire, with sirens warning of an air raid.' The nightmares, he continued, had an effect that endured in daytime because the 'children [were] frightened of noisy games' and, although they all drew well, they only sketched planes, fascist bombing, tanks, and shooting.<sup>22</sup> Leaders at this temporary home for the Spanish refugee children on the Black Sea recognized the trauma (a word not used) and tried to distract the children from the remembered and re-imagined horrors by allowing them to play and run a lot and make new acquaintances (for further discussion of the role of play in working through trauma, see the chapters in this volume by White and Finder).

Letters and oral testimony provide further evidence for the children's struggle between fear/loss and joy/hope portrayed in the Soviet press. Jose and Pilar Fernandez wrote to their father in Bilbao that their ship was not in the best condition and the seas were rough and sometimes obscured by fog, but the children were fed well with sausage, white bread, meat, and chocolate. They were greeted in Leningrad by music and flags and excited crowds, and were given a shower and clean clothes before embarking on a train to the south of Russia.<sup>23</sup> Food was the principal topic of Isidro San Baudelio Echevarría's letter to her brother. After her arrival in Leningrad, where music

---

<sup>21</sup> Elena Kononenko, *Malenkie ispantsii* (Moscow: Detizdat, 1937).

<sup>22</sup> A. Gudimov, 'Gosti iz Ispanii', *Izvestiia*, 8 April 1937, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> Zafra, *Los Niños Españoles Evacuados a la URSS*, p. 105.

and the 'Internationale' greeted her group, she started fattening herself up on bread and butter, cheese, café con leche and rice pudding. Fortunately, without warplanes above, she was also able to swim at the beach of her sanatorium with its 'free air'.<sup>24</sup> Enrique Undiano, twelve years old, wrote a letter to his mother and sister six days after reaching Leningrad in which he marvelled at the abundance of food and entertainment available to the children, particularly the 'billiards, swings, balls, tennis courts, bicycles, and cars with big pedals'.<sup>25</sup> Electric buses were as foreign to him as the women he saw driving the trains and working on the roads – many of the children like him from the poorer parts of Spain had never before encountered either technology or women's equality. The suburban Moscow camp, which Enrique described as a 'wonderland' [*'juaja'*], was a launching pad for his hopes and dreams.<sup>26</sup> He looked forward to field trips to Lenin's mausoleum and museum exhibits about the tsars and Republican Spain. In a month, he noted with probably a surfeit of enthusiasm, he would begin training as an aviator. Whether he was correct or not, his brief letter showed that he saw opportunities in the Soviet Union - if women could drive trains there, why should children not fly planes? For some children like Enrique, evacuation to the USSR seemed a gift that would help them to overcome their displacement and loss.

However, other children remembered their arrival in Leningrad negatively. The large crowds, flowers, music, and treats were always welcome, but some of the refugees took exception to their subsequent treatment. The children were often filthy and louse-ridden following the long journey, so after disembarkation showers and a change of clothes were first priorities. At this point, cultural differences could prompt anxiety or anger. Antonio Martínez remembered that a row of sorts started when the Spanish girls

---

<sup>24</sup> Zafra, *Los Niños Españoles Evacuados a la URSS*, p. 107.

<sup>25</sup> Zafra, *Los Niños Españoles Evacuados a la URSS*, p. 101.

<sup>26</sup> 'Juaja' refers to a place where one's needs are met effortlessly. It would be equivalent to the Land of Cockaigne. I thank Wendell Smith for his insight on this translation.

and boys were told to shower together. This was apparently scandalous to those raised in Catholic Spain, even in republican families.<sup>27</sup> Some children protested vigorously when material artefacts and belongings - sometimes the children's only tangible connection to home - were taken from them. Although many children arrived with their clothes in tatters and welcomed the crisp uniforms they were given on arrival, others wanted to keep their own clothing. One woman reflected on her childhood experience as a newly arrived refugee: '[my] dress ... was made of [...] smocking [*nido de abeja*], that was very fashionable then and I looked so good in it, and suddenly, they give me the same as everyone else, and I never saw the other dress again ... where can it be? ... but oh well'.<sup>28</sup> Initially, she expressed a desire to keep her finery and individuality, but in the end she seemed resigned to her fate. Sometimes clothes had a much more personal meaning for children. Another woman recalled later that in Spain her 'mom [had] made us a couple of little black dresses [...] when my father died [...] we took very few things but what bothered me the most was that mom bought us raincoats because we had no money for coats, and they took them away from us [...] they made us tear up the only Bible we had'.<sup>29</sup> The dresses represented a connection with her father and the raincoats symbolized the family's financial sacrifice for the children. The disposal of the Bible was an immediate recognition that the girl's religious traditions and identity were no longer going to be part of her life in the USSR. In all of these more negative assessments we see a sense of lost cultural traditions, religion, or a material connection to family.

As many of the other chapters in this volume relate, separation from parents was clearly very difficult for the displaced children, and their misery became infectious.

One Soviet *niño* who was older than most on arrival remembered the tears of the

---

<sup>27</sup> Alted, *Los Niños de la Guerra de España en la Unión Soviética*, p. 80.

<sup>28</sup> Devillard, *Los Niños Españoles en la URSS, 1937-1997*, p. 94.

