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The Nomad Selves: The American Women of The Spanish Civil War and Exile

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

THE NOMAD SELVES: THE AMERICAN WOMEN OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR AND
EXILE

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

HISTORY

by

Maria Labbato

2021

To: Dean John F. Stack, Jr.
Steven J. Green School of International and Public Affairs

This dissertation, written by Maria Labbato, and entitled *The Nomad Selves: The American Women of the Spanish Civil War and Exile*, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgement.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

Immaculada Colomina Limonero

Renée Silverman

Michael Bustamante

Bianca Premo, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 18, 2021

The dissertation of Maria Labbato is approved.

Dean John F. Stack, Jr.
Steven J. Green School of
International and Public Affairs

Andrés G. Gil
Vice President for Research and
Economic Development and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2021

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my parents, Paul and Mary Labbato

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This dissertation is indebted to several institutions and grants that made such travel possible: the Kimberly Green Latin American and Caribbean Center for their award of the Tinker Field Research Grant, the George Rawlinson Travel Grant at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC), and graduate funding by Florida International University's (FIU) University Graduate School (UGS).

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"The Nomad Selves" benefited greatly from the support, work, and encouragement of number of amazing scholars and colleagues. I will forever be grateful for Jürgen Buchenau for his positivity and confidence in me and invitation to take his

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I am further indebted to my family, my parents Paul and Mary Labbato and sister Nicole Shnaidman; I am grateful for their endless help, support, and love over the years. As a first-generation college student trying to navigate the unknown world of graduate school and academia, mentors and advisors so often become family-like figures. My late advisor Dr. Aurora G. Morcillo warmly and enthusiastically inspired and supported me and my research since our first phone conversation. In Proustian fashion, she once asked me to create a living archive of my own, with objects that are imbued with memories and defining experiences from my past and formative to my identity and sense of belonging in the world. This dissertation is now a part of that archive: it is an artifact of her mentorship, creativity and brilliance, poetry, and dedication to her students. “The Nomad Selves” is a testament to how deeply Aurora is imprinted upon me and my approach to scholarship and teaching, into this and future works, and how I desire to live within humanity.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

THE NOMAD SELVES: THE AMERICAN WOMEN OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR
AND EXILE

by

Maria Labbato

Florida International University, 2021

Miami, Florida

Professor Bianca Premo, Major Professor

As witnesses to the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and its ensuing streams of exile, US-born Muriel Rukeyser and Janet Riesenfeld understood the conflict as symptomatic of larger European and antifascist struggle. Weaving biography, intellectual history, and cultural studies this dissertation reveals how the art and activism of these two women in the Spanish Civil War can expose an overlooked element in the antifascist movement and its fate with Cold War anti-Communism. Their experiences—one a writer and poet, and the other a dancer and screenwriter—with the Spanish conflict and exile informed their lives and creative works. They embodied what theorist Rosi Braidotti calls the nomadic subject; that they bore witness to the war and moved across literal and symbolic borders reveals an activism rooted in personal and historical identification with and empathy for the other. North American histories have predominately centered on the masculinized Abraham Lincoln Brigade or male artists and intellectuals. This study adds to growing scholarship on women's experiences and reveals the gendered dimension to that participation within a more Atlantic scope: the Spanish Civil War offered these nomadic

women a political awakening and a lens into the Popular Front's promise for diminishing divisions, at home and abroad, including nationalist boundaries, class or religious differences, and traditional gender roles. Yet the growing anti-Communism and international politics of the Cold War reverted this potential, creating a new paradigm and establishing new borders for these women. Through their nomadism, both women challenged dominant political and gendered Cold War ideologies. Broadening our scope of the study of anti-fascist activism to include women's artistic activities presents an alternative narrative to the binary between the feminine cult of domesticity and the institutionalized masculine heroism of war, politics, activism, or leftist writings of professional academia. Instead, it reveals these women's empathy to be at the core of their art, their politics, and their border-crossing sense of selves as activists.

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PREFACE

Internal nomadism drives this project. The “nomadic subject,” as conceptualized by Rosi Braidotti, feels continual suspension, which can be physical fluctuation, or, rather, a feminist reading recognizes the multiple and fluid identities of this type of nomad who desires to cross space, culture, language, gender, or genre.¹ Some “nomadic subjects” immigrate to other countries, while others simply feel a restlessness with where they are or with imposed fixity. I can relate to the latter. I often questioned where I belonged within academia; however, Aurora G. Morcillo provided the confidence to defy conventions, in discipline and life. My advisor encouraged my desire to straddle academic realms, reject singular categories, and to pursue a less than traditional history. I am grateful to Aurora and all the trailblazers who forged new scholarly paths that allow us to fully appreciate interdisciplinary and transnational works.

Aurora’s own trajectory and embrace of nonconformity inspires this project. Moving from Granada, Spain to pursue doctoral studies in the United States, she started a life and prolific academic and teaching career far away from her home, family, and the Mediterranean—which she loved and missed intensely. Aurora was like the women she, and I, study: outward or inward nomadic beings, resisters and detractors, advocates, and activists. She once told my graduate seminar that as a little girl in Granada she wanted to be a martyr. As I grew to know her, her work, and the legacy of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), I could see that spirit within her. Aurora stood up for issues and people

¹ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

when it was not easy or popular to do so. At the forefront of gender and women's history in Spain, her research and intimate oral histories exposed the everyday resistances to Francoism; she placed human faces and feelings into the history. Likewise, she encouraged her students to envision themselves in their histories. In a seminar on memory and reconciliation, Aurora asked us to create a "living archive" of ourselves: memories, photographs, smells, songs, and objects from our childhoods and the pivotal moments of our lives. She forced us to dig deep within ourselves and the pasts that shape who we are—even the pasts from before we were born but exist within us now. We learned that we could not write professional histories, histories of "others," with empathy and zest until we explored our own histories. *The two did not have to be separate.*

This dissertation would not be what it is without her. She was encouraging and visionary, and it was birthed from our interactions with each other: she, as a Spaniard working and living in the U.S., and I, an American enamored with Spain. Our relationship motivated the inquiry into American and Spanish women who crossed the Atlantic during the Spanish Civil War and ensuing exile while driven by empathy and social justice. The nomadic women I study, who traversed borders and boundaries, resonate with me. As an American woman with working-class Italian immigrant roots, I am similarly the "outsider" with an affectionate gaze toward Spain and a foreign status that shapes my bias and attempt to infiltrate a cultural and national history that is beyond my own. While such perspective has its limitation, as did the reporting by my historical subjects, it is propelled by a desire to relate compassionately to humanity more broadly.

