

The 'Basques' in Britain: An examination of refugee children's agency and identity formation through self-produced journals *Amistad* and *Cambria House Journal*

Joshua James Burns (28685717)

Professor Antony Kushner

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28685717

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Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. J. J.', written over a horizontal line.

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28685717

Contents

List of abbreviations	p. 6
Introduction	pp. 8-10
Chapter One ‘A Problematic Arrival?’	pp. 12-17
Chapter Two ‘Negotiating Categorisation’	pp. 18-26
Chapter Three ‘Organising in Britain’	pp. 27-35
Conclusion	pp. 36-37
Bibliography	pp. 39-43

List of abbreviations

BBTC – Basque Boys’ Training Committee

BCC – Basque Children Committee

NJCSR – National Joint Council for Spanish Relief

CHJ – Cambria House Journal

HLSC – Hartley Library Special Collections

Introduction

On May 23rd 1937, the *SS Habana* docked in Southampton following a two-day voyage from Santurtzi to the welcome of large crowds and the presence of the national media. On board were 3,889 ‘Basque children’, 219 women teachers, some mothers, and 15 priests fleeing the violence of the Spanish Civil War.¹ For the children a significant chapter in their ‘refugeedom’ had just begun. The widespread assumption that the journey would be “only for three months” was an inaccurate assessment of the severity and deterioration of the conditions in Spain by all those involved in the humanitarian relief effort. Less than 300 children had been repatriated home to Spain by the end of 1937 and another 400 remained in Britain following the Second World War. The ‘Basque’ refugees were the ‘largest single influx of refugees’ in British history and therefore mark a significant moment in the twentieth century when thinking about Britain’s pre-war immigration and refugee policies.² Indeed, as highly visible symbols of the civil war, the children offered a ‘major vehicle for popular engagement with Spain, across the political spectrum’ during a period of international instability.³

Despite this, the movement has been largely neglected by historians - in comparison to the *Kindertransport* that arrived one year later, but this literature is growing. Dorothy Legaretta’s groundbreaking, but dated study *The Guernica Generation* from 1986 and Adrian Bell’s important contribution *Only for Three Months* from 1996 ensure that there is a substantial amount of material which can be employed toward investigating new questions and interpretations that have as yet been unexamined. Susana Sabin-Fernandez noted in her PhD on commemorative practices among the Basque refugees since their exile, much of the material she amassed remained unexamined due to lack of time and space.⁴ Recent studies have highlighted the rich diversity of experience when studied regionally by examining the local processes and traditions which affected the reception and treatment

¹ Tony Kushner, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide*, (London; Frank Cass, 1999) p. 110.

² Adrian Bell, *Only for Three Months: the Basque refugee children in exile*, 1st ed., (Norwich: Mousehold Press, 2007), p. 9.

³ Edward Packard, ‘The Many Histories of the Basque Refugee Children in Britain’, *Childhood Remixed*, (2018), 8-22, (p. 15)

⁴ Susana Sabin-Fernandez, ‘The Basque Refugee Children of the Spanish Civil War in the UK: Memory and Memorialisation’, Unpublished PhD Thesis (University of Southampton, 2010), p. 252.

of the children.⁵ This negotiation between the local, the national and the international is of great significance to the politics of refugee movements as relief was both deeply local and profoundly global, underscoring Britain's debts, obligations, and vulnerability both to the far away and the very close.⁶

And yet, the refugee is seldom placed at the centre of narratives about social change.⁷ There has been a continued focus on reception and the views of the British public, particularly the role of the labour movement, to the neglect of the refugees themselves.⁸ Jim Fyrth described the movement as 'an epic of the British people's history'.⁹ Therefore, it is timely to utilise the existing research to construct a more critical understanding of the children's *own* contemporary experience of exile in Britain. There has not yet been a systematic use of the archival material that is being collected in Hartley Library, Southampton, to recreate the refugee experience.¹⁰ One of the most significant of pieces of material is a depository of a self-produced magazine by the children, *Amistad* (Friendship), and this has received very little attention in other secondary literature.¹¹ *Amistad* was a bilingual monthly magazine that launched on the third anniversary of the children's arrival in Britain, closely associated with the Basque Boys Training Committee (BBTC) which assembled in 1939 as a means of finding employment for the 'Basque boys' who remained in Britain. It was initially published in the London office of the Basque Children Committee (BCC) but later in the children's own room at 'el Hogar Espanol' (Our Home), which was located at 22 Inverness Terrace in London, until it ceased

⁵ Hywell Davies, *Fleeing Franco: how Wales gave shelter to refugee children from the Basque Country during the Spanish Civil War*. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011); Robert Graves, 'Leicester's refuge for Basque children from the Spanish Civil War (part 1)', *Leicestershire Historian*, 52, (2016), 3-10; Meriam Jump, 'The Basque refugee children in Oxfordshire during the Spanish Civil War: politically charged project or humanitarian endeavour?', *Oxoniensia*, 72, (2007), 55-71.

⁶ Jordanna Bailkin, *Unsettled: Refugee Camps and the making of Multicultural Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 13.

⁷ Peter Gatrell, 'Refugees—What's Wrong with History?', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol 30, 2, 1 (2017), 170–189.

⁸ Buchanan, Tom, 'The Role of the British Labour Movement in the Origins and Work of the Basque Children's Committee', *European History Quarterly*, 18, (1998), 155-174.

⁹ Jim Fyrth, *The Signal Was Spain: The Spanish Aid Movement in Britain 1936-1939*, (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1986), p. 242.

¹⁰ Barry N. Stein, 'The Refugee Experience: Defining the Parameters of a Field of Study', *The International Migration Review*, 15, (1981), 320-330.

¹¹ Bell, *Only for Three Months*, p. 140.

publication in 1944.¹² *Amistad* provides an opportunity to trace the movement of some of the ‘Basque children’ from the protection of the BCC to adult exiles establishing a self-supporting diasporic community in Britain. *Amistad* attempted to unite those who remained in Britain following ‘colony’ closures as only a handful remained open after 1940.

Therefore, this thesis will move beyond the existing paradigms of the Basques’ relationship with British adults to reveal previously unknown elements of their lives in exile and different elements of integration and cultural transfer by looking at the relationships between children. This study also proposes to extend the insightful analysis of Kevin Myers, who has highlighted the role constructions of ‘childhood’ and ‘national identity’ played in conditioning responses to the children by the British, which will be outlined and contextualised in Chapter One. Building upon this, I will focus on the responses of the refugees to these assumptions and consequent treatment on their own understandings of their identities as children-come-exiles growing up in a foreign country in the last two chapters. These identities are considered alongside the *Cambria House Journal*, the journal of the children at the Caerleon colony in South Wales. This journal was published between 1938-1939 and provides a unique regional perspective that can be compared with the national, even internationalist, aspirations of *Amistad*.

Jordanna Bailkin has recently criticised historians for failing to identify refugee camps as sites of exchange and multiculturalism. Rather than barriers between ‘citizen’ and ‘alien’, refugee camps blurred lines between political quarantine and refugee aid and were also spaces of possibility rather than solely confinement and segregation.¹³ Despite this necessary corrective, Bailkin’s study is primarily fixated on the politics of the ‘camp’ and its vicissitudes over time, refusing to ‘ghettoize’ particular refugee groups, stemming from an assumption of the desire for the state to ‘settle’ individuals in order to control them. Although the ‘Basque children’ appear, Bailkin’s focus upon the state and ‘daily acts of rebellion against it’ can serve to aid the processes of binarization that exist particularly within the discussions of children’s agency in places of liminality, rather than resist it.¹⁴ As Mona Gleason has argued, children’s agency is not only exercised through acts of rebellion and resistance to authority, but in complex, multi-trajectorial ways.¹⁵ This binarization often reinforces power relations rather than challenging them, such as the ‘powerful adult’ and the ‘powerless child’.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Bailkin, *Unsettled*, pp. 5-7.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁵ Mona Gleason, “Avoiding the Agency Trap: Caveats for Historians of Children, Youth, and Education”, *History of Education* 45, no. 4 (2016): 446-59, (pp. 447-448).