<sup>29</sup> Devillard, *Los Niños Españoles en la URSS, 1937-1997*, p. 94.

younger children in his institution setting off all the others. It got so bad that the Russian caregivers had to leave the room crying themselves.<sup>30</sup> But in the public eye the children were idealized and portrayed as more than just a collective of war-weary and travel-fatigued children – they were specimens of socialist internationalism in practice.<sup>31</sup> The children were given a voice, albeit briefly, as they disembarked with cries of ‘Saliut! Viva Rusia!’ while waving the Spanish revolutionary flag. As in the *Izvestiia* article cited earlier, they were marked by language and symbol as ‘other’, yet they were not entirely alien because they shared a revolutionary spirit and an understanding that the USSR was a special place - the first socialist state. So, the young Spaniards were both ‘us’ and ‘them’. In this first article *Izvestiia* was developing the image of a Soviet-Spanish hybrid that would become central to the children’s self-understanding in the years to come and part of their dual patriotism for two homelands. But the children’s transformation, their ‘hybridization’, had to be learned from role models.

### Resettling in the Soviet Union

The Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party had been granting special and separate aid to Spanish children for months before the evacuations began, but it is likely that a 22 September 1936 letter from the Comintern to Stalin requesting that the USSR accept refugee children set evacuation planning in motion.<sup>32</sup> Although the first flotilla of *niños* was still months away, the International Organization for Aid to Revolutionary Fighters (MOPR) opened a house for foreign children in the autumn of 1936.<sup>33</sup> With an international home like this as precedent, Marshall Kliment Voroshilov’s request to

---

<sup>30</sup> Colomina, *Dos Patrias, Tres Mil Destinos*, p. 29.

<sup>31</sup> ‘V Artek priekhali ispanskie deti’, *Izvestiia*, 2 April 1937, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Dmitrii Manuilskii to Stalin, in Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), f. 17, op. 120, d. 266, l. 85.

<sup>33</sup> V. A. Talashova, ‘Sovetskii Komsomol: aktivnyi uchastnik dvizheniia solidarnosti s respublikanskoi Ispaniei v period natsional’no-revliutsionnoi voiny, 1936-1939’, unpublished PhD dissertation (Vologda, 1972), p. 119. Cited in Daniel Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War*, Chapter 5 (accessed online).

Stalin that one of Moscow's best orphanages should be re-designated to house 80 to 100 Spanish refugee children, with priority given to children of dead Republican fighters, was swiftly implemented.<sup>34</sup> Not surprisingly given Voroshilov's status and position, a Politburo decree on 3 January 1937 placed the Red Army Intelligence Service in charge of the first set of boarding-school style homes for Spanish children.<sup>35</sup>

In November 1937 the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros), which was responsible for Soviet schools and orphanages, took over responsibility for the Spanish child refugees. By the end of 1940 it directed twenty-two Spanish children's homes in the Russian and Ukrainian republics. These varied greatly in size and location. Some were in the centre of Moscow or Leningrad, others were in wooded suburbs. The more rural homes typically had attached schools, whereas the urban homes often sent children (especially the older ones) to separate classrooms within a nearby Soviet school. These twenty-two homes included two new institutions that were opened in 1940 for Spanish adolescents (teenagers who generally had completed the seventh grade and were often working during the day while continuing their education at night).<sup>36</sup> Three of the homes were specifically for ill children. The Nazi invasion in June 1941 brought further displacement as the children and the homes were evacuated to the interior of the USSR and then returned to the Moscow region in 1944.

Soviet children's homes in general, and the Spanish ones in particular, had a clear administrative structure designed to meet the various needs of a boarding school. The members of staff included administrators (e.g. the director, assistant directors, and accountants), classroom teachers and residential educators [*vospitateli*], medical personnel, and auxiliary staff (e.g. cooks and maintenance workers). When the *niños*

---

<sup>34</sup> Voroshilov to Stalin, 20 December 1936, Russian State Military Archive (RGVA), f. 33987, op. 3, d. 853, l. 72. Cited in Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War*, Chapter 5 (accessed online).

<sup>35</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 983, l. 67.

<sup>36</sup> This brief experiment ended as the Second World War started in the USSR and the older children were sent to work or labour training.

began arriving in 1937, Soviet education was moving away from experimentation with child-centered learning that was the fashion of the 1920s and instead beginning to insist on teacher-centred instruction.<sup>37</sup> Mirroring the centralization of authority that tightened under Stalin in that decade, so too schools began to teach and practise greater authority and discipline, which was hardened even further after the outbreak of war.<sup>38</sup> But the changes in education in the latter half of Stalin's rule were complex. The renewed focus on disciplined behaviour and structured learning developed from several sources nearly simultaneously. The reification of Anton Makarenko's teaching, the turn away from child-centred education, and the regime's continued worry about homeless and wayward children (although no longer reported in the press) all became amplified in 1936-37 as the Great Purges were unleashed and the Spanish children began to arrive on Soviet shores.<sup>39</sup> A new journal, *Sovetskaia pedagogika* [*Soviet Pedagogy*], published its first issue in 1937, launching discussion of the 'ideological perversion' and 'pseudo-science' of child-centred education, or pedology, which had dominated Soviet education since the 1920s.<sup>40</sup>

The return to adult authority and structured learning were intended, firstly, as methods to improve education. Child-centred schools, proponents of the new approach declared, had created rude children with no respect for authority.<sup>41</sup> Students were known to disrupt class by breaking out into arias from *Faust* and greeting teachers with 'Hiya,

---

<sup>37</sup> For a discussion of the return to teacher-centred instruction and the importance of discipline in the classroom, see E. Thomas Ewing, *The Teachers of Stalinism: Policy, Practice and Power in Soviet Schools of the 1930s* (New York: Peter Land, 2002); Larry Holmes, *Stalin's School: Moscow's Model School No. 25, 1931-1937* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999).