Aurora imbued poetics into her scholarship and teaching. She was poetic, and that was a core of her work and outlook. Muriel Rukeyser (1913-1980), poet, writer, activist, roused by her witness to the Spanish Civil War, wrote:

In this moment when we face horizons and conflicts wider than ever before, we want our resources, the ways of strength. We look again to the human wish, its faiths, the means by which the imagination leads us to surpass ourselves. If there is a feeling that something has been lost, it may be because much has not yet been used, much is still to be found and begun. Everywhere we are told that our human resources are all to be used, that our civilization itself means the uses of everything it has—the inventions, the histories, every scrap of fact. But there is one kind of knowledge—infinately precious, time-resistant more than monuments, here to be passed between the generations in any way it may be: never to be used. And that is poetry. However confused the scene of our life appears, however torn we may be who now do face that scene, it can be faced and we can go on to be whole. If we use the resources we now have, we and the world itself may move in one fullness. Moment to moment, we can grow, if we can bring ourselves to meet the moment with our lives.²

The powerful potential of and urgency for poetry in history and our lives today resonates of Aurora’s vision. Significantly influenced by the Spanish philosopher and exile María Zambrano, I learned from my advisor, mentor, and role model that the “other” is not external, but within oneself. Aurora reinforced the importance of empathy and mercy in our lives and scholarship to prevent the building of divisive walls. She did not shy away from difficult topics and conversations; sometimes it got intense or sad, but she navigated that heaviness with a beauty, humor, compassion, and humanity. *With feeling.*

During the U.S. 2021 presidential inauguration, Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman stirred the nation to unify following four years of increasing divisions, to build bridges with each other, the past, and the future. She urged us to “rise up” and continue

² Muriel Rukeyser, *The Life of Poetry*, foreword by Jane Cooper (Ashfield, Massachusetts: Paris Press, 1949, 1996), 7, 8.

fighting for the country's democratic project of "a more perfect union."³ In the following days, during an interview with *The Daily Show's* Trevor Noah, Gorman discussed the inherent rebelliousness of poetry, and its potential, like the symbolic cleansing power of water, to heal. As she readied herself for a poetry reading to be aired at the Superbowl LV, one of the most exemplary masculinist symbols and traditions in U.S. culture, I am reminded of Muriel Rukeyser's lamentation of society's "fear of poetry:" a fear of the democratizing power of employing feelings and emotions to blur differences in exchange for an approach to history and life armed with "objective" and "rational facts" that have the effect of categorizing and dividing, whether by race, gender, class, religion, or other.

Today's social justice and intersectional activists, particularly within the Black Lives Matter movement, are more successfully than ever fiercely challenging such fears. Gorman affirmed the historical work of the poem: "Poetry stands as a great reminder of the past that we stand on and the future that we stand for."⁴ Empathetic histories and the stories of those who continuously seek to destroy borders locate continuities and correlations across time, space, and culture to enact a more just future. Linking the past, present, and future, the Spanish Civil War, Aurora writes, "represents an eschatological moment in the Spanish *telos*." As 2021 marks the war's 85th commemoration, equally critical to deciphering of the "event" itself is the project of unearthing how it continues to loom in the minds and hearts of Spaniards, as either a "dystopia" for the defeated or

³ Amanda Gorman, "The Hill We Climb," 59th US Presidential Inauguration, Washington, D.C., January 20, 2021.

⁴ Interview with Amanda Gorman, *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* (January 28, 2021).

restoration of the “rightful ideal society” by the victors. Deconstructing the binaries created in its wake centers the links between memory and history, a history of emotions, and the politics of memory. “Remembrance and forgetting” around the war “articulate a *sense of self*, a sense of historical agency at the personal and collective levels.”⁵ This present work adds to a collective memory outside of Spain by linking two foreign women’s personal experience and memoir of the event to a broader narrative of war and antifascist activism.

The international volunteers who journeyed to Spain between 1936 and 1939 recognized that the conflict was not solely a national one but rather a battle that affected all peoples struggling against fascism and inequality. Neither was time or the event isolated: the impact of the conflict did not end in 1939 or in Spain. Many foreigners carried their ideologies and experience in Spain back home where they continued to fight for civil rights and social justice. With the ongoing “culture wars” and “memory battles” in Spain over the Civil War and Francoism, reconciliation is paramount for a society able to live together in peace. Aurora often invoked Paul Ricoeur’s *Oneself as Another* to highlight this imperative: identifying ourselves in the “other” involves an “ethics of caring” and makes possible justice for neighbors and ourselves.⁶ A nomadic history is a step in this direction: Aurora instructed on history and mercy, inspiring my, and others’, scholarship and classrooms:

⁵ Aurora G. Morcillo, ed., *Memory and Cultural History of the Spanish Civil War: Realms of Oblivion* (Leiden: BRILL, 2013), 557.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 558.

*Mystery is not found outside;
it is within each of us,
surrounding and enfolding us.
We live and we move within mystery.
The guide to avoid getting lost in it resides in Mercy.*
María Zambrano, “Para una historia de la Piedad” (1989)⁷

⁷ Translation by Aurora G. Morcillo. “El misterio no se halla fuera; está dentro y en cada uno de nosotros, al par que nos rodea y envuelve. En él vivimos y nos movemos. La guía para no perdernos en él es la piedad.” María Zambrano, “Para una historia de la Piedad,” (1989).

INTRODUCTION

*“Nomadism: Vertiginous progression toward deconstructing identity; molecularisation of the self.”*⁸

As witnesses to the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and its ensuing streams of exile Americans Muriel Rukeyser and Janet Riesenfeld understood the conflict as symptomatic of larger European and antifascist struggle. Weaving biography, intellectual history, and cultural studies this dissertation reveals how the art and activism of these two North American women in the Spanish Civil War can expose an overlooked element in the antifascist movement and its fate with the rise of Cold War anti-Communism. Their experiences—one a writer and poet, and the other a dancer and screenwriter—with the Spanish conflict and exile informed their lives and creative works. Histories of North Americans in the Spanish Civil War have predominantly centered on the masculinized Abraham Lincoln Brigade, as well as on male artists and intellectuals. This dissertation augments the growing works attributed to foreign women in Spain, focusing on the pro-Republican or Loyalist side and how for women on the Left protecting democracy in Spain coalesced with other democratic ideals and struggles for social justice, including workers’ rights, religious freedom, and challenging gender norms.

These women embody theorist Rosi Braidotti's concept of the “nomadic subject,” which is a conceptualization of a dynamic and multiple female subjectivity shaped

⁸ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 16.

fundamentally through literal or symbolic travel.⁹ The subjectivity that I interrogate is women's compassionate responses to the Spanish Civil War that are traditionally unseen contributions to war and politics. Combining feminist theory with women's biography and history of the Spanish Civil War and exile provides a more empathetic historical narrative. It also expands the narrative of the Spanish conflict to an Atlantic one, and women's anti-fascism and exile with hemispheric considerations. Despite being from the U.S., Rukeyser's and Riesenfeld's lives and works traversed the Americas, demonstrating parallels and divergences with other leftist women in the region. Their narratives also reflect interesting ways the U.S. and Mexico worked in tandem and apart in their treatment towards the II Republic during the Spanish Civil War, post-World War II suspicion of communism, and Cold War gender ideologies. Ultimately, these American women's witnessing war and their ability to move across literal and symbolic borders and boundaries sheds light on their personal and historical commitment in their identification with and empathy for the "other."¹⁰ While this form of nomadism is supported by a privilege of being white, middle class, and a U.S. citizen, the "nomadic subject's" blindsight or effacing of difference adds to discussions of postcoloniality. The specific

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ When possible in the text, I use the adjective "US," rather than "American" for individuals and groups originating from the United States, as part of this study's aim is to enter dialogue with the transnational currents of antifascism and exile surrounding the Spanish conflict. The women presently under review are just a fraction of the volunteers and activists in the Western hemisphere involved in Atlantic-wide efforts to halt fascism. A future and expanded hemispheric study will further bridge Americans when researching women's antifascist thinking, writing, and activism, as well as activities surrounding the Spanish Civil War and exile.

examples of Rukeyser and Riesenfeld expose critical paradoxes inherent in the conceptualization.