This will be scrutinised in later chapters, through an examination of how the children attempted to counter hegemonic discourses through the self-publication of magazines and journals which problematised beliefs attached to their perceived identities and acknowledges a greater role for the children than the historiography has hitherto allowed.

Chapter Three brings these threads together by considering how *Amistad* conceptualised the children's status in Britain; their roles in rebuilding the Spanish Republic, their shifting identities and responsibilities in this process, and their struggles in mobilising a collective identity that could be used as a means of organizing the remaining 400-650 'Basque children' that remained during and following the Second World War. The long-term implications this has on the legacy of the Basque's in Britain and the existing narratives that surround their period of exile in Britain will be also be evaluated.

Chapter One

A Problematic arrival?

This chapter will outline the Basque arrival and the portrayal they received by the British press and the means through which this reception was negotiated by stereotypes and racialised assumptions about Basque and Spanish ‘national identity’ as well as ‘childhood’. These stereotypes helped to shape the humanitarian response to the ‘Basque children’, but also set limits upon acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in the attempts to depoliticise the Basque children’s identities to make their presence in Britain more amenable and acceptable with the National Government’s official policy of non-intervention.

The British government had adopted a policy of non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War in the hope of preventing the conflagration from spreading by effecting an arms embargo. Despite the recognised participation of Germany and Italy, sympathy within the Conservative Party for General Franco’s rebellion against the Popular Front government made it less disposed to act decisively.¹ Meanwhile, popular sentiment for the Republic was reflected through the Aid Spain Movement, as tens of thousands marched, demonstrated, collected, and held concerts and other social events generating an estimated £2,000,000 to send medical personnel, supplies and food-ships.² Crucial to the evacuation of the child refugees was Franco’s destruction of Guernica on April 26th 1937. The coverage of George Steer at *The Times*, reproduced in the *New York Times*, exposed the horrors of modern air warfare that were ‘unparalleled in military history, as ‘Guernica, the most ancient town of the Basques and the centre of their cultural tradition, was completely destroyed yesterday afternoon by insurgent air raiders’.³ Following Steer’s exposé, mounting pressure was put on the government by the National Joint Council for Spanish Relief (NJCSR) - a pressure group of sympathetic MPs - to make the humanitarian gesture of accepting refugees, framed around the embarrassing ‘failure’ of the British Navy to circumvent a feeble Franco blockade to reach those starving in Bilbao.⁴ On April 29 1937, three days after Guernica’s destruction the Home Secretary Sir John Simon, granted facilities for the ‘Basque children’, on the condition that it did not incur any ‘charge on public funds for their maintenance’.⁵ Preparations commenced to bring 2,000 – later 4,000 - child refugees to Britain, who

¹ Paul Preston, 'Britain and the Basque Campaign of 1937: The Government, the Royal Navy, the Labour Party and the Press', *European History Quarterly*, 48, (2018), 490-515.

² Kushner, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide*, p. 106.

³ Special Correspondent, ‘THE TRAGEDY OF GUERNICA TOWN DESTROYED IN AIR ATTACK’, *The Times*, April 28 1937.

⁴ Preston, 'Britain and the Basque Campaign of 1937', p. 501.

⁵ “Refugee Basque Children: Home Secretary to Give Facilities,” *The Times*, 30 April 1937, p. 18.

duly arrived on the 23rd May and were then dispersed throughout Britain in around 90 ‘colonies’ from North Stoneham, Southampton camp.

Prior to the arrival of the child refugees in Britain, there were humanitarian processes at play appealing to the sympathies of the British public by portraying the refugees in a specific manner. As Kevin Myers and Tom Buchanan have highlighted, crude national stereotypes, such as the ‘Spanish’ being bloodthirsty, cruel, excessively passionate and highly individualistic – legacies of the Inquisition and the bull-ring - were used as a shorthand for explaining the Civil War and its causes, rather than the articulating the complex political realities which it was felt many would find alien or incomprehensible.⁶ One of these stereotypes was Spanish incompetence, characterized by immutable customs such as the *siesta* and the *mahana* attitude. This was a recurrent refrain on the Left that implied that the civil war was too important to be left to the Spanish who did not take conflict seriously.⁷ Likewise, the belief that the Spanish were ‘a race of bloodthirsty savages’ took hold to such an extent that in May 1936, following the Popular Front's election victory, the official journal of the TUC felt obliged to assure readers that: ‘[t]he average Spaniard, despite his sometimes ferocious appearance, his devotion to his national blood sport and the fact that his country still breeds anarchists, is a very ordinary, kindly-disposed human being, heartily sick of the disorder which exists on his doorstep’.⁸ The fact that anarchism as a political philosophy existed at all and was seen to be ‘bred’ was used to highlight the maturity and stability of the British system of trade unionism, and further distanced the ‘Spanish’ from the ‘Basques’ in the popular imagination as a backward race who had not yet reached industrial modernity.

In contrast to views of the ‘Spanish’, Michael Alpert writes that ‘the British public was very sympathetic to the cause of the Basque people, whom it saw as resembling themselves – conservative seamen, farmers, miners and steel men – and fighting for their ancestral liberties’.⁹ Labour leader, Clement Atlee claimed in the Commons in April 1937, ‘[t]he Basques, who are old friends of ours, are fighting for their liberty...[t]he Basques stand for democracy... what is he [prime minister] doing on the behalf of democracy?’, with a relationship constructed around the previous visit of the Queen to Bilbao and the historic trade links between Britain and the Basque region.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the labour

⁶ Myers, ‘The Ambiguities of aid and Agency’, pp. 29-30.

⁷ Tom Buchanan, ‘“A Far Away Country of Which We Know Nothing”?: Perceptions of Spain and its Civil War in Britain, 1931–1939’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 4, 1, (1993), 1–24, (p. 5).

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

⁹ Michael Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*, (Hampshire, 1994), p. 120.

¹⁰ Clement Atlee, ‘Situation at Bilbao’, House of Commons debate, 14 April 1937, Vol 322 Col 1035.

movement set up the 'Save the Basque Children' fund in 1937, bringing in some £2840 by June.¹¹ Even within the highest levels of British government, the autonomous Basque province, governed by the *Partido Nacionalista Vasco*, evoked admiration. Anthony Eden, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs claimed, 'If I had to choose in Spain, I believe that the Basque system would more closely conform to our own system than that of Franco or the Republic'.¹² It was the alleged proximity of the Basques to the English that, according to one Manchester Guardian reader, made it necessary to:

welcome them with true British hospitality. The Basques as a race are closely akin to ourselves in culture and outlook ... A deeply religious people, they are kindly, courteous and usually light-hearted ... Politically they tend towards conservatism, but they can boast an old age system of democratic government.¹³

As noted, the Committee set up to support and care for the children was named the 'Basque Children's Committee' while the temporary reception camp they established at North Stoneham, Southampton was named the 'Basque Children's Camp'. The BCC continuously emphasised and exploited the racial identity of the children in their appeals. "You can't help liking them" claimed the headline on a leaflet sent out by the BCC, asking for people to 'adopt' a Basque refugee by paying ten shillings a week for their upkeep.¹⁴ '[H]e becomes peculiarly yours. You can send him presents, take him out for the day or for the week-end... They are small, dark little people with straight black hair and merry dancing eyes'.¹⁵ Moreover, in order to help with fund-raising there were children's concerts, a recording of the children singing and even a commissioned stamp. One of these concert leaflets from June 1938 further reveals the deeply racialised understandings of the Basque populace, described as 'one of the oldest and most purest races in the world; probably also one of the least known and understood'.¹⁶ The event providing a glimpse into '[t]he very soul of a people, the oldest and most mysterious race in Europe... every dance is a priceless heritage in which the spirit of a forgotten past still lives and moves'.¹⁷ Consequently, nearly everywhere the children went they were

¹¹ Tom Buchanan, 'The Role of the British Labour Movement in the Origins and Work of the Basque Children's Committee', *European History Quarterly*, 18, (1998), 155-174, (p. 161).

¹² Michael Alpert, 'Humanitarianism and Politics in the British Response to the Spanish Civil War, 1936-9', *European History Quarterly*, 14, (1984), 423-440, (p. 432).

¹³ Myers, 'Ambiguity of Aid and Agency', pp. 33-34.