<sup>38</sup> Ann Livschiz, 'Pre-Revolutionary in Form, Soviet in Content? Wartime Educational Reforms and the Postwar Quest for Normality', *History of Education*, Vol. 35, Nos. 4-5 (2006), pp. 541-60.

<sup>39</sup> Pedagogue Anton Makarenko developed a method of raising children in self-governing collectives in which labour obligations were key. Self-governance, positive peer pressure, and role-modelling replaced the need for physical punishment. See his semi-autobiographical novel *The Road to Life (An Epic in Education)* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1951). This is the translation of *Pedagogicheskaia poema* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1935), written 1925-35.

<sup>40</sup> B.G. Anan'ev, 'O glavnom 'zakone' pedologii', *Sovetskaia pedagogika*, No. 1 (1937), pp. 14-34.

<sup>41</sup> S.N. Belousov, 'Ob otklikakh na stat'iu E. Kononenko – "Grubost"', *Sovetskaia pedagogika*, No. 8 (1938), pp. 144-52; E. Kononenko, 'Grubost', *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 3 January 1938, p. 1.

grandma' [*Zdrastvui, babushka*'].<sup>42</sup> Discipline, the reformers believed, would lead to greater success in studies, reduce tardiness and absenteeism, and eliminate rudeness. Educational authorities embarked on a number of experiments, including creating new rules of student behaviour, introducing a student card, and even single-sex education in urban schools.<sup>43</sup> The new pedagogy, self-evidently, presupposed that the young person was malleable, and therefore improvable.<sup>44</sup> Secondly, then, the new practices were intended to regulate the child's social training, to cultivate proper citizens - schools could make the difference between a child growing up good or evil. In the words of Soviet President Mikhail Kalinin, *vospitanie* [upbringing] was wider than *obuchenie* [education] and Communist *vospitanie* was the 'development of political consciousness, a common culture, and raising of the intellectual level of the masses'.<sup>45</sup> The development of a 'common culture' meant not just the learning of Russian language and literature, but also a person's adherence to correct behavioural norms.

During and after the war, the journal *Sovetskaia pedagogika* published numerous articles that reminded teachers and school administrators about the importance of character training. Schools were to be sites for inculcating self-control, decisiveness, persistence, constancy [*postoianstvo*], initiative, tactfulness, attention to one's health, and a love of labour and one's people.<sup>46</sup> Honesty and truthfulness were also 'characteristic features of the new man-communist'.<sup>47</sup> New rules for students in 1943 developed these themes further by mandating that students arrive on time, that they leave and speak only when given permission, raise their hands in class, and remove

---

<sup>42</sup> A. Kairov, 'K voprosu ob ukreplenii distsipliny v shkole', *Sovetskaia pedagogika*, No. 7 (1943), pp. 21-26.

<sup>43</sup> V.P. Potemkin, 'Ob uluchshenii kachestva obucheniia i vospitaniia v shkole. Doklad Narodnogo Komissara Prosveshcheniia RSFSR akademika V. P. Potemkina na Vserossiiskom soveshchaniu po narodnomu obrazovaniiu (15-19 avgusta 1944 g.)', *Sovetskaia pedagogika*, Nos. 11-12 (1944), pp. 1-8.

<sup>44</sup> Ia.B. Reznik, 'O znachenii vospitaniia', *Sovetskaia pedagogika*, Nos. 4-5 (1940), pp. 42-50.

<sup>45</sup> M.I. Kalinin, 'O kommunisticheskom vospitanii', *Sovetskaia pedagogika*, Nos. 11-12 (1940), pp. 3-13.

<sup>46</sup> M.P. Malyshev, 'Shkola i vospitanie kharaktera', *Sovetskaia pedagogika*, No. 6 (1941), pp. 3-16.

<sup>47</sup> S. Kamenogradskii, 'Vospitanie chestnosti i pravdivosti', *Sovetskaia pedagogika*, No. 2 (1941), p. 48.

their caps when meeting teachers or administrators on the street.<sup>48</sup> Truthfulness was central to the success of students and the entire collective, which is why the new student rules stressed the importance of doing one's own homework.<sup>49</sup> School rules also emphasized cultured behaviour by barring students from gambling, smoking, and coarse speech.<sup>50</sup> Students had to keep their shoes and clothes clean and protect their school materials. A good communist in training was also required to be attentive to others and to help their parents and other children. Finally, hardening [*zakalivanie*] was another element of character development, as children in wartime now began to be trained as defenders as well as workers. 'A courageous person is not born', wrote one commentator, 'courage is learned'.<sup>51</sup> The ability and urge to action came through physical education and military training, both of which gained greater emphasis during the war.