Braidotti posits that the kind of movement that these women made, personally and geographically, facilitated the deconstruction of identity, the “molecularization of the self.” Indeed, Rukeyser and Riesenfeld had many selves, marking them as symbolic nomads. Applying the theory of nomadic subjectivity to biography reveals how women engaged with and challenged conventional political discussions, both overtly or more indirectly through creative and artistic works. Their empathy is what propelled their life and work choices and shaped their ever-evolving selves during and after the Spanish Civil War. For Braidotti there is not one true authentic self. Instead, subjectivity can evolve out of empathy and in response to changing contexts—in the case of this study, the Spanish Civil War, exile, or Cold War. While Braidotti’s nomad lives with a sense of “what if” something or someone else, viewing endless possibilities rather than fixity, she does not reject the notion of home or community—even if they are temporary.¹¹ A history of nomadism, undertaken by examining the emotional responses of Rukeyser and Riesenfeld to the events, issues, and cultures they experienced, demonstrates how empathetic, historical actors create bonds, not divisions, across nation and culture. However, in many ways the Cold War reverted the potential for breaking down old, traditional forms of oppression and categories of difference that supporters of the Loyalist

¹¹ Ibid., 5.

cause began to bring to life in Spain, and, instead, created a new paradigm and establishing new borders for these women.

Despite the Cold War's heightened international politics—belonging to one or more nations while still acknowledging the importance of national borders—these “nomadic subjects” were unattached to rigid national boundaries or political identities; instead, they were fueled by an empathic perspective. To be sure, the “nomadic subject” is different from the migrant (who has a point of destination). The nomad is in a kind of perpetual motion, not always in physical movement but rather symbolic or metaphorical. Nomads have lacked a history and the present work is part of a movement to reclaim those histories and integrate narratives that are located outside of the national historical archive, but rather are ensconced in memoir, poetry, art, and cultural works. They remain outside of fixed identities that attach to national or historical categorizations.¹² Having empathy creates a state of possibility, a less self-centered outlook on the event. It is not that these nomadic women are not political actors, nor that due to flexible subjectivity there is no biography, nation, or politics; but rather, empathy destroys the notion of opposites.

Through their nomadism, Rukeyser and Riesenfeld broke with the dominant political and gendered Cold War ideologies. Broadening our scope to include women's anti-fascist activities presents an alternative narrative to the binary between the feminine

¹² Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Nomadology: The War Machine* (New York: Semiotexte, 1986). Until the feminism of the 1970s and the rise of studies that focus on race and gender, cultural, and subaltern histories, the history of women, along with other marginalized communities, have been silenced and absent from official narratives. The use of evidence outside of traditional texts unearths these valuable experiences.

cult of domesticity and the institutionalized masculine heroism of war, politics, activism, or leftist writings of professional academia. The nomad observer focuses less on political debates along party lines, calculating statistics, or military strategies, but considers intently the human experience and feelings: reporting on children's responses to violence, describing food lines and hunger, relaying the eeriness of gas masks on display in boutique windows, communicating the hope ordinary people felt for the world's democracies to come to their aid in unity in Spain only to be abandoned. The transnational, artistic activist exists above or beyond national lines, offers a counter politics of emotion to the masculinist national activist political actor. Adding this emotive history captures more fully the cost of division and war.

This dissertation draws on postmodernism in the sense that the “nomadic subject” considers specific historical developments while inserting her own self-reflection. “The Nomad Selves” further positions the works of Rukeyser and Riesenfeld as nomadic feminist critiques of hegemonic structures, culture, politics, since, as Braidotti argues:

Nomadic consciousness is akin to what Foucault called counter-memory; it is a form of resisting assimilation or homologation into dominant ways of representing the self. Feminists—or other critical intellectuals as nomadic subject—are those who have forgotten to forget injustice and symbolic poverty: their memory is activated against the stream; they enact a rebellion of subjugated knowledges.¹³

The nomad's relationship to the earth is “transitory attachment” and cyclical, and her “thinking is a minority position.”¹⁴ Being witness to the Loyalist cause in Spain sparked

¹³ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 25-28.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Rukeyser and Riesenfeld's defense of broad social justice. As will be elaborated on later, postmodernism promotes empathy without imposing universality. For activism, searching for common interests across material differences offers the potential for alliances.

However *affective*, the “nomadic subject's” desire to find relationships and commonalities across identity carries the potential to mute the historical and lived reality of imposed categories of difference and the discrimination that often follows. Such an *affective mythification* benefits from grounding the theory of nomadism in embodied historical lives and events. Historical specificity may minimize the postmodern risk of subsuming the “other” as myth. While acknowledging women as having historically occupied the position of the “other” sex; nomadic women, as demonstrated through the poet (Rukeyser) and the dancer (Riesenfeld), *yearn* to side with the oppressed but in that process, scholars may find limitations of the US-born nomad, which we will see shortly.¹⁵

Applying a feminist and biographical approach to the Spanish Civil War is valuable since scholars argue that the Spanish conflict was perhaps one of the most critical wars of the twentieth century and a prelude to the Second World War.¹⁶ Not only did the conflict divide Spaniards—most significantly between those supporting the military coup, the so-called Nationalists, and the II Republic Loyalists united under the

¹⁵ See bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1984) and “Postmodern blackness,” in *Yearning* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1990).

¹⁶ For discussions that set the Spanish Civil War within broader, international history and politics, see Paul Preston, *Revolution and War in Spain, 1931-1939* (London: Routledge, 1993) and *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), Helen Graham, *The Spanish Civil War: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), and Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

democratically-elected Popular Front—but the war also elicited significant international attention. The democratic governments of the West abstained from involvement with a policy of Non-Intervention, but Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany aided the self-proclaimed Nationalists, eventually under the command of future dictator, Francisco Franco (1939-1975).¹⁷ Prominent historian of Spain Paul Preston, in his work *The Spanish Holocaust*, estimates that the Spanish Civil War saw the execution of 200,000 people, with another 200,000 dying at the front, with unknown civilians perishing in the numerous bombings. After the war's end 20,000 Republicans were executed and many of the 500,000 exiles died in French camps, Nazi camps, and terrible conditions in prisons or work battalions.¹⁸ With the popular, passionate, and violent responses to the conflict across the divide in Spain, Rukeyser and Riesenfeld employed many of their creative works in support of the Loyalist cause. Only two countries (USSR and Mexico) supported the Popular Front. However, international volunteers flocked to Spain to fight for the II Republic (1931-1936) and against fascism. International volunteers, predominately the International Brigades were mostly male in composition, but women joined as well and understood that Spain was the last front to stop fascism, and Adolf Hitler, in Europe.¹⁹

¹⁷ The United States, Britain, France signed the Non-Intervention Pact in 1936 in hopes of diverting another world war. Although Germany and Italy ignored it, having also signed and supported the Nationalists' efforts, the powerful Western democracies refused to become involved in the Spanish Civil War.