¹⁴ Benjamin, *Recuerdos*: p. 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Aldwych Theatre London, 'Eresoinka', June 14 1938, *Hartley Library Special Collections* (hereafter *HLSC*), MS 370/8 A4110/2/1/3/6, p. 35.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

referred to collectively as ‘Basques’, which conjured images of a ‘moderate, pious and hard-working people’ who were the ‘very opposite of the church-burning anarchism sometimes associated with the Republic in the British press’.¹⁸ Archbishop Hinsley wrote on the front page of the *Catholic Herald* that the children were coming from ‘the pre-eminently Catholic Basque Country’ in order to have their ‘faith safeguarded’.¹⁹

Before the *Convention Relating the Status of Refugees* enshrined a ‘universal’ definition of the ‘refugee’ in 1951, the legal construction of the ‘refugee’ was contested. The granting of refugee status was not dependent upon *individual* refugees demonstrating that they had left their home countries because of ‘well-founded fear’ of persecution, but on a more *ad hoc* basis by accepting the persecution of a group.²⁰ The view that the refugee was an agent of political unrest rested on interwar-period assumptions that transferring ‘native’ populations was wrong, catering to suspicion and prejudice, and that European ethnic groups, similar to colonial subjects, belonged in the regions and nations they inhabited.²¹ Group designation had the effect of creating disagreement about which refugee groups should be given assistance and those that should not.²² In the context of non-intervention, the acceptance of the Republican refugees was an especially politically infused gesture, and as such it became a very divisive question for the British public who similarly had divided loyalties and attitudes towards the Popular Front government. This also meant that the refugees were not treated as individuals who were responsible for themselves, but as a collective group that were to be held responsible for each other’s actions and perceived to share analogous beliefs.

Conceptions of ‘childhood’ had significant power on how the children were perceived, treated and expected to behave. There was significant anxiety about teenagers as being both sexual and political threats and the category of ‘child’ was hotly, varying from 12 to 16, and transposed ideas of innocence as intrinsic to the children.²³ As the *Eastleigh Weekly News* stated, ‘Obviously Bilbao was no place for children, where the horrors of air-raids and food shortage were having their terrible effect

¹⁸ Myers, ‘Ambiguity of Aid and Agency’, p. 32.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ UNCHR, ‘Convention and Protocol Relating the Status of Refugees’, <<https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>> [Last accessed 29/03/2019], p. 14.

²¹ Susan D. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain*, (2009), p. 227.

²² Kushner, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide*, 11.

²³ Jordanna Bailkin, ‘Defining the Refugee Child: A History’, *Refugee History*, (20th July 2018) <<http://refugeehistory.org/blog/defining-the-refugee-child-a-history>> [Last accessed 23/04/2019]

upon young minds and bodies.²⁴ War was viewed as a corrupting influence upon the children's mental development and removing the virtue that was intrinsic to 'childhood'. In an editorial entitled 'The Innocent Victims', the *Southern Daily Echo* the paper told its readers that:

Whatever one's views may be concerning the rights and wrongs of the war in Spain, we are all without exception united in pity for those poor children who are now to find sustenance in this country. They are the innocent victims of a tragedy which they have done nothing to cause and in the perpetuation of which they have taken no hand. Everyone would wish to see them removed from the scene of bloodshed and terror to the safety and peace of this country.²⁵

However, as Peter Anderson has shown, the 'refugee' status of the children became more severely contested once Bilbao fell on June 18th 1937 as it was now argued that the reason for the children's evacuation, risk to life, had been resolved with Franco's troops in control of what had been the autonomous Basque province.²⁶ The continued presence of so many Basque children in Britain throughout late 1937, and even after the end of the Civil War in 1939, was perceived as an obstacle to Franco's mission for the 'New Spain' and saw the creation of the Spanish Children Repatriation Committee to press for full repatriation of the children.²⁷ It became clear that many of the children were intensely politicised and had acted as heads of families or fought in the civil war and were therefore not used to being treated as children, soon undermining the narrative of the children as 'innocents'.²⁸ After Bilbao fell, some Communist children had attempted to burn down the Catholic children's chapel which led the Stoneham sanitary inspector to mockingly describe the children as 'Lovely little Basque babies'.²⁹ Meanwhile, the *Yorkshire Evening Post* alleged that some of the children had stoned a cottage after the cottager had 'smacked' one of the Basque children for fighting

²⁴ Kushner, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide*, p. 106.

²⁵ Myers, 'The Ambiguities of aid and Agency', p. 29.

²⁶ Peter Anderson, 'The Struggle over the Evacuation to the United Kingdom and Repatriation of Basque Refugee Children in the Spanish Civil War: Symbols and Souls', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 52, (2017), 297-318, (p. 307).

²⁷ Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*, p. 204; Anderson, 'Repatriation of Basque Refugee Children in the Spanish Civil War', pp. 307-308.

²⁸ Benjamin, *Recuerdos*, p. 3.

²⁹ Bailkin, 'Defining the Refugee Child: A History', *Refugee History*, (20th July 2018) <<http://refugeehistory.org/blog/defining-the-refugee-child-a-history>> [Last accessed 23/04/2019]

with his own child.³⁰ The right-wing press regularly portrayed the children as subversive ‘Reds’ or ‘Communists’, despite the diversity of the refugees’ political allegiances, while a popular joke at the time went: ‘Why has your child become so unruly? Oh, he’s been playing with some Basque children’.³¹

Therefore, this chapter has emphasised the racialised politics that played a significant role in producing notions of victimhood which allowed the Basque children to be permitted entry into Britain by a chiefly hostile British government. This construction shaped the treatment of the children while in exile, but it also set conditional limits upon acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Despite this, the characterisation of the children as ‘Basque’ as opposed to ‘Spanish’ did not go unchallenged by the children themselves, as the next chapter will show.

³⁰ *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 26 July 1937, p. 7.

³¹ Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*, p. 124; Kushner, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide*, p. 105.

Chapter Two

Negotiating categorisation

Building upon the British assumptions about what constituted the ‘Basque child’ from Chapter One, where the processes of humanitarianism served to depoliticise the children’s identities in order to control them, this chapter will highlight the responses that some of the *niños* offered to these cultural stereotypes and the attempts of the children to navigate them, in spite of their positions of liminality, through a mobilisation of alternative discourses. Additionally, this helps to complicate our understanding of the children’s agency, beyond the binaries of protest/submission which often accompany the study of refugees, in suggesting that there was not an archetypal ‘Basque refugee’ there was a medium through which the children could articulate their grievances and disrupt narratives of British generosity.

As Peter Gatrell and Liisa Malkki have argued, the portrayal of refugees as *without* agency has a long genealogy, and is mediated through legal formulations, bureaucratic practices, and is compounded by the material deprivation often experienced by refugees.¹ And yet this portrayal of powerlessness supplies only a partial picture of the refugee experience.² In the case of the ‘Basque children’ the documents which survive to rarely permit refugee perspectives and - as ‘children’ - the *niños*’ perspectives are often doubly marginalised as they had to negotiate adult relationships, with their perspectives are often sanitised, distorted and mediated through adult interpretation.³ Consequently, that some of the estimated 90 ‘colonies’ where the *niños* were settled around Britain saw the creation and publication of self-produced journals is not trivial to the historian, as they provide a contemporary articulation of the *niños*’ ‘refugeedom’ which is rarely captured by more conventional sources. Likewise, despite their strengths, oral histories cannot capture the immediate emotions and perspectives that these journals can provide. Even more significant is that these journals were well received. For example, in the March 1939 edition of the *Cambria House Journal (CHJ)* – the journal of 58 *niños* in Caerleon, South Wales - the editor expressed their hope that the readership would soon reach 4,000.⁴ As the *CHJ* was sold for 1p a copy and the upkeep of a single Basque child

¹ Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, (Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 9.

² Ibid.

³ Barron, Hester & Langhamer, Claire. "Feeling through Practice: Subjectivity and Emotion in Children's Writing." *Journal of Social History*, 51, 1, (2017), 101-123, (p. 105).