When Soviet educators began to house the newly arrived Spanish children, and arrange for their schooling, discipline was one of the most pressing issues that they felt needed to be addressed. As the testimony of a former Spanish child refugee that opens this chapter suggests, this was not an entirely misplaced anxiety: their 'Spanish temperament' indeed may have made many of them 'little hooligans', at least in the eyes of Soviet administrators and teachers now focused on asserting adult authority and enforcing disciplined behaviour among their charges. Another Spanish exile remembered staying in the relatively luxurious Hotel October in Leningrad upon his arrival, where he and his pals skated on the waxed floors, vandalized the buildings and broke things, and shouted down the orchestra that had come to play.<sup>52</sup> Viewing such behaviour, the director of one Soviet-Spanish children's home noted the need to

---

<sup>48</sup> 'Pravila dlia uchashchikhsia', *Sovetskaia pedagogika*, No. 10 (1943), p. 2.

<sup>49</sup> A. Kairov, 'Vospitanie pravdivosti', *Sovetskaia pedagogika*, No. 8-9 (1943), pp. 8-12.

<sup>50</sup> V. F. Shishkin, 'O vospitanii kul'tury povedeniia', *Sovetskaia pedagogika*, Nos. 5-6 (1944), pp. 51-53.

<sup>51</sup> A. Kairov, 'Muzhestvo i ego vospitanie v nashi dni', *Sovetskaia pedagogika*, Nos. 8-9 (1942), p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> Alted, *Los Niños de la Guerra de España en la Unión Soviética*, p. 99.

overcome the ‘lordly-bourgeois inclinations’ [*burzhuzno-barskie naklonnosti*] of the refugee children.<sup>53</sup> ‘We had everything’, one former *niña* remembered, ‘but some of us we were a little too much [in need] of responsibility or, as it was said there, of discipline’. Of the methods, she recalled: ‘nobody laid a hand on us, nobody scolded us raising his voice or offending [...] everything boiled down to making us understand that we were wrong in being disobedient.’<sup>54</sup> It is noteworthy that, like Makarenko, the (now adult) respondent equates ‘responsibility’ and ‘discipline’, and stresses that Soviet educators sought not by punishment but by gentler means to cultivate responsible, disciplined young people – by persuasion and the provision of positive role models for the children to emulate.

The Spanish refugee children’s boarding school years were a period of transition for them during which both Soviet and Spanish adult carers tried to nurture the new arrivals and acclimatize them to the foreign culture in which they now lived. The Soviet authorities, even in times of great domestic and international turmoil, and while almost always lacking sufficient resources, tried to create places in which the children could adapt to their new surroundings, maintain some of their Spanish heritage, and learn Soviet values and the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist worldview from personnel in the homes. To instil these norms and values, the adults would need to act as role models for the children. Role models were part of a disciplinary system in which children were both observed and observers. Although this chapter focuses on adults, the children’s peers increasingly became part of the disciplinary network as they internalized the disciplinary regime, served as monitors in the classrooms and dormitories, and participated on administrative committees with adults in the homes.

Spanish teachers remained in the homes and Spanish language and culture

---

<sup>53</sup> State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), f. A-307, op. 1, d. 122, l. 5ob.

<sup>54</sup> Devillard, *Los Niños Españoles en la URSS, 1937-1997*, p. 103.

lessons continued, but Soviet instructors and Soviet values trumped Spanish as a priority for Narkompros. For the Soviets, the homes for Spanish children, who for the most part were isolated from parents and grandparents, became an ideal location to propagate Soviet teaching. The story of Pavlik Morozov, among others, shows the authorities' fear of children being taught one thing in school and then going home to parents who were not ideologically correct in their thoughts and actions.<sup>55</sup> Young Pavlik overcame his home circumstances and denounced his parents, but the boarding schools allowed the Soviets to avoid negative domestic influences in the first place, as long as the adult staff could be trusted.<sup>56</sup> To borrow a phrase from Homi Bhabha, writing about a different context, the Spanish homes were sites of the 'production of cultural *differentiation* as signs of authority'.<sup>57</sup> The homes nurtured Soviet culture and values and often juxtaposed them to the 'natural' behaviour with which the Spaniards had arrived, and which had to be overcome. These were spaces for cultural and behavioural education.

From the beginning, Soviet officials clearly understood that although Spain's republican government wanted to preserve the refugee children's Spanish heritage, Soviet ideology was to be the mainstay in the classroom. All courses were initially taught in Spanish with translated Soviet textbooks, and there were additional courses in Spanish language, literature, history, and geography where proper staffing allowed. In short, the education was Soviet with a Spanish veneer. In fact, the first set of rules governing the Spanish homes made no reference to maintaining Spanish culture.<sup>58</sup> A director of one of the Spanish homes understood how multinational education applied to

---

<sup>55</sup> The best source to date is Catriona Kelly, *Comrade Pavlik: The Rise and Fall of a Soviet Boy Hero* (London: Granta, 2007).