¹⁸ Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), xi.

¹⁹ Helen Graham, *The War and Its Shadow: Spain's Civil War in Europe's Long Twentieth Century* (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2012).

Recent attempts to document the exact number of women who participated in the International Brigades is ongoing. However, at least 170 English-speaking women volunteered in medical services with the overwhelming majority working for the Loyalist side.²⁰ Ultimately, with the financial and military aid of Germany and Italy, the Nationalist coalition led by Franco was victorious in April of 1939. An exodus of almost half of a million Spaniards followed the defeat of the II Republic, with as many as 40,000 exiles and the Republican government escaping to Mexico.²¹ The history of the Spanish Civil War is therefore an Atlantic and transnational one—it lays at the center of European events and yet incorporates histories from dozens of countries.²²

This study builds on the recent gender scholarship of the Spanish Civil War by tracing the connections extending beyond the predominately masculinized and national narratives of Non-Intervention, political developments, and war to shift the conflict and how it influenced ordinary people, namely women, into a larger perspective. Although a

²⁰ Jim Fyrth and Sally Alexander (eds), *Women's Voice from the Spanish Civil War* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991), 29, fn. 1. See also Angela Jackson, *British Women and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Routledge, 2014) and "Blood and Guts: Nursing with the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, 1936–39" in *One Hundred Years of Wartime Nursing Practices, 1854–1953*, edited by Brooks Jane and Hallett Christine E., 165-88 (Manchester University Press, 2015). Accessed January 28, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt18mvm3p.15>.

²¹ The exiles in Mexico contained a high percent of left-leaning intellectuals, officials, and artists, which Mexican President Lazaro Cárdenas welcomed with citizenship and financial aid. Patricia Fagen, *Exiles and Citizens: Spanish Republicans in Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974).

²² The volunteers from the International Brigades came from dozens of different countries; 40,000 volunteers from 53 countries joined Spanish forces on the side of the Popular Front. Of these, 2,800 were Americans in Abraham Lincoln Brigades, first departing for Spain on Dec 26, 1936. See Alvah Bessie and Albert Prago, eds, *Our Fight: Writings by Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Spain 1936-1939* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987). See also Graham, *War and its Shadow*, Peter N. Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), and Remi Skoutelsky, *Novedad en el frente: Las brigadas internacionales en la guerra civil* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 2006).

scholar of the Communist International (Comintern) critiques the myth of a righteous and uniform battle to defend democracy against fascism by the International Brigades in Spain, the Spanish Civil War attracted the attention from the working classes, volunteer fighters with diverse leftist political affiliations, antifascists, writers, intellectuals, artists, photographers, and photojournalists, as it was a war that produced more passionate responses than rational ones.²³ The definition of antifascism used here encompasses a shared goal of resisting forms of fascist regimes at the national level (i.e. Italy, Germany, and Spain) and carrying that position to combat threats to the rights of individuals or groups within democratic systems that are premised on exclusionary and reactionary notions of national belonging.²⁴ To further understand the fervent support for the II Republic, reviving lesser known female works (produced before the widely celebrated *For Whom the Bell Tolls* by Ernest Hemingway or George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*), provides a more comprehensive reading of the war and nuances how the

²³ Dan R. Richardson, *Comintern Army: The International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War* (University Press of Kentucky, 1982), 1, 2. Accessed July 15, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt130jjdh.3. Richardson argues the struggle was much more complicated than a clear-cut divide of democracy against fascism. Sebastiaan Faber, *Anglo-American Hispanists* pays particular attention to professional academics with involvement in Spain, as a driving force for the field was hispanophilia. Peter Carroll's *The Odyssey* presents a volunteer culture in the Abraham Lincoln Brigades that was not duped by the Comintern, but that the struggle in Spain was yet the next battle to be fought against fascism and for working class issues. Involvement in the Spanish Civil War should be understood "within the context of lifetime commitments," x. Carroll further follows the veterans' social and political awareness from engagement in World War II to activism against American wars in Niangua, Cuba, and Vietnam. For a discussion of the attraction of the Spanish Civil War and the more than 80 African Americans that joined the Abraham Lincoln Brigades, see *Invisible Heroes: African-Americans in the Spanish Civil War*, directed by Alfonso Domingo and Jordi Torrent (Argonauta Productions, 2014).

²⁴ For explication of Franco Spain as a fascist regime beyond its military organization, see Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain, 1923-1977* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000); I use summaries of antifascist activism and antifascism from Ariel Mae Lambe, *No Barrier Can Contain It: Cuban Antifascism and the Spanish Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 2, 15, 17; See also Hugo García, Mercedes Yusta, Xavier Tabet, and Cristina Clímaco, eds., *Rethinking Antifascism: History, Memory and Politics, 1922 to the Present* (New York: Berghahn, 2016); Michael Seidman, *Transatlantic Antifascisms: From the Spanish Civil War to the end of World War II* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

intellectual Left mythologized Spain and the Spanish Civil War while also envisioning the experience as part of a larger and longer commitment to democratic ideals and justice beyond or outside of so-called radical, left-wing political parties.

Indeed, Spanish and foreign women were vocal and active players during the conflict in organizing and petitioning for international aid, and female Republican supporters joined men in exile as family members or in their own need to escape Europe. The historiography of the Spanish Civil War is immense, with a growing body of works dedicated to the gendered dynamics of war. Yet, the experiences and stories of prominent female figures during the conflict are just recently being unearthed, with so many still buried.²⁵ In the 1990s Mary Nash and Shirley Mangini added to the understandings of gender and war while literary criticism has effectively analyzed women's creative productions against the historical context.²⁶ Nash provides a thorough analysis of gender relations in Spain before and during the Spanish Civil War as well as documenting Spanish women's various roles, from relief work, nursing, and welfare to trade union membership, defense, and active combat as *milicianas*. She and various other scholars of modern Spain have provided a gender framework for understanding the conflict, how both sides employed gender tropes in their propaganda campaigns, and in the enactment

²⁵ Shirley Gonzalez Mangini, *Memories of Resistance: Women's Voices from the Spanish Civil War* (Yale University Press, 1995); Aurora G. Morcillo, ed, *Memory and Cultural History of the Spanish Civil War* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

²⁶ Mary Nash, *Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War* (Denver: Arden Press, 1995); Mangini, *Memories of Resistance*.

of sexual violence or as discursive subjects of the brutal and “unmanly” acts by the enemy.²⁷

While studies on Spanish women and gender and the Civil War have grown, foreign women’s histories in Spain remain sparse. Historian Paul Preston expands the conceptualization around women’s relationship with the Spanish Civil War by combining biographies of key participants from both Spain and England, narrating and contrasting pro-Republican support with pro-Nationalist sympathies.²⁸ Preston recounts the lives of four women, two British and two Spanish, who found themselves on both sides of the Republican-Nationalist divide in Spain, adding a more complex perspective of women’s alliances and interests on the different political sides. The present study takes inspiration from Preston’s method, though it departs in its focus on women *from* the United States and adds a feminist analysis to women’s published works on Spain and in exile. A feminist theoretical framework grounded in historical example further moves the literature away from institutional studies and political histories of the Spanish Civil War and exile in Mexico.