⁴ Charlotte Mary Hopkins, ‘The Basque experience of exile, 1936-39’ p. 46.

was ten shillings (50p) a week, this indicates that the monthly journal would have been capable of capturing significant financial revenues for the local BCC committee which, Jack Williams, a BCC member, claimed needed to raise £15 a week through ‘fundraising activities’.⁵

This readership also highlights the significant interest that sections of the British public took in the words and activities of the Basque children. However, it also exposes an element of ‘performance’, that makes it problematic to read the articles wholly as expressions of the children’s thoughts and feelings, as the children are likely to be conscious of their readership and tailor their language and presentation accordingly. For example, the sense of financial precarity felt by the local committee was apparent in September 1939, as a decision was made to form a committee to make the journal ‘more interesting’ after complaints that the monthly articles were too similar.⁶ However, preceding this adult intervention, elements of performance were clear in the pedagogically-titled ‘Essay written in English’ by M.Z in the January 1939 edition of *CHJ*. The ‘happiness’ of the children is repeatedly emphasised, as well as the sense of routine, marked by the ringing of a ‘bell’ by ‘Mrs. Sancho’, which highlighted the children’s compliance with authority.⁷ Keren Celia, studying the autobiographies of ‘Basque children’ in France during the same period, has established that humanitarian writings as a *genre* have the tendency to celebrate ‘happiness’ as a typical state of ‘childhood’ that their efforts have the purpose of returning children towards, thus generating greater donations.⁸ Underlying a performance of happiness is a performance of obedience which is more openly explicated elsewhere in the *CHJ*. It is noted in an article by a ‘girl from Bilbao’ that some visitors on Sundays came in order to:

listen and then criticise and speak evil of the Basque children...All they want to do is to do harm to us and our country... I do not say that we are not sometimes mischievous and rebellious, but in England are children always good? No as in every place are there some

⁵ ‘Anon’, ‘Cambria House, Caerleon: Home for Basque children 1937-1939’ <<http://www.caerleon.net/cambria/basque/>> [Last accessed 24/04/2019] ; Jack Williams, *CHJ*, July 1939 No 9 in Hopkins, ‘The Basque experience of exile, 1936-39’, Appendix.

⁶ ‘Anon’, *Cambria House Journal*, September 1939, *Cambria House journal* [a later compilation], undated, *HLSC*, MS 404 A4171 6/2/2.

⁷ M.Z, ‘An Essay In English’, *Cambria House Journal*, January 1939, <<http://www.caerleon.net/cambria/basque/page4.html>> [Last accessed 24/04/2019]

⁸ Keren Celia, ‘Autobiographies of Spanish Refugee Children in the Quaker Home in La Rouviere (France 1940): Humanitarian Communication in Children’s writings’, *Les Cahiers de Framespa*, 5, (2010), DOI: 10.4000/framespa.268.

naughty ones. But the people who talk in this way only notice what we do. So therefore, for our own good and for the good of Spain we ought to behave well'.⁹

Such comments illuminate the article by M.Z and suggests a hyper-sensitivity to the instability of their position and dependence public goodwill which meant the children were also keen to portray themselves as well-behaved and deserving, even if they were genuinely happy. As a *niño* later recalled, 'we had to be in our best behaviour always. We had not to [sic] antagonise public opinion [...] There was a campaign in the press to repatriate us'.¹⁰ This was an acute issue in Wales, as 24 older boys at the Brechfa colony were repatriated to France in 1937 by the Home Secretary following an incident involving a knife, and was widely reported by the national press.¹¹

However, the journals were not merely an exercise in emphasising the good behaviour and 'happiness' of the children, thus making them 'worthy' of moral, financial and material support. The journals show the children as agents, even co-creators of campaigns. *Amistad* was first issued 23rd May 1940, to coincide with the third anniversary of the children's arrival in Britain. It was targeted at the children's 'friends, sympathetic organisations and trade union branches' that had helped them settle in Britain, and was conceived as an 'informative monthly publication' with columns like 'Did you know that...?' whereby the children provided facts about Spanish history and culture.¹² The gratitude felt by some Britons is perceived through a reader's letter published by *Amistad*, in which its role in 'educating a somewhat ignorant English public in ideas, culture and customs of the Spanish people' was recognised.¹³ In addition to this educational premise, in November 1940, Fermin interviewed the BCC press secretary, Miss Violet Miller, about the successes of *Amistad* and its potential to aid the BCC's efforts. Miller is reported to have said, 'so put your best foot forward, as we say in England, and raise the circulation to stupendous heights of your very interesting little book. I welcome you as fellow workers in the appeals department'.¹⁴ In response Fermin wrote that 'I assured her we will make her wishes come true. We must not let her down. Let us work feverishly for the

⁹ 'A Girl from Bilbao', *Cambria House journal* [a later compilation], undated, *HLSC*, MS 404 A4171 6/2/2.

¹⁰ Sabin-Fernandez, 'The Basque Refugee Children of the Spanish Civil War in the UK', p. 123.

¹¹ Jordanna Bailkin, 'Defining the Refugee Child: A History', *Refugee History*, (20/07/2018) <<http://refugeehistory.org/blog/defining-the-refugee-child-a-history>> [Last accessed 23/04/2019]

¹² Alicia Pozo-Guitierrez and Padmini Broomfield, "'Here, Look After Him' Voices of Basque Evacuee Children of the Spanish Civil War", (Southampton, University of Southampton, 2012), p. 3.

¹³ 'Anon', *Amistad*, February 1941 No 7, *HLSC*, MS 404 A4171 - 6/1/1 (hereafter *Amistad*). pp. 4-5.

¹⁴ Fermin, *Amistad*, November 1940 No 4, p. 14.

magazine and make it a real success.¹⁵ Fermin was able to conceive of his role in *Amistad* as an ally and ‘fellow worker’ in the BBC appeal’s cause rather than solely as a victim of fascism, which was clearer than ever in the circumstances of the Second World War. Other children were given roles as ‘reporters’ who would write articles about what was occurring in different colonies. In this sense, the editing and dissemination of *Amistad* enabled some of the children to feel part of a collective struggle, sharing their experiences of fascism and helping to mobilise sympathetic Britons.

The journals were significant as they provided a platform for some children to articulate their grievances with their treatment in Britain, which allowed to them to problematise more celebratory narratives that were presented in contemporary written accounts and in some of the *ninos*’ later oral histories.¹⁶ More significantly, they offered creative solutions to these problems. Within *Amistad* there was a sustained challenge to the depictions and stereotypes that were associated with the ‘Spanish’ identity, as it was portrayed in Britain, and that these articles were written in 1941 suggests that the preceding four-year period of exile had done little to dent pre-existing assumptions. In ‘Spain...? Oh, Yes!’ Felipe presents the reader with a fictional conversation between a Spaniard and a foreigner in which the tropes of Spanish culture are employed such as wearing ‘white trousers and a sombrero’, ‘playing the guitar’, and taking part in bull-fighting’. In response to each trope the Spaniard replies incredulously, denying that these behaviours reflected the reality of their life. This leads the ‘foreigner’ to then describe the Spaniard as ‘queer’ for not abiding by the foreigner’s stereotypes, while the Spaniard muses, ‘if only you knew what my life was really like!’¹⁷ Felipe proceeds to lament the inability of transnational travel and contends that stereotypes would endure until there were means of breaking these down such as, ‘organising sportive-cultural tours available to everyone during the summer holidays... thus establishing bonds of international friendship and mutual understanding, so necessary to the maintenance of a lasting a progressive peace’.¹⁸ In explaining the predicament of many children, Felipe provides a brief account of Spain’s history and considers how foreign writers’ attractions to Spanish culture gave rise to these stereotypes, which shows great maturity and a sense of responsibility to break down the cultural stereotypes.¹⁹ In a separate article, ‘My second fatherland’, Felipe concedes that he also had stereotypes about Britain:

All rich people well dressed, wearing top-hats. I thought that every day was foggy, and that umbrellas and makintoshes were indispensable, also that the people live on mere delicacies,

¹⁵ Ibid,

¹⁶ Pozo-Guitierrez & Broomfield, ‘Voices of Basque Evacuee Children of the Spanish Civil War’, p. 3.