<sup>56</sup> Rachel Green, 'There Will not be Orphans Among Us': Soviet Orphanages, Foster Care, and Adoption, 1941-1956', unpublished PhD dissertation (University of Chicago, 2006).

<sup>57</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, 'Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1985), p. 156. Emphasis in original.

<sup>58</sup> GARF, f. A-2306, op. 70, d. 5987, ll. 1-3.

Spaniards:

From these pupils, entrusted to us by the heroic Spanish people, we must forge not only strong and fearless fighters for the liberation of their compatriots, but faithful sons of their Fatherland, and loyal followers of the great teachers of humanity - Marx, Engels and Lenin. [...] A love and devotion to the Communist Party of Spain and the VKP (b) [All-Union Communist Party], and to Spain and the USSR - these must be the first priorities in our endeavour to raise them [the Spaniards] as our own children.<sup>59</sup>

The director understood that the Spanish children could be transformed - or 'forged' - into new and better people through, among other things, the inculcation of Soviet patriotism and political loyalty, alongside a commitment to Spanish communism. Thus, the homes' personnel sought to recreate the *niños* as Soviet-Spanish hybrids.

I use hybridity here not in the negative, racist, colonial sense, but rather as a potentially positive blending of a Soviet worldview and system of behaviours with Spanish culture. This was not a removal of Spanish identification, but rather its adaptation to Soviet mores. In fact, in 1945, as the children grew up and moved out of the homes, a Spanish cultural centre was created in Moscow as a space for them, and then their children and grandchildren, to study the Spanish language, learn to dance, cook traditional food, and more. The Soviet homes for Spanish children served as a 'third space', both metaphorical and physical, situated between past and future, between two homelands, where new meanings, identities, behaviours, and cultures for the *niños* were enunciated, practised, and negotiated.<sup>60</sup>

Attempts to instil discipline in the Spanish homes sometimes begat violence,

---

<sup>59</sup> GARF, f. A- 307, op. 1, d. 338, l. 88.

<sup>60</sup> On Homi Bhabha's understanding of 'third space', see his 'Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences', in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (eds), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 156.

and the staff sometimes crossed the line in their treatment of the children. However, a female educator, who was barely twenty years old in 1937, recalled that the Soviet administrators vigorously condemned violence as a form of punishment: they ‘were saying that [slapping] was counter-educational, that it was not educational, that it is necessary to speak to the child, it is necessary to convince him that he has to do the things well but not to punish him, that not at all’.<sup>61</sup> When adult violence did occur, the Soviet officials sought to stamp it out. An August 1937 report indicted the behaviour of several Spanish educators who ‘tried to beat the children, saying that they were incorrigible, that they were bandits, criminals, etc.’ The only way to redress this problem, the report noted, was to teach the Spanish adults, who in this case had just arrived in the Soviet Union, that ‘there are no bad children, but there are bad educators.’<sup>62</sup> The Spanish adults, and not just the children, had to be trained anew. The condemnation of adult violence differentiated proper Soviet behaviour from poor educational methods learned in Spain.

A dozen years after the *niños* arrived, there were still scattered cases of educators who were labelled as ‘unqualified’ when caught striking children. A 1949 report cited several such cases. One male Spanish educator, who was also admonished for not making the boys clean themselves or their sleeping quarters, was chastised for striking two boys when they failed to complete their homework and were rude to their teachers. The teacher was trying to discipline the boys’ behaviours, but he used a method that was deemed un-Soviet. A Russian female educator hit two girls in the face, one with a notebook.<sup>63</sup> Some children justified their own bad behaviour, which led to the staff’s violent rebukes, with reference to failings on the part of their adult carers.

‘[T]here were several uprisings of the children because of the poor management by the

---

<sup>61</sup> Devillard, *Los Niños Españoles en la URSS, 1937-1997*, p. 103.

<sup>62</sup> GARF, f. 8009, op. 20, d. 45, l. 14-22.

<sup>63</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op 1, d. 344, l. 5.

directors', recalled one adult respondent in an oral history survey. 'In our home, in Leningrad, there were many abuses and we children, we were always the losers. We were seven to ten years old. We lacked food and everything. [...] And they beat us a lot. [...] Sure, we behaved badly because we were hungry.'<sup>64</sup> This recollection, although not a fond memory, shows that the respondent had by adulthood internalized cultural differentiation - in complaining about violence and hunger, she repeats the Soviet line that adults were to provide for a happy and healthy childhood. The director of the home, not the state or the children themselves, was to blame; the children's poor behaviour was a function of poor adult leadership.

Other Soviet *niños* in hindsight respected their abusers. One of the youngest children, born in 1933, said of his director: 'let's be honest, he used to hit us, yes, but I remember him as an extraordinary person [...] although, yes, he did make me lose a tooth and all that [...] [W]hen one of those Spanish naughty boys [*pelagatos*] would start to threaten or something, he would give a few slaps for sure!'<sup>65</sup> This belief in the need at times for physical intervention recalls an episode in Makarenko's semi-autobiographical novel *Road to Life*. When the wayward boy Zadorov had acted disrespectfully and Makarenko, who disapproved of violence toward children, slapped him, the boy apologized and later reflected on the appropriateness of the punishment. This scene marked the transition point for Makarenko from teaching in a relatively unstructured child-centred environment to a system in which the children, through adult role models, were given clear boundaries and discipline.<sup>66</sup>

### Role Modelling

Still, Soviet pedagogy considered that disciplining children by violence in most cases

---

<sup>64</sup> Colomina, *Dos Patrias, Tres Mil Destinos*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>65</sup> Devillard, *Los Niños Españoles en la URSS, 1937-1997*, p. 104.