After the politically progressive 1910 Revolution, Mexico City played a critical role in the Cold War as it attracted politicians, intellectuals, and artists on the Left from

²⁷ See Nerea Aresti, Miren Llona, Deirdre Finnerty, Sofía Rodríguez López, M. Cinta Ramblado Minero, Victoria L. Enders, Pilar Domínguez Prats, in Aurora G. Morcillo, ed., *Memory and Cultural History of the Spanish Civil War: Realms of Oblivion* (History of Warfare, Leiden: Brill, 2013). As Nash and these various authors explain, some women even held high political leadership, such as Federica Montseny, who served as Minister of Health for the II Republic, and on the nationalist side, headed the fascist Women’s Section, such as Pilar Primo de Rivera. See Nash, *Defying Male Civilization*.

²⁸ Paul Preston, *Doves of War: Four Women of Spain* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002).

across the globe. Historian Patrick Iber summarizes: “At the intersection of world and regional history, Mexico City became a key node in the global debate. The combination of the Mexican Revolution, the experiences of the European Popular Front of the 1930s, and the Spanish Civil War provided the foundational experiences that produced the conditions of the Cultural Cold War.”²⁹ Famous intellectuals, exiles, expatriates, and nationals—including Diego Rivera, Leon Trotsky, and Ramón Mercader, Trotsky’s assassin—debated “the identification of anti-Communism with artistic independence from state and party” in Mexico City.³⁰ An analysis of the experiences and works of Rukeyser and Riesenfeld with their Atlantic-wide antifascist positions expands the regional scope and nuances our understanding of the Cold War intellectual Left.

A nomadic history offers additional insight into the critique that the Popular Front culture of the 1930s was intimately bound up to Stalinist and anti-Stalinist divides. Michael Denning strongly demonstrates that artists and intellectuals on the Left did not have to be official members of the Communist Party in the production of Popular Front culture in the U.S.; rather, a diversity of actors, many publicly supporting Republican Spain, lay on a spectrum of leftist politics that espoused worker’s rights.³¹ Rukeyser’s use of protest poetry and direct action and Riesenfeld’s public fundraising through dance and later resistance to gender codes in her and her husband’s screenplays created anti-fascist

²⁹ Patrick Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 13.

³⁰ Iber., 14.

³¹ Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (The Haymarket Series, New York: Verso, 1996), 24, 25.

political modes that were further alternatives to masculinized party politics. The nomad, however, has no state or party.

This dissertation argues for the informal politics of the nomadic poet and dancer, which problematize conventional historical periodization. Artist-activists, like with visual art, can produce debates through their memoir, poetry, and screenwriting, occupying critical spaces in cultural and political production.³² Narrowing in on Spain exposes tensions within Denning's argument that there was a period in the 1930s and 1940s where the Popular Front had cultural hegemony for the first time. Muriel Rukeyser's compromised position in the early 1940s for having supported the II Republic and other causes, with the FBI opening a file on the poet in 1943, illuminates the Cold War obstacles earlier than 1945 for artists under surveillance, censored, or blacklisted due to anti-communism in the United States. Therefore, this dissertation takes the position that the historical and political Cold War periodization is, in part, contrived as we see Popular Front legacies pushed forward of the defeat of the II Republic in 1939 while Cold War ideologies and tensions existed earlier than 1945. Therefore, acknowledging a "Pre-Cold War" more appropriately identifies and analyzes the transitional period from the first "red scare" in the 1920s to the institutionalization of the Cold War in 1945. A nomadic history exposes the reification of masculinized ontologies of politics and history during the 1930s and early 1940s alongside the Popular Front culture and intersecting literary and political movements.

³² Helena Lewis, *The Politics of Surrealism* (New York: Paragon House, 1988). Lewis argues that art became political in the early twentieth century from Dadaism and World War I to the revolutionary position of the European Surrealist movement starting in the 1920s.

This project's contribution additionally resides in its Atlantic perspective in the examination of the conflict and the ensuing Cold War. Both women broke with the gendered, Cold War ideologies that predominated in both US. society and the Mexican exile community. They presented alternative narratives to the binary between the feminine cult of domesticity and the institutionalized masculine heroism of war, politics, activism, or leftist writings of professionalized academia. An Atlantic approach to the Spanish Civil War and Cold War-era exile requires a hemispheric treatment of responses by the U.S. and Mexico. At times, the two countries worked together, for example in the Second World War. Notably, their approaches differed in other contexts; differences that illuminate the activities and experiences of Rukeyser, Riesenfeld, and the supporters of the Popular Front in Spain. The critical role of Mexico adds to a more "American" hemispheric history.³³ Indeed, throughout the Americas, the Cold War's polarized rigidity ensured that many creative women on the Left engaged in nontraditional political expressions.

With the blending of the genres of memoir, poetry, novel, and reporting by blurring the space between art and politics, and by existing in a constant state of geographical and personal flux in place of commitment to parties and ideologies, the "nomadic subject" challenges masculinist national constructions of politics and activism. Rukeyser and Riesenfeld traveled often. However, even when they were not in physical

³³ To further explore the role of the Mexican government in supporting the II Republic during and after the Spanish Civil War, including resisting official recognition of Franco Spain, as well as foreign volunteers in Spain from across Latin America, see Gerold Gino Bauman, *Los voluntarios latinoamericanos en la Guerra Civil Española* (Cuenca: Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2009), 22, 120.

motion, the narration of their lives requires broader contexts outside the United States. Due to the transnational scope of the Spanish Civil War, exile, and the nomadic quality of these women's lives, this dissertation engages with the histories and sources produced in the U.S., Spain, and Mexico. The literature of Spanish exiles in Mexico is abundant, showcasing a plethora of intellectual and artistic work produced by the community. The scholarship often focuses on the political relationship between the Spanish government and the exiles in refuge, and spotlights intellectuals' interactions with the Mexican government and who worked within the nation's literary and academic institutions, but without significant female voices or feminist perspectives.³⁴

Recently, scholars have inserted women back into the Spanish Civil War exile history. Spanish historian Pilar Domínguez Prats has been particularly prolific about Spanish women in Mexico, combining studies of the demographics on ordinary women, as well as narrating the histories of prominent figures, and arguing Spanish women had