¹⁷ Felipe, ‘Spain...? Oh, Yes!’, *Amistad*, January 1941 No 6, p. 6.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

delicious sandwiches, and the famous English Tea. Now that I have the pleasure of living in the country, I can see the reality.²⁰

That Felipe sees England as his ‘second fatherland’ suggests the emergence of a new identity in the process of formation. Such examples highlight how interaction between the cultures could help to disrupt suspicions on a local level and individual level and will be examined further in the next chapter. Meanwhile, in ‘Spanish Summer’, M. Josefina criticises the impression that Spaniards spent most of their times sleeping in ‘siestas’ before displaying the great diversity between Spanish regions, as well as between holiday-makers and farmers.²¹ The latter enjoyed the siesta as a ‘short time of well-deserved rest’ after labouring in the heat for hours on end, suggesting that ‘siestas’ were not a racial trait of Spanish laziness, but a reward for hard-work in tough conditions - which no doubt appealed to British working-class notions of thrift.²² As Kevin Myers has documented in the Cambridge colony, a more liberal and radical pedagogical culture existed, as it was run by a National Union of Teachers and had the support of Leah Manning, which meant the children’s were encouraged to explore aspects of their national identity and politics.²³ That *Amistad* received the support of key NJSCR figures, the ‘Red’ Duchess of Atholl, Wilfrid Roberts and Manning in its first issue further suggests this radical pedagogical culture extended to *Amistad*.

The significance of opposing stereotyping is further shown by the fact that similar themes were developed within the pages of *CHJ*. The anonymous J.A offered a deeply class-based analysis of bull-fighting in the January 1939 edition of *CHJ* in which it is described as a ‘horrible thing’ practised by ‘rich Spaniards who have no conscience’, which involved ‘high prices charged for admission... This is a spectacle which is so greatly appreciated by the monied class in Spain, and which, if the Republic had won the war, would have been abolished’.²⁴ Here we see attempts to separate what constituted ‘Spain’ and how it was comprised by ‘J.A’ on the explicit basis of class and what was and was not considered as an acceptable act for a ‘Spaniard’ – thus claiming ownership of the ‘Spanish’ identity. Therefore, that an adjacent article notes the cultural diversity in Spain and their own

²⁰ Felipe ‘My second fatherland’, *Amistad*, May 1940, p. 5.

²¹ Josefina, ‘Spanish Summer’, *Amistad*, January 1941 No 6, p. 7.

²² *Ibid*.

²³ Kevin Myers, ‘National identity, citizenship and education for displacement: Spanish refugee children in Cambridge, 1937’, *History of Education*, 28, (1999), 313-325; Kevin Myers, ‘Englishness, Identity and Refugee Children in Britain, 1937-1945’, *Unpublished Phil*, (Coventry, Coventry University, 2000), p. 194.

²⁴ July 1939 Journal Edition in Hopkins, ‘The Basque experience of exile, 1936-39’, Appendix.

‘wonder’ of bull-fighting and how it was more than just a ‘bloodthirsty sport’ is significant.²⁵ These articles suggest that the children at Caerleon were not solely writing to a Welsh audience, but were sensitive to their fellow refugees’ opinions and assumptions, and this diversity was accordingly presented to their Welsh audience, which would have enabled assumptions about the ‘Basque child’ to be complicated and nuanced.

Despite the richness of this material, the journals are not unproblematic in their presentation of the ‘typical’ *niño* experience or attitude. The journals, particularly *Amistad*, were launched after a few years of living in Britain, which alters the outlooks offered by the ‘children’, especially as by this point the majority of the 4,000 had already been repatriated to Spain, leaving around 650 *niños* in Britain. Of these, only those over the age of 16 and preferred to remain or those younger children whose parents were dead, untraceable or imprisoned by Franco, and thus had to stay, remained.²⁶ Likewise, the publication of the magazines by the ‘children’ had the consequence of marginalising those voices which were not capable of being presented in the journal format, such as those whose were less linguistically or artistically adept, too young to obtain regular column space, or at colonies deprived of a journal and of a different pedagogical culture. Of the children, 400 were cared for by the Salvation Army, while the Roman Catholic Church took in 1,200, which underscores the diversity of experience the children would have had.²⁷ That the typical age for writing the articles appears to be around 10 plus and generally male suggests a certain type of *niño* was given more space to articulate their thoughts and feelings which contributed to a process of ‘ethnic gatekeeping’. Indeed, in an article in 1941 Felipe wrote, ‘[d]o not think that the magazine is a childish thing just because it includes articles sent by children 10 and 12 years old’.²⁸ Gendered marginalisation was also evident in the January 1941 edition of *Amistad*, where a ‘boy’ opens the journal highlighting how the:

weak sex is putting away her laziness so much that we are afraid they may take our names away from the front page ... greeting enthusiastically these girls lead the “feminine revolucion” [sic], and to the boys: be careful! Don’t remain behind and let the people say that the girls are better workers than us.²⁹

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Bell, *Only for three months*, p. 69.

²⁸ Felipe, ‘Editorial’, *Amistad*, April 1941, No 9. The full quote notes that it is important to cultivate these younger children as they are the future of Spain, but for the current analysis the emphasis is upon power relations within the journal.

²⁹ ‘Anon’, *Amistad*, January 1941 No 6, p. 3.

From the start of the war the BCC set up training to make the children self-sufficient in the form of the BBTC to help them find employment.³⁰ The editorial can be read as a playful attempt to encourage higher productivity among the children to an audience of British donors in the context of the Second World War and how the conflict had shifted gender dynamics more broadly. However, the editorial also reproduces a discourse that suggests the girls are typically considered ‘lazy’ and ‘weak’, while the absence of girls’ voices in the magazine highlights the gendered divisions of influence within *Amistad* – which is revealing subtitled ‘a magazine of the Basque boys in England’. This is revealing of what types of work are seen as legitimate by the ‘boys’, while what the “feminine revolucion [sic]” meant to the girls who were being addressed by the editor - who feared losing his name ‘from the front page’, remains absent - likely as their perspectives were not greatly sought after. There is a sense of shame that the girls were outperforming the boys, suggesting they felt their masculinity was threatened by the girls’ presence in the workplace and a fear of being ‘only a girl’ and the status that comes with it. In an article ‘Why I joined a union’, Honorio elucidated that it was the ‘sense of brotherhood’, above all else, which helped him to remain hopeful for the future, and this emphasises how the boys refugees workplace solidarities were class-inflected and largely unresponsive to the gender of their fellow refugees.³¹

Despite this, pictures, contemporary reports and oral history narratives highlight the domestic work young girls contributed to the support the functioning of the camps as early as at North Stoneham with the washing of clothes. It was reported in the *CHJ* in January 1939 that ‘[o]ur girls are experts at using up old woollen garments by undoing them to get the wool, and knitting new jumpers to suit their own requirements.’³² This expresses the types of ‘work’ that the girls undertook – valued in the *CHJ* as ‘expertise’ - to support their ‘colonies’ beyond carrying out to manual labour. Yet this was not valued or seen as ‘respectable’ by some of the boys of *Amistad* which distorts the types of knowledge and experience that is presented and can be gleaned from the magazine. Perhaps more significantly, the *Amistad* article demonstrates the role that female refugee labour played in assisting the British war effort, providing evidence of the changing relationships that conscription in 1939 bore upon the composition of the workforce in Britain. In 1943 women made up 52 per cent of workers in chemicals, 46 per cent in metals, and 34 per cent in engineering compared with 27 per cent, 32 per cent and 10 percent respectively in 1939.³³ The girls were implicated in - and contributed to - broader

³⁰ Mariam Fazlollahi, “British civilians’ aid to the Basque refugee children of the Spanish Civil War: why was it only a civilian movement and how was it organised?”, *Hartley archive*, 3/2/2/12, p. 53.

³¹ Honorio, ‘Why I have joined the Union’, *Amistad*, April 1941 No 9, p. 12.

³² ‘What Cambria House Needs’, *Camria House Journal* (hereafter CHJ), January 1939 No 3, <<http://www.caerleon.net/cambria/basque/page4.html>> [Last accessed 24/04/2019]

³³ Penny Summerfield, *Women workers in the Second World War: production and patriarchy in conflict*, (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 151.

societal changes, even if their contributions were not readily accepted or acknowledged as a result of the ‘Basque boys’ epithet. This silence is not accidental and is replicated in other instances. Angelita Felipe Gomez recalled not being able to find employment due to her ‘alien’ status during the war, requiring official permission to work at Metal Box Steel Works, while a boy recollected not having to register his bicycle - which was a requirement of all aliens in Britain – after the police officer noted he was ‘one of the “Basque Boys”’ and therefore not a ‘foreigner’.³⁴ The relationships that the children were navigating were shaped by geography, age and gender dynamics, as much as by cultural stereotypes, and this needs greater reflection in the historiography going forward, for the ‘Basque’ label wasn’t inclusive to all of the children’s identities.