<sup>66</sup> Makarenko, *Road to Life*, Chapter 1.

failed to teach them self-discipline. Instead, as *Detskii Dom*, the journal for Soviet children's homes, stated clearly in its first issue, teachers and educators needed to be good role models, which meant being organized, tidy and precise, with good self-discipline, and the ability to produce disciplined behaviour among their students.<sup>67</sup> The values expected of adults mirrored the student rules that required tidiness, accurate school work, and cultured speech. To teach not only academic subjects but proper Soviet behaviour and discipline, influential adults had to embody the appropriate norms themselves. Just as the religious grandmother was viewed as a threat to children's correct upbringing during the militant atheism campaigns of the early Soviet years, so too teachers and educators who failed to exemplify communist values were now seen as undermining children's moral training. Unfortunately, many staff in the Spanish children's homes were not well trained themselves and so, it was thought, could not function effectively as positive role models for the children. Eliminating adults who were not seen to positively reinforce Soviet teachings created a transparency of discipline by showing the authority of the institution and by purging and putting on display the model of the unacceptable.

Beginning in 1939, a host of both Russian and Spanish workers left or were dismissed from the Spanish children's homes. Of the 129 Spanish teachers and educators who arrived with the children in 1937-1938, only 100 remained in the homes after reductions in 1940, a 22.4 per cent decline. Fourteen of the twenty-nine Spaniards no longer working in the homes were without jobs but still lived in the institutions, which was considered to be 'harmful to the educational work with the children'.<sup>68</sup> Most of the Russians who left were auxiliaries, like cooks or cleaners. Some, however, had been in direct and extensive contact with the children and therefore, it was feared, could

---

<sup>67</sup> I.I. Daniushevskii, 'Voprosy vospitaniia detei v detskom dome', *Detskii dom*, No. 1 (1944), pp. 3-11.

<sup>68</sup> GARF, f. 5451, op. 43, d. 106a, ll. 97-100.

have threatened the harmonious and homogeneous message that the Soviets wanted to project in classrooms and in extra-curricular activities. For some of the adults who left or were forced to leave the homes, we have evidence as to the causes.

Many of the Russian staff members who left the homes had done nothing wrong; they simply were moving on to other things. For example, a January 1939 report from Home No. 1 noted that one couple among the staff was moving to Crimea, two nurses had resigned to continue their studies, another nurse and an educator had left for family reasons, and other workers in the home had departed because of general staff reductions. But some of the Russian workers had been fired for personal or work-related behaviour. Several were truant, one pilfered produce, another stole from Spanish comrades, two came to work drunk, another failed to return to work after leave, and a nurse-maid [*niania*] stole children's goods. Others were fired on the basis of general 'poor work'.<sup>69</sup> It is striking that none of these dismissals was for political reasons or gross misconduct. Rather, the dismissals occurred because of disregard for labour and personal discipline, which could not be tolerated in adults who were meant to act as positive role models. It does not appear that any of the Russian employees' misdemeanours led to criminal proceedings or any punishment other than sacking.

Details on the firing of Spanish workers at this time show a different set of issues that were more frequently construed in political terms and not merely as lapses in labour discipline. Many of the Spanish educators were young women who, back in Spain, had received little education themselves, had no childcare experience and demonstrated little or no political commitment (very few were party members). One Spanish female staff member was removed because she was considered to be 'politically completely illiterate' and refused to take measures for self-improvement.

---

<sup>69</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 2, d. 3, ll. 1-2.

Her 'weak professional preparation' and deafness were also emphasized in the recommendation to move her to manufacturing work. Another woman refused to fulfil her obligation to provide a 'communist upbringing for the children'. She was also called 'politically illiterate'. Yet another woman was deemed to be 'partially literate' and to have little regard for her work and little interest in the children. Since her work was 'undisciplined', the report concluded, she should be re-assigned to a manufacturing job in Kolomna, where her husband lived. A fourth woman was evaluated as 'illiterate' and 'completely uninterested in receiving a minimal education'. She neither studied nor showed interest in 'questions of political development', and she was 'uninterested in the children'.<sup>70</sup> The fact that these Spanish adults were sent to factory work rather than being arrested suggests that they were not seen as political enemies, even though they were viewed as direct threats to the proper upbringing of children.

There is a degree of consistency in these cases. Adults in the position of nurturing the next generation of Spanish communists had to be willing to transmit the values of a good communist: education, political awareness, and proper behaviour. Educational preparation among all these dismissed employees was weak, and some combined their intellectual lethargy with political and personal behaviour that did not provide an authoritative model of correct Soviet behaviour for the children.<sup>71</sup>

Some charges were more explosive than simple illiteracy or lack of political knowledge or engagement. One Spanish woman was judged unfit to work with children because she 'admitted to sexual contact with individual pupils'. As if that were not enough, she was also uninterested in politics. A March 1940 report by the Chief of the

---

<sup>70</sup> All cases are noted in GARF, f. A-307, op. 2, d. 460, ll. 1-3.