³⁴ The initial wave of work on the exile community presented detailed professional and institutional histories. Clara E. Lida's treatment of the newer wave of liberal minded Spanish exiles examined intellectual exiles' academic and professional activities at the *Casa de España*—later named *El Colegio de México*. While her detailed studies follow the activities and achievements of intellectuals who participated in Mexican academic life or political activities focused on anti-fascism, women's general exclusion from these spaces resulted in their omission from the official histories, see Clara E. Lida, José Antonio Matesanz, Beatriz Morán Gortari, *La Casa de España en México*, México, D.F.: Colegio de México, 1988; Clara E. Lida, José Antonio Matesanz, *El Colegio de México: una hazana cultura, 1940-1962*, México: D.F.: Colegio de México, 1990. The historiography on the Spanish exile community has grown however, for political and institutional accounts, see Fagen, *Exiles and Citizens*; Thomas Powell, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981); Lois Elwyn Smith, *Mexico and the Spanish Republicans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955). Pilar Domínguez Prats' revises the history by publishing works on female exiles in Mexico. Spanish women before and during the Civil War voiced a high degree of gender equality, yet Prats' broad research on female Spanish exiles in Mexico suggests that there was a regression of the social revolution among the Spaniards in exile and that traditional gender roles continued in Mexico. See Pilar Domínguez Prats, *Voces del exilio: Mujeres españolas en México, 1939-1950* (Madrid, 1994) and "Silvia Mistral, Constanza de la Mora y Dolores Martí: Relatos y memorias del exilio de 1939," *Revista de Indias*, vol. LXXII, num. 256 (2012): 799-824.

little affiliation to Mexican politics.³⁵ “The Nomad Selves” elaborates on the ways women’s experiences crossed the Atlantic, as well as traversing cultural, political, and social divides in the context of the Civil War and subsequent exile, seeking to expand how we envision their activities—writing, activism, art, *and art as activism*—in exile in Mexico or when returning home to the US from Spain after the war. Their biographies demonstrate how women engaged with and challenged conventional political discussions, creating counter-politics through creative and artistic works. Framing these women's narratives within a nomadic subjectivity expands our perceptions of activism and captures the Spanish Civil War within the transnational setting in which they operated, permitting us to understand the history of the Spanish Civil War and the US Left in new ways.

By focusing on these biographies around and after the war in Spain, I will trace a trajectory of women’s activism and nomadic subjectivity, which is informed by positions of otherness, through much of the Cold War. The nomad’s particular politics of empathy connects the conflict surrounding Spain and antifascist commitment in gendered (and Jewish—a significant number of foreigners, and especially women, attracted to the Loyalist cause were Jewish) associations. As just two examples, after first organizing clothing-drives to aid Spain, the American Evelyn Hutchins felt the confidence to take more direct action and volunteered as an ambulance with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, while Hungarian-Jewish Kati Horna and German-Jewish Gerda Taro rushed to the

³⁵ Pilar Domínguez Prats, *Voces del exilio: Mujeres españolas en México, 1939-1950* (Madrid, 1994), and “Silvia Mistral, Constanza de la Mora y Dolores Martí: Relatos y memorias del exilio de 1939,” *Revista de Indias*, vol. LXXII, num. 256 (2012): 799-824.

Spanish fronts to document the war and capture the daily tribulations as one of the first war photojournalists.³⁶ These histories, in many ways similar to the stories of Rukeyser and Riesenfeld explored here, are recently gaining attention by academics.³⁷ War explored from the perspective of women and the history of emotions reveals the intimate contours of political and social consciousness, making explicit how the personal is political and the links between “nomadism” (fluidity or adaptation) and feminism. Most significantly, US intellectual women's anti-fascists roles have been largely underrepresented in the histories of international volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. The abundance of analytical work on literature, film, and art joins the larger narrative of foreign participation in the Civil War as male dominated.

Just as Preston invokes the characterization of “humane observer” for British correspondent to Spain, Henry Buckley, this dissertation adds women’s perspectives to expand this insight of emotion and empathy in scholarship.³⁸ Not formally employed as journalists during the Spanish Civil War, these women from the U.S. acted as travelers and amateur professionals, dedicating their work, whether lifelong or temporary, to Spanish affairs. Rukeyser and Riesenfeld provide non-professional or academic

³⁶ *Into the Fire*, directed by Julia Newman (2002), re-released by First Run Features, 2007, 2020.

³⁷ See Michel Otayek, Michel, “Testimony of an Instant: The Spanish Anarchist Revolution Through the Lens of Kati Horna (1936-1939)” (M.A. Hunter College, Dept. of Art, 2011); Manuel García, *Memorias de posguerra: diálogos con la cultura del exilio (1939-1975)* (Valencia: Publicaciones de la Universitat de València, 2014) <http://www.digitaliapublishing.com/a/35360/>; Marc Aronson and Marina Tamar Budhos, *Eyes of the World: Robert Capa, Gerda Taro, and the Invention of Modern Photojournalism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2017).

³⁸ Henry Buckley, *The Life and Death of the Spanish Republic: A Witness to the Spanish Civil War* (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013).

observations and writings about the war in Spain while asserting their roles, with other foreign and Spanish women, as historical agents in the conflict.

Sebastian Faber analyzed the impact of politics and ethics and the Spanish Civil War on US and British professionals who dedicated their lives and work to understanding Spanish culture and/or language, known as *Hispanists*. The war arrived at a key moment of the discipline's development and allowed for academics and amateur *hispanophiles* to gaze towards Spain. "Hispanists," he writes, "are generally driven not only by a commitment to disciplinary rigor (the scholarly search for truth), but also by an affective bond with Spain (*Hispanophilia*) and by political or ethical concerns."³⁹ While in this process these English-speakers categorized Spain as "other," Faber sets them apart from the dominant hegemonic attitudes employed by many Westerners when writing about the "East" as described by postcolonial scholar Edward Said. In Spain, affection and professional concerns "served to bring out important tensions among these driving factors."⁴⁰ Non-professionals, such as Rukeyser and Riesenfeld, and their location as women outside of academia or institutions depart from Faber's *hispanophiles* in critical ways. For the "nomadic subjects," such a tension did not exist, because their art, documentation, and empathetic, affective bonds merged and mutually supported one another. Further, we will see how their emotional accounts captured ordinary aspects of the conflict and lessened bias political perspectives.

³⁹ Sebastian Faber, *Anglo-American Hispanists and the Spanish Civil War: Hispanophilia, Commitment, and Discipline* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), vi.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, vi.