Ultimately, this chapter has shown that children’s agency was performed through challenging stereotypes about ‘Spain’, but this agency was not distributed equally within the journals. Despite this, writing seems to have provided a source of authority that the children lacked in their own lives. What can be inferred from the material in *Amistad* and the *Cambria House Journal* is that some of the older children set about mobilising a discourse that opposed and problematised ‘Spanish’ and ‘Basque’ identities and highlighted the structures of power that the children were navigating, especially as these discourses were employed as a means of ‘depoliticising’ the children in order to make them more amenable to the British public. The children not possessing a ‘Basque’ identity in the sense advocated by British organisations concealed the differing forms of solidarity and division that did exist, as the next chapter will demonstrate.

³⁴ Benjamin, *Recuerdos*, p. 53; Sabin-Fernandez, “‘Basque Refugee Children’ Memory and Memorialisation’, p. 227.

Chapter Three

Organising in Britain

As argued in the previous chapter, some children in *Amistad* and *CHJ* mobilised an alternative discourse in order to problematise the stereotypes that were attached to the essentialist ‘Spanish’ national identities that were contrasted with ‘Basque’ identities. Stuart Hall has written that identities ‘are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power’.¹ In Britain the children entered and settled in a new society with a different language, no longer having physical ties to ‘home’ apart from a potential sibling.² And as Natalia Benjamin has noted, many children considered their experiences in Britain as marking a turning point from childhood to adulthood.³ In this sense a new identity was just as much in the process of construction by the children themselves as it was by the humanitarian organisations and British people. Attempts at the construction of a unique ‘collective identity’ can be perceived through an extended examination of the *Amistad*, its conceptions of the role of football games and concerts in shaping children’s identities and the subsequent attempts to direct it to more politically minded activities.

The Basque Delegation in London had requested from the BCC that ‘rather than dispersing the children individually into English families [...] they be kept together, precisely so that they may retain their *cultural identity*’.⁴ Following the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939, Franco set about a policy of ‘cultural repression’ in his attempts to create a more homogenous ‘Spanish’ identity that centred on Madrid, which made this task all the more essential as Basque traditions were prohibited.⁵ One practice which was intended by the BCC to reinforce an awareness of the children’s collective identity was the formation of groups to perform traditional Basque songs and dances in ‘homemade’ costumes in the halls, and theatres throughout their localities’.⁶ That these were performances very well received is apparent with the appearance of a book, *The Songs of the Basque children*, which was published in 1938 by the central BCC in London. The book had a far-reaching audience and was even

¹ Stuart Hall quoted in Jennifer Craig-Norton, ‘Contesting Memory: New Perspectives on the Kindertransport’, *Unpublished PhD Thesis* (Southampton, University of Southampton; 2014), p. 210.

² Helen Taylor, Refugees, the State and the Concept of Home, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 32, (2013), 130–152, (p. 130-131).

³ Benjamin, *Recuerdos*, p. 4.

⁴ Bell, *Only for Three Months*, pp. 77-78

⁵ Sheelagh Ellwood, *Franco* (New York, Longman, 1994), p. 117.

⁶ *Ibid.*

sold in Caerleon, South Wales for 2/- as an alternative to fundraising concerts during the Blitz.⁷ The book very much represented an adult construction of ‘Basque’ identity to be purchased, shared and consumed by the British public, which was highlighted in Chapter One, but the sites that the BCC provided gave the children ready-made identities that they could embrace and subvert for their own purposes.

The concerts served an important role in retaining a cultural link with ‘home’ for some refugees and provided an opportunity for self-expression. This was evident at a concert in Plymouth, where it was noted in the programme that “‘The Shepherdesses’ is an original dance by the girls themselves, adapting it to the sad melody of the song of the girls in the West of Spain when the shepherds leave their pastures in Spring in search of fresher ones in the North’.⁸ This original piece presents the audience with a performed allegory of the children’s exile, mediated through a pre-existing cultural medium, which offers optimism for the future despite a new nomadic lifestyle. Likewise, Inaki narrated his journey from learning the jota in Spain to performing it in Britain: ‘to me that had cost me so much sweat to learn my favourite dance, I think I was going to forget about not being able to practice it anymore. But that has not happened, so I have used it and learn it even better... when there is a concert there is always someone who says: “Hey Inaki you have a place reserved for the jota”’.⁹ Inaki found that the talents he developed in Spain of use to him in Britain, which was perceived as a reward for his efforts and a means of retaining a link with his former life.

Football was also a significant space for cultural engagement to take place. As Jessica Thorne has contended in regard to political prisoners in Franco’s Spain, football was not ‘just a game’. Football aided in the transgression and attrition of hierarchies between ‘guard and prisoner’, fashioning a space for enjoyment and individuality, and becoming a source of social ties between prisoners, yet it equally showcased the importance of culture as a vehicle for politicisation.¹⁰ Although, football in Britain did not reach the same heights of ideological codification as it did in Spanish prisons, football games in Britain provided a space for an exploration and affirmation of identities and breaking down cultural barriers between ‘refugee’ and ‘citizen’. In showcasing the potential football held for ideological codification, an article in the *Cambria House Journal* claimed

⁷ Cyril Clarke, ‘Our Concerts’, *CHJ*, October 1939 Vol. 1, No 12, p. 6.

⁸ Navarro Alonso family Scrap book, *HLSC*, MS 370/8 A4110/3, unpaginated.

⁹ Inaki, ‘La Jota’, *Amistad*, February 1941 No 7, p. 12.

¹⁰ Jessica Thorne, “‘Gathered for Special Training’”: Football and Politicisation in Franco’s Prisons’, *History Workshop Journal*, (2019), <<http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/gathered-for-special-training-football-and-politicisation-in-francos-prisons/>> [Last accessed 04/03/2019]

that the Caerleon colony boys' football team, ages 11-15, was named 'España libre' (Free Spain).¹¹ The naming is indicative of the political identities that existed behind the game and how through the process of playing together it was possible to forge connections and solidarities beyond their unique experiences in the civil war and therefore as a distinctive group in exile. These connections and solidarities were explored in other connected ways, as the children also took part in political demonstrations, such as the appearing on a platform at the Aberdare May Day demonstrations with raised clenched fists.¹² Likewise, in January 1939 the *CHJ* disclosed that the boys team had been 'adopted en bloc by the South Wales Miners' Federation'.¹³

Football could play less of an ideologically codified role; a means of integrating and strengthening the connections between local communities and for the refugees it played a significant role in feeling closer to their host communities. The children were able to travel throughout Wales playing many different teams of high calibre.¹⁴ As the anonymous 'X.X' wrote in the January 1939 edition of *CHJ*, following a football match against some local boys in Cardiff, "[w]e had a meal at Mr. O'Dare's house, and then went to see the Cardiff City match, at which Cardiff gained a victory by 2 goals to nil. As soon as this match was over, we had tea with the boys against whom we had been playing, and they presented us with a big basket of fruit, which pleased us very much".¹⁵ The boys took great delight in reporting the *South Wales Argus*' description of them as "the Basque Wonder Team".¹⁶ The significance sport played in settling the children is evident as one child noted the football matches and concerts were 'what we like[d] most' about living in South Wales.¹⁷ Leisure was not a mundane or residual construct for the refugees, but a vital element of their social and civil life where identities were structured and hierarchies were broken down.¹⁸

¹¹ Anon, *CHJ*, September 1939, MS 404 A4171 6/2/2.

¹² Hopkins, 'The Basque experience of exile, 1936-39', p. 24.

¹³ 'What can you do to help Cambria House?', *CHJ*, January 1939. <<http://www.caerleon.net/cambria/basque/page4.html>> [Last accessed 11/04/2019]

¹⁴ 'Two years in Caerleon', *CHJ*, July 1939 No 9 in Hopkins, 'The Basque experience of exile', appendix.