<sup>71</sup> On the ideal Soviet classroom teacher see, E. Thomas Ewing, 'A Stalinist Celebrity Teacher: Gender, Professional, and Political Identities in Soviet Culture of the 1930s', *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Winter 2004), pp. 92-118. Also: Ewing, *The Teachers of Stalinism: Policy, Practice, and Power in Soviet Schools of the 1930s* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), Chapters 5 and 6 detail the return to teacher-centred instruction with set curricula and the renewed importance of discipline in classrooms in the 1930s.

Narkompros Division of Children's Homes of Special Purpose [*spetsnaznachenie*], Dubrovskii, sheds more light on this case.<sup>72</sup> The person in question was a member of the Spanish Communist Party and was a milliner before becoming an educator in Children's Home No. 1. Dubrovskii's short characterization noted that she worked as both a cleaning woman and an educator, although she lacked any training for this latter role, but she 'displayed a dishonest attitude to work'. She had also been caught in 'anti-Soviet conversations'.<sup>73</sup> It is unclear whether these charges preceded or followed the charge of sexual misconduct with students, but it suggests that the first recommendation to remove her was not heeded and the authorities were trying to build a stronger case against her. It is clear that someone wanted her fired, and the combination of allegations of improper behaviour and political hostility likely sealed her fate.

The exiled Spanish intellectuals who worked as teachers in the homes presented a different and potentially more dangerous threat. One Soviet investigator urged in December 1939 that a Spanish science and mathematics teacher should not 'remain in the children's home because he was not providing a communist upbringing or devoting time to the principles of communist education. He prefers to discuss his travels and avoid work with the collective of other communists.' The author of the document feared that this teacher would use his intelligence to foment unrest among a 'part of the Spanish collective which is less prepared and understands political questions poorly'.<sup>74</sup> Thus, in the view of Soviet officials, the teacher not only consciously refused to serve as a model of communist values, he also behaved as an individualist rather than working with others. Both his political values and his personal behaviour challenged the Soviet norms being instilled in the young Spanish charges.

In some cases, it was not what a person did, or did not do, but who they were

---

<sup>72</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 2, d. 409, l. 1-2.

<sup>73</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 2, d. 409, l. 1-2.

<sup>74</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 2, d. 1384.

that marked them as suspicious. A Soviet investigator claimed that the age of one adult Spanish male teacher (he had been born in 1895) made it likely that he was too deeply attached to his roots and traditions. The report deemed him conscientious in his educational work, but noted that he bore the ‘influence of a bourgeois scholastic school’, perhaps owing to his theological training. In Spain this teacher had belonged to a party of ‘republican-federalists’, but the Soviet official could not discern what his political attitudes were in the USSR. To be sure, the Spanish political left was so fractured that being a socialist or even a communist in no way guaranteed support for the Soviet Union or even that one was an atheist or internationalist. The teacher in question never refused to attend public events, the report continued, nor did he eschew political speeches of a ‘deeper character’. But in his daily life he was supposedly often ‘insincere’ and at times ‘two-faced’.<sup>75</sup> This was far from a ringing endorsement, but apparently not quite enough to get him sacked. He was, however, investigated again in January 1939, when it was noted that he had an ‘unhealthy attitude’, and that officials in the children’s home were suspicious of his ‘relations with older girls’ as well as his ‘dubious political physiognomy’.<sup>76</sup> Here we see the Soviet fear of ‘masking’ that was so prominent during the Great Purges.<sup>77</sup> The teacher showed no outward evidence of political unreliability or hostility, but his biography – his age, his training and experience, his uncertain political affiliations - prompted concerns. He might be a conscientious and loyal Soviet pedagogue or a lecherous, anti-Soviet personality. Because of this potential two-facedness, this teacher’s character, behaviour, and political leanings were all suspect or ‘dubious’ and he could not be left in a classroom of impressionable Spanish children if they were to be ‘reforged’ into Soviet-Spanish

---

<sup>75</sup> Report undated, GARF, f. A-307, op. 2, d. 1376, ll. 3-4.

<sup>76</sup> GARF, f. A-307, op. 2, d. 407, ll. 1-3.

<sup>77</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!*, Part 5.

hybrids.<sup>78</sup> In this instance, as with the woman mentioned earlier, allegations of sexual misconduct were most likely introduced to strengthen the case for dismissal.

Clearly the Spanish workers in the homes were carefully monitored for their political attitudes. Evidently, and understandably, the Spaniards also had less concept of how to ‘speak Bolshevik’ in front of the authorities. Probably many of the Soviet workers had by now learned how to mask their political attitudes, if they were not ardent supporters of the party, to appear to be good communists. Many of them, of course, were true believers and worked hard to become ideal citizens.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, Narkompros’ 1938 ‘Regulations Concerning the Children’s Homes for Spanish Children’ demanded that all Soviet employees of the homes should be recruited from the Communist Youth League (Komsomol) and approved by their regional committees.<sup>80</sup> Although the records of employees show that in fact most were not Komsomol members, this rule reflects the authorities’ desire to have only positive communist role models for the children, and suggests that most Soviet staff had already undergone some type of vetting. So it should not surprise us that they were fired less frequently for political reasons. With politically suspect or apathetic Spanish adults being culled from the homes, Soviet citizens became increasingly central as the children’s role models of behaviour. In this way, Soviet authorities differentiated for the children between proper Soviet culture and the old ways of Spain.