To be sure, the privilege of moving and uprootedness enjoyed by Rukeyser and Riesenfeld must be analyzed alongside the usefulness of the bridges “nomadic” women build. One must grapple with empathy driving the desire to *become* another or the romanticized, cultural appropriation or adoption of Hispanic traditions like Riesenfeld’s use of flamenco. While not completely unlike the U.S. form of blackface, the potential counterhegemonic politics of art and emotion forms part of a broader primitivist and modernist movement in Europe and U.S. in the early twentieth century that sought out perceived authenticity or individualized emotional forms of expression to rebel against the authority of traditional European establishment and morality. Empathy, then, could act as a solvent for non-Anglo-English cultures or “others.” In Hobsbawmian fashion, culture and tradition continuously evolve with the acknowledgement that communities do not exist in isolation.⁴¹ A nomad’s empathetic quest for *knowing* and *becoming* what she perceives as an *authentic* “other” exposes the constant exchange between the “self” and “other,” revealing, in fact, *in*-authenticity.

Within Spain itself there was growing popularity among the elite class and Madrid residents in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century of flamenco and “gitano” culture.⁴² Many intellectuals on the Spanish Left sought to elevate such aspects of Andalusian society to a broader national identity, a process supported by figures like Federico García Lorca and the Concurso de Cante Jondo in his birthplace of

⁴¹ Eric Hobsbawm, “Language, Culture, and National Identity” *Social Research*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (Winter 1996), pp. 1065-1080.

⁴² Timothy Mitchell, “Flamenco Deep Song” in *Flamenco’s Golden Age* (Yale University Press, 1994), 155.

Granada in 1922.⁴³ Transnationally, the arts and literature for foreign intellectuals could “embod[y] the artistic, cultural, and political posterity of the Republican cause.”⁴⁴ U.S. intellectuals’ uses of Hispanic culture, language, and the war in Spain further provide insight into the “self.”

Indeed, non-professional women provided more emotional documentation of war with a window into their own subjectivities. The gaze of this dissertation is toward Jewish American women’s activities and ways of situating the Spanish Civil War within their conceptualization of anti-fascism and defense of democracy. Many US and British women who were distanced from the front still contributed towards outsiders’ perceptions—including the perpetuation of overly simplified versions of the Nationalist and Republican conflict and Western writers’ and artists’ appropriation of the Spanish conflict to project fears of the widening European ideological divide. With Hitler’s and Mussolini’s regimes waging violence and enacting repression through discourses of an essential national identity, Americans and Europeans taking a passionate stance on Spain saw it as the battleground to beat back fascism and to prevent European civil war. Rukeyser and Riesenfeld experienced the social changes for women on the Left that sought and found greater autonomy through support of Republican Spain and broader Popular Front politics. Even if they did not directly campaign on a feminist agenda, their

⁴³ Meira K. Goldberg, Michelle Heffner Hayes, eds., *Flamenco on the Global Stage: Historical, Critical, and Theoretical Perspectives* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2015).

⁴⁴ Evelyn Scaramella, “Translating the Spanish Civil War: Langston Hughes’s Transnational Poetics” *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (Summer 2014), p 187.

lives often reflected the social changes ushered in following women's suffrage and the rise of the new, 'modern woman' of the 1920s and 1930s.

While this study does not attempt to interrogate the histories and experiences of colonized and oppressed communities, postcolonial thought and postmodern studies can be marshalled when analyzing women's nomadic historical contributions. When thinking through the meanings of a subject's position in society and the creation of knowledge, Braidotti employs Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theory of *nomadology* to destabilize the dominant concepts of each. Deleuze and Guattari employ metaphysics to argue for continuity over discontinuity in the nomad's constant state of movement, not just physically but in the quest for learning and existing beyond categories; however, in their theory, univocity does not imply sameness. Braidotti reads their philosophy as an answer to post-structural, romanticized temptations to simply shift power to a historically marginalized group and replacing it as a new, hegemonic center. Rather, *nomadology* dissolves the notion of one "center" and negates "authentic identities of *any* kind."⁴⁵ For these thinkers, stability and change exist together and "nomad science" seeks out the continuous, rounded edges—rather than end "points"—of a thing or idea.⁴⁶ The "nomadic subject" occupies this state of being between points, suspension, and blurring the superficial lines between the "self" and the "other" or between geopolitical borders.

⁴⁵ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 5.

⁴⁶ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*; Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 374-75; Brent Adkins, "Introduction: A Perceptual Semiotics," in *Deleuze and Guattari's A Thousand Plateaus: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015) 6-11.

As a perpetual “other,” women’s subjectivity, in part, naturally fits into this space of limbo. Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha provides a path towards the deeper significance of thinking *beyond something* and the ability to tell transnational histories.⁴⁷ He reminds us of the critical importance “to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences.”⁴⁸ The nomad is neither exile nor migrant: she defies categorization yet enjoys privileges through the freedom for travel and middle-class security to defy professional boundaries and genre that the latter two do not.⁴⁹ Indeed, postmodernism rejects inflexible categories of identity, but this emphasis on fluidity, connection, and global community need not ignore the lived politics of exclusion and the real ways communities develop strategies for survival or “strategic essentialism.”⁵⁰ In the present study it was Rukeyser and Riesenfeld who essentialized the fight in Spain to speak to a US audience or challenge the mythologies of equality in the U.S.

Despite their privilege, Rukeyser and Riesenfeld’s “empathetic proximity” (the nomad’s fluidity of identity should not be mistaken for appropriation or imitation) helps

⁴⁷ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994) and *Nation and Narration* (Routledge, 1990).

⁴⁸ Ibid., 1. A foundational feminist text of the twentieth century that examines the age old “woman question” and critique of ‘woman’ as the original “other” is Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949).

⁴⁹ Braidotti differentiates the migrant from the exile, as the former is motivated by economic necessity, and therefore tied to class structures and usually has a point or destination in mind. The exile flees for political reasons, and is often, though not always, of either wealthier economic standing or from the intellectual class.

⁵⁰ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987), “Can the Sub-Altern Speak?” (1988), *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (1990); Spivak’s “strategic essentialism” is a form of politicized, shared identity by a minority group, it has been adapted by feminist, queer theorists, postcolonial theorists, and activists.

to provide a more human history.⁵¹ Bhabha's postcolonialism identifies the liminal spaces, the bridges, and the ways in which the "self" and the "other" mutually constitute each other, helping break down barriers between time and space contributing to a more empathetic present. He then emphasizes fluidity of identity: "not making a claim to any specific or essential way of being."⁵² Their position as women, empathetic nomads, and non-professional *hispanists* led them to document in their art, even if in a limited way, the suffering of the "othered" (Spanish Republicans, workers, or racially or religiously oppressed). Through creative works that crossed cultural boundaries, such as poetry, dance, and film, these women challenged their own, and at times others', static, "authentic" identities. Ultimately, empathy is what I am after; still, their empathy paradoxically acted in ways to affectionately mythologize authentic cultures abroad.

The intersections of gender and religion place the poet and dancer in a particular state of suspension enabling empathy for broad causes. They were Jewish women who sought to empathize with Europe's "other": they defended a cause that Western democracies obstructed, witnessed fascism, anti-Semitism, lived during the Holocaust, and challenged Cold War attacks on "subversives" and celebrations of domesticity.

⁵¹ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 5, 22-23.