¹⁵ X.X, 'OUR FOOTBALL MATCH IN CARDIFF', *CHJ*, February 1939 No 4, <<http://www.caerleon.net/cambria/basque/page5.html>> [Last Accessed 20/03/2019]

¹⁶ J.H, 'Football', *CHJ*, September 1939, Vol 1. No 11, MS 404 A4171 6/2/2.

¹⁷ Anon, 'Two years in Caerleon', *CHJ*, July 1939 No 9, <<http://www.caerleon.net/cambria/basque/page9.html>> [Last accessed 24/04/2019]

¹⁸ Robert Snape, *Leisure, Voluntary Action and Social Change in Britain, 1880-1939*, (London; Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), p. 147.

Likewise, *Amistad* described the activities of the ‘Basque boys’ in an article, ‘Deportes’, where a game of football was played against an Austrian anti-fascist group during a trip to London.¹⁹ Although no more information is provided, the political milieu in which the children interacted is suggestive of the highly politicised identities that some of the children possessed, where transnational links and solidarities were made through a shared abhorrence of fascism. This was particularly evident when a group of children went to the ‘International Youth Festival’ in London in October 1941, which had several keynote speakers including Ernest Bevin, Minister for Labour, and Winston Churchill, as well as youth delegations from China, Russia, Czechoslovakia and France.²⁰ The networks football forged is perhaps further revealed through the distinctions drawn between ‘Basque boys’ and the ‘young Spaniards’ that made up the team, revealing the different social and political identities that existed within the ‘London group’.²¹ That this article was written only in Spanish - rather than bilingually - further indicates a familiarity and acceptance of children with dissimilar political identities. These children did not necessarily perceive being ‘Basque’ and ‘Spanish’ as contradictory - as the ‘British’ seemed to - but were more devoted to strengthening an inclusive republican identity. As was revealingly argued by an anonymous author, ‘let those who still think *Amistad* is just a ‘group of Basque children’ which has no connection with our future activities get rid of the idea. Every festival that we organise, every football match we play etc. helps us to build up our organisation, which is one of the best weapons to fight fascism’.²²

Peter Gatrell has noted that a sense of history is often close to the surface of refugee’s self-expression.²³ The past is of great importance as a channel for articulating and validating the possibilities of collective action. Such a sense of history was particularly pronounced in *Amistad*:

[t]oday all Spaniards are working fervently, in spite of all the disappointments suffered, to complete the task [the announcement of a Republic following the abdication of Amadeo I of Saboya] which started that 11th February, 1873, and than [sic], over the whole of Spain, the red, yellow and purple flag of freedom will be flown once more’.²⁴

¹⁹ Anon, ‘Deportes’, *Amistad*, December 1941 No 12.,

²⁰ ‘Grupo de Londres actividades: Grupo Artístico: International Youth Rally’, *Amistad*, October 1941 No 14, p. 2.

²¹ ‘Anon’, ‘Deportes’, *Amistad*, December 1941 No 12.

²² ‘Anon’, *Amistad*, December 1941 No 12.

²³ Peter Gatrell, ‘Introduction’ to *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, (Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 12.

²⁴ Amador, *Amistad*, No 7 February 1941, p. 1.

Giordano further explicated this vision of the past in serving to create a vehicle for collective action. In the January 1941 edition of *Amistad* he wrote: ‘the youth of Spain everywhere in Britain, in America, in Spain itself, the *New Spain* that is growing will see that... the whole [of] Spain is free once again and free forever’.²⁵ There was an apparent diasporic quality to the children’s refugeedom with political mobilisation and education seen as part of a larger purpose of bringing republicanism - a ‘new’ progressive force - to Spain.

The building up of the ‘organisation’ through the development of ‘friendship’ was an important element behind the commencement of *Amistad*. However, it becomes apparent that *Amistad* not only mobilised a discourse that challenged national stereotypes, but also attempted to fashion a new ‘collective identity’ of the children who remained in Britain which allowed it to negotiate the majoritarian Basque nationalist and Spanish republican identities that existed in the original ‘Hackney Boys’ grouping. It is noted that *Amistad* was started by ‘3 or 4 boys’ and therefore it initially had a strong editorial focus.²⁶ This editorial bearing was evident in the five-year anniversary reflections of some of the children. ‘I was just a little boy when I had to leave Euzkadi our homeland. Then I knew very little and still know very little about her history, traditions and customs. Nor did I realise the beauty of our countryside the industry of our cities, towns and villages... I see our country with new eyes, and I agree with he who said: “the Basque whatever his ideas or religion might be, must always remember that his country is Euzkadi”’.²⁷ For Inaki, his exile saw a commitment to the Basque nation grow out of ignorance and a sense of loss that had previously gone unappreciated. Likewise, in a different edition, Fermin explains how: ‘Although too young to understand the meaning of the word “republic”, the memory of those marching people is firmly stamped upon our minds, that gigantic waving of banners, those cheers for the Republic and for Liberty ... we in foreign countries, must be united and organised for this moment, so that we may take our part in restoring that lost happiness and freedom to our country, Spain’.²⁸ There is a sense in both accounts that a youthful pride and wonder in both the Republic and Basque nation had since developed into something more resembling political ideology which was being cultivated and sharpened by other boys and adult Spanish exiles through workshops, lectures, football games and festivals. *Amistad* provided a space for an inclusive collective identity to be conceptualised, imagining the opportunities that a united group of young exiles - the ‘Basque Boys’ - could create by working together.

²⁵ Giordano, ‘Do you remember Teruel?’, *Amistad*, January 1941 No 6, p. 12-13. [Emphasis mine]

²⁶ ‘Anon’, ‘Un Ano De Actividades’, *Amistad*, August 194 No 12 p. 12.

²⁷ Inaki, ‘Euzkadi, Our Homeland’, *Amistad*, March 1942, p. 10.

²⁸ Fermin, ‘Viva La Republica’, *Amistad*, No 9, April 1941.

In February 1941, the editor suggested that, rather than solely focusing on the exploits of the ‘Hackney boys’, to instead feature material from the children who were separated nationwide in ‘Birmingham, Coventry etc.’ as ‘our idea is to unite this friendship to be real and effective’.²⁹ Yet in the next month’s edition, a message from Antonio, a *niño* in the midlands, despaired at the fact that, ‘It is now one year since we started to work in the midlands and since then we have done nothing to unite ourselves. We live like strangers and have never tried to have a collaboration among ourselves’.³⁰ In another article by Antonio, which was abridged in English as ‘giving encouragement to the “midlands boys”’, he wrote of how ‘we are no longer “Basque children”, but “young Basques”’ which transformed their predicament and that ‘we have to unite and organize and study not only or what we would learn in a school, but to study more widely our situation in this country, discuss it for ourselves’.³¹ Antonio ranted on his failed attempts to mobilise the ‘midlands boys’, unlike the way that the ‘Hackney boys’ had been able to:

They laugh, well because they fear that if they go to these meetings, it means they cannot go to the cinema. To hear if they have to go to these meetings, it means they cannot go to the movies or go with girls on a Sunday or Saturday or laugh because they think that one or several boys are nobody to organize them, because they think they are so big that they do not allow others to tell them what to do and if they did they would think that it is to lower themselves; or they do not go to the meetings because they are ashamed to show their ignorance and they are not enough men for a voice to go and to conquer that with time everything is done.³²

Antonio’s efforts to ‘form a club’ which could be a source of political discussion were met with ‘laughter’ and rebuked as ‘nonsense’ by some of the other, likely older, children.³³ This feeling was so acute that Antonio believed that organisation would only be possible with an adult - ‘a Spaniard’, perhaps in reference to the exile Pepe Estruch at the Carshalton colony in London, to coordinate them. He did not feel he had the authority to convey the significance of his message:

We need and ask a teacher who can organize us, educate us, organize us in school and sports, to put us on the line where life would be more interesting. Well, I understand that in many

²⁹ *Amistad*, No 7 February 1941, p. 2.