The Spanish children themselves recognized the cultural differences between Soviet and Spanish adults. As one former student remembered, ‘the Spanish [teachers] were more liberal, less disciplined, more happy-go-lucky [*más viva la pepa*]

---

<sup>78</sup> For many cases such as this we do not know the outcomes because privacy laws in the Russian Federation make personnel files inaccessible.

<sup>79</sup> On people’s attempts to refashion their autobiographies to conform with the new Soviet ideals, see Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*.

<sup>80</sup> GARF, f. A-2306, op. 70, d. 5987, l. 6.

in every way'.<sup>81</sup> Although the archival record clearly shows, as we have seen, that Spanish adults frequently frustrated or antagonized the homes' Soviet administrators, one has to wonder if the differences were as dramatic as some of the children remembered. Much of the learning in the homes focused on Soviet behaviour and values, including hard work, a love of education and books, and personal discipline. That the children decades later represented weak Spanish teachers as the antithesis of Soviet values like self-discipline suggests an internalization of those Soviet values as 'good'. Anyone who was not remembered as personifying proper Soviet values would be labelled as 'bad'.

The existing Spanish oral histories of the displaced children have not contextualized or understood the Soviet authorities' motives and methods in structuring the homes and their staff. In particular, we need to analyse the Spanish as well as Soviet staff turnover in 1939-40 in light of Stalin's speech at the Eighteenth Party Congress in March 1939, in which he called for raising the political knowledge of cadres throughout the Soviet system. While some of the Spanish teachers who were removed from the homes may have become victims of the purge of the Comintern and other foreign communists at this time, most of the dismissed staff, as noted above, were not condemned as real or potential enemies but as being politically 'illiterate' and therefore unsuitable as children's role models, and were transferred to factory jobs.<sup>82</sup> Had this

---

<sup>81</sup> Devillard, *Los Niños Españoles en la URSS, 1937-1997*, p. 107. The phrase 'viva la pepa' also can suggest complete chaos, disorder, and incompetence. My thanks to Elise Bartosik-Velez for help with this translation.

<sup>82</sup> It is not yet clear how widespread such removals were or how aware Spaniards were of what was going on around them. Valentín González, known as the civil war hero 'El Campesino', reported in his memoir that 60 per cent of teachers who had come from Spain had been liquidated by the time he arrived in 1939. Jesús Hernández, former minister of education for the Republic, stated much the same that after the Spanish Civil War ended teachers were expelled and/or arrested and replaced with Russian teachers and textbooks, and the children were put to labour as well as schooling. Valentín González, *Vida y muerte en la URSS* (Buenos Aires: S.A. Editorial Bell, 1951), p. 190, quoted in Legarreta, *Guernica Generation*, p. 171, n. 35; Hernández, *El país de la gran mentira* (Madrid: E.G. del Toro, 1974), pp. 222-23, cited in Legarreta, *Guernica Generation*, p. 171, n. 36. Labour was part of the *niños*' training which was no different from that of Soviet children. González offers no documentary evidence to support his claims.

been an attack on Spaniards and/or Spanishness, the special schools for Spanish children, which, as we have also seen, still maintained a strong contingent of Spanish teachers and staff, would not have remained intact - at great expense - until 1953. Furthermore, there would have been no logic in creating a Spanish cultural centre in Moscow in 1945 that sought to maintain connections among graduates of the Spanish homes and to sustain their community's culture and traditions.

From the moment of Stalin's speech on cadres, attention turned to ensuring that staff, both Soviet and Spanish, within the Spanish homes had sufficient and proper political training. Political illiteracy on the part of teachers threatened the working class and the state.<sup>83</sup> The critical reading and discussion of the core communist texts was prescribed as the best solution for adult learners who had failed thus far to acquire the proper political outlook.<sup>84</sup> Behaviour problems and uneven political education necessitated a review of the adult staff because only good role models could ensure the 'reforging' of the displaced Spanish children into good Soviet citizens. The 'hybridity' of the Soviet-Spanish *niños* consisted in remaining 'national in form' while becoming 'socialist in content'. The case of Spanish children in the Soviet Union thus shows a regime that was still committed to a kind of internationalism, even while it was declaring the leading role of the Russian people and attacking many national minorities and émigré communities within its borders.

---

<sup>83</sup> A.Ia Vyshinskii, 'Vystuplenie na Vserossiiskom soveshchaniia aktiva uchitelei i rukovodiashchikh rabotnikov narodnogo obrazovaniia', *Sovetskaia pedagogika*, No. 10 (1939), pp. 29-34.

<sup>84</sup> F. Kozhevnikov, 'Opyt samostoiatel'nogo izucheniia istorii VKP(b)', *Sovetskaia pedagogika*, No. 3 (1940), pp. 64-69; 'K itogam XVIII partiinoi konferentsii', *Sovetskaia pedagogika*, No. 4 (1941), pp. 3-10.