³⁰ Antonio, *Amistad*, No 8 March 1941, p. 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

places there are clubs that, after asking, have left a room where they can meet and also, when they can use the games as the rest of the members, so that we would not only meet to discuss, but for fun too. I think this would attract more to the boys and girls if any.³⁴

Therefore, it becomes apparent that the politicised activities that Antonio encouraged were off-putting to some of the *niños*, simply as irrelevant to their own individual needs or identities and he had to change his approach to attract more ‘midlands children’. The struggles that *Amistad* had in organising in the ‘midlands’ may have been connected to the more complex identities that were developing in contrast to the more explicitly Basque nationalist and Republican identities that *Amistad* gave editorial space. This is evident in a 1942 article which was intended as a rebuff to an article in the *Sunday Express* which claimed that: “[t]hey all consider themselves British now ... A boy of sixteen is saving up to bring his mother here after the war’.³⁵ *Amistad* responded by noting that this assessment was ‘in part contrary to *our aims* and by no means express the general opinion among us: the remaining boys’ and girls’, and that return was impossible due to the danger that the Franco regime – a ‘Nazi colony’ - posed to the children whose parents were dead or missing.³⁶

In contrast, Roberto - a *niño* living in Yorkshire, whose voice was sought after as one of the ‘midlands boys - highlighted the rich diversity of the mutable localised identities of the children when he wrote of his ‘New Surroundings’. The people of Yorkshire had qualities which reminded him of ‘our sturdy Basque people’.³⁷ He was fascinated with the people of Yorkshire’s comedic use of ‘proverbs’ which he claimed could not be usefully translated into Spanish but also how he had been told by his English friends that he was developing a ‘distinct Yorkshire accent’.³⁸ In a more geographical sense, the hilly countryside of the Yorkshire Pennines was reminiscent of the Basque lands, while his house at the bottom of a hill reminded him of Basque ‘*caserios*’ (farmhouses).³⁹ Here, as with dancing previously, it is possible to see how ‘home’ was in the process of being reconstructed to suit the needs of exile for the children, and this meant taking and fashioning a unique, flexible identity which drew from local sources that shaped how Roberto understood his identity in relation to the collective ‘Basque children’. This is underscored by a *CHJ* article by children who were saying ‘Goodbye!’ to their repatriated ‘brothers and sisters’ in June 1939.⁴⁰ ‘We shall always remember our

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ ‘Anon’, ‘Comments to a Press report’, *Amistad*, February/March 1942 No 17, p. 8.

³⁶ *Ibid.* (emphasis mine)

³⁷ Roberto, ‘New surroundings’, *Amistad*, No 7 February 1941.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ ‘Anon’, ‘Goodbye!’, *CHJ*, June 1939, p. 2.

native country Spain, and our home, Cambria House'.⁴¹ These instances emphasise that the children's cultural and political identities were not as well-defined and secure as assumed by the Basque Delegation in London when they stressed the protection of the children's 'cultural identity' while they were in exile. It becomes apparent that living in colonies together provided for some a bond that was considered as close as family, but these feelings of local integration were local and do not seem to have extended toward other colonies with different local contexts. By October 1941, *Amistad* had received contact from '75% of the boys' remaining in Britain, which while seen as a cause for celebration, makes it clear that it did not speak for *all* the children.⁴²

However, that the less political identities of some of the children were not easily translatable to *Amistad* should not disregard the connections that *Amistad*, as a nominally 'national' publication, enabled some children to feel part of a broader community. Maria Aberdare from South Wales wrote to *Amistad* in December 1940 remarking that 'there are no Spanish people that I know of for miles and I cannot speak or see one for months so I would like to thank you all boys and girls for making this enjoyment possible'.⁴³ For niños who regularly had to travel around Britain on account of insufficient BCC funding or were isolated from the London and Carshalton hubs, the permanence of *Amistad* provided a more unified and stable engagement with Spanish cultural identities and provided a link to 'home'. Rather poignant in this respect was the case of Marta Luisa, an 11-year-old girl living in Llanelly, Wales who sent a letter in 'broken Spanish' to the editors which claimed she wanted to begin organising by selling six copies of magazine monthly.⁴⁴ That Marta was unable to fluently write in Spanish underscores the disruption to some of the children's Spanish education while in exile, and this further emphasises the magazine's role in enabling her to reorient and strengthen her connections to Spain.

The ambiguity in identity that was present has implications beyond *Amistad's* attempts at mobilisation. As Edward Packard has recently evaluated, 'the history of the niños vascos continues to be told via commemorative events... [this] often has a celebratory character, but should not remove or oversimplify the difficult and problematic elements of the children's stories and memories and should avoid romanticising what the niños experienced'.⁴⁵ Therefore, *Amistad's* contemporary attempts at mobilisation and articulations of identity offer insights into how the dynamics of exile played out; how differences among children affected their solidarities, how the literary connections between the

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² 'Anon', *Amistad*, October 1941 No 14, p. 13.

⁴³ Maria Aberdare, *Amistad*, December 1940, p. 7.

⁴⁴ 'Anon', *Amistad*, November/December 1941, No 14, p. 13.

⁴⁵ Packard, 'Many histories of the Basque children', p. 18.

children were in some instances deeper than their physical activities suggest, and how these emotional ties to an 'imagined community' were constructed and developed at a later date.⁴⁶ The implications of the 'local' is most apparent through the fact that the niños defined themselves geographically, 'midlands boys', 'London boys'. That colonies also had specific journals, like *Cambria House Journal* in Caerleon, *Ayuda* in Cambridge or *Juventud Vasca* in Margate, further implies that a collective identity as a group of 4,000 children in exile did not exist at the time but was actively in the process of formation throughout the period of exile by *Amistad*.

⁴⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origins and spread of Nationalism*, (London, Verso, 1983).

Conclusion

This dissertation has shown the significance of constructions of essentialist, agency-denying identities in facilitating the humanitarian relief of the ‘Basque’ refugees during the Spanish Civil War. Using the self-published journals of children living in exile, I have highlighted how the children challenged the hegemonic narratives and identities in the process of pushing against racist attitudes towards ‘Spain’ and its assumed distinctiveness to the ‘Basques’. In turn, this has shown that the label of ‘Basque children’ did not capture the sheer complexity of the social and political identities the children possessed which defied easy categorisation. It is significant that ‘Basque’ identity was rarely problematised by the children in the same way as ‘Spanish’ identities, which suggests they were comfortable associating with the assumptions the British had about the Basque region. The children’s identities were in a period of profound fluidity and meant that these identities were more flexible than presumed. As the evidence from *Amistad* has highlighted, even the children underestimated this flexibility as they attempted to organise themselves around a more explicitly republican identity. This struggle is in contrast to the trend that has existed since the death of Franco in 1975, following the “pact of forgetting” in which divisive memories of the Civil War were to be suppressed as Spain transitioned to democracy.¹ As the children perceived themselves to be ‘Los Olvidados’ (the Forgotten) due to the pact, the children have come to consider the ‘Basque children’ label an important part of their collective identity and a source of pride.²

There are certainly limits to this study for *Amistad* was a publication that began after the repatriation of the majority of the refugees. Therefore, it would be simplistic to instil this study with an authoritativeness, for the local processes of identity formation would have been unique to each area, period and child, thus requiring further study where the material permits, particularly during the initial period of 1937-1939. Here an analysis of *CHJ* has been a means of contrasting the ‘local’ and ‘national’ conceptions of the ‘Basque children’ by examining how geography shaped the children’s understandings of themselves in relation to a collective group. The journals have highlighted how solidarities and divisions could be gendered, familial and geographical, rather than simply political, racial or cultural. The example of *Amistad* emphasises that, in 1940, unity, education and friendship were seen as essential to break the divisions that were perceived to be developing between the children and create a more celebratory and inclusive national identity which could sustain the children in exile and make the re-emergence of a Republican Spain a greater possibility. As Manolo would write in March 1942; “I never knew what happiness was until I met the boys and girls that form the

¹ Packard, ‘Many histories of the Basque children’, p. 9.

² Pozo-Gutiérrez and Broomfield, ‘Voices of Basque Evacuee Children of the Spanish Civil War’, p. 180 in Packard, ‘Many histories of the Basque children’, p. 17.

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group of 'Amistad' in London... If you are alone write to 'Amistad' and they will do all they can to make you remember something of our country'.³

³ Manolo, *Amistad*, March 1942, p. 9.

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