⁵² Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2, 3. Bhabha argues that if postmodernism's primary concern is the fragmentation of post-enlightenment, grand narratives of rationalism, it is still a limited intellectual endeavor. The significance is located in the notion that "the wider significance of the postmodern condition lies in the awareness that the epistemological 'limits' of those ethnocentric ideas are also the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident, histories and voices - women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities." As we experience the "demography of the new internationalism," it is critical to understand the histories of postcolonial migration, political and cultural diaspora, and community displacement—especially exiles.

Aurora Morcillo uses Bhabha in her “gendered reading of the orientalizing of Spain.”⁵³ She explains that during the Francoist Cold War period this process was “reinvented” with women serving as active agents of change during the regime, particularly in the shift from autarky to consumerism in the 1950s, as the period itself was one of transition. This economic and cultural change created space for “dissent” from the “National Catholic discourse” of women’s “virgin/whore binomial” following the Spanish Civil War. The consumer and tourist industries relied on women’s increased work and economic power that eventually led to political influence.⁵⁴ This Cold War “in-between” space resembled US culture at the same time: as cultural ideals exposed conformity along traditional gender lines, women saw increased labor and consumer opportunities. This complex space within gender ideologies crossed with anti-communist rhetoric and policy that as Jewish, left-leaning women, Rukeyser and Riesenfeld occupied a liminal space in their society.

This dissertation begins to explore the question of Jewish political identity through Rukeyser and Riesenfeld, as it is not inconsequential that many of the antifascists coming to the aid of the II Republic were Jewish. Generally, Jewish history is a history of diaspora.⁵⁵ While it bears the burden of exile, persecution, and often fragmented or

⁵³ Aurora G. Morcillo, “The Orient Within: Women “in-between” under Francoism,” in Fatima Sadiqi, Moha Ennaji, eds. *Women in the Middle East and North Africa: Agents of Change* (London: Routledge, 2010), 259. There was a concerted effort on the part of Spain to promote a discourse of “pro-Arab Catholic Hispanic nationalism” that was premised on colonial rhetoric of Spain as a benevolent “older brother” imparting wisdom on North Africa, also through diplomacy and Muslim studies programs. Spain then served as a bridge between Europe and the Islamic world, p. 264.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 267, 268.

⁵⁵ See Elisheva Carlebach, *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany, 1500–1750* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); David Graizbord, *Souls in Dispute: Converso Identities in Iberia and the Jewish Diaspora, 1580–1700* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Jonathan I. Israel,

cryptic identities, especially in the larger Spanish-speaking world, it also carries the prospect of transcending borders. Significantly, 38 percent of U.S. volunteers in the Spanish Civil War were Jewish, with 15 percent of the total of the International Brigades were Jews from various countries.⁵⁶ This might be because of the inherently transnational experience of Jews and the destabilization of Jewish nationalist identities in Europe, especially after the rise of Nazism in Germany. The nomad's subjectivity lies above the national, with the signs and evidence of empathy offering paths toward the bridged spaces and internationalism; therefore, this dissertation seeks a more transnational and Atlantic history of the effects of the Spanish Civil War. By writing Jewish women's stories, we can view the Spanish Civil War within a history of emotions and that defied traditional borders—unhinging it from single national contexts.

“The Nomad Selves” takes the lead from poststructuralist biography to highlight how literary and film analysis with personal narratives can illuminate broader histories in unique and fruitful ways.⁵⁷ For example, historian of Argentina Daniel James paints a

Diasporas within a Diaspora: Jews, Crypto-Jews and the World Maritime Empires, 1540–1740 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2004); Richard L. Kagan, and Philip D. Morgan, eds. *Atlantic Diasporas: Jews, Conversos, and Crypto Jews in the Age of Mercantilism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); David B. Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010). Joshua Teplitsky explains that this last text argued that “a defining feature of Jewish life during the Early Modern period was the existence of “mingled identities,” cultural profiles that do not neatly fit a single community or society but instead straddle, traverse, transgress, or blur the boundaries between them.” Joshua Teplitsky, *Jews*, Oxford Bibliographies, (July 4, 2015)

⁵⁶ Zaagsma Gerben, *Jewish Volunteers: The International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); Sugarman Martin, Against Fascism—Jews who served in The International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, p. 2, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1500046458>, accessed July 19, 2020; Raanan Rein, “Tikkun Olam and Transnational Solidarity: Jewish Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War,” *Contemporary Judaism and Politics*, pp. 207-230. Accessed January 26, 2020 via Academia.edu.

⁵⁷ Daniel James, *Doña María's Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

picture of the city Berissenses, which had undergone an economic shift from beef salting to factory-driven meat packing, through the testimony of Peronist union activist, María Roldan. James demonstrates how life histories can illuminate the complexities of the subject's historical and political moment. Critiquing the notion that institutions and structures singularly drive history, James centers activists' memories to show bottom-up pressure for change. Attention to women's voices and thoughts reveal them as key actors in consciousness-raising, political organizing, and community and identity building. In this vein, this dissertation hopes to reveal some of women's attempts to change or impact politics and society (and the *limitations* on that impact). A history solely concerned with official politics, parties, and institutions misses the alternative, uncategorized, ways ordinary individuals tried to shape historical outcomes through depoliticized methods during highly politicized times. James, along with oral historians and historians of emotion, argues that every source, even the most "objective" data, is only a partial window into the past. Like oral history and memoir, artistic expression can provide evidence of alternative forms of political expression and activism.⁵⁸

These nomadic women and the transnational potential of the Civil War further permit a parallel analysis with European women, namely Margarita Nelken (1894-1968), a German and French Jewish writer, politician, activist, and exile born in Spain, and

⁵⁸ Tilly and Tarrow's "contentious politics" help illuminate the nomadic subject as a contentious political actor, who are those making claims of unified belonging to an issue: "we women," "we workers," their political identities. By historicizing women's public and published creative, literary, and activist works, we can trace their multi-issue awareness across time and with various institutions. Broadening the definition of social movement, beyond disruptive tactics, as "sustain campaign of claim making, using repeated performances that advertise the claim, based on organizations, networks, traditions, and solidarities" shows patterns in women's social and political work.

Jeanne Rucar Buñuel (1908-1994), a Frenchwoman married to Spanish Surrealist and exile Luis Buñuel. The comparison with women dislocated in Mexico from the Spanish Civil War demonstrates how the “nomadic subject” becomes either the activist or survivalist as a lens into the history of exile and gender. While Nelken and Rukeyser, “the activist,” engaged in political protest either directly or through creative works, Riesenfeld, “the survivalist,” represents the ways in which many exiled women in Mexico sought to make new lives and focused on professional and economic security. Rucar returned to more domestic roles in the postwar era in exile in Mexico, however, some women defied the dominant macho culture of the exile community and forged professional careers in Mexico. Due to these counterpoints and the nomad’s dynamism and mobility, this dissertation is not solely a US history, nor is it only Spanish nor Mexican history. Rather, it puts these nationalist historiographies into conversation with feminist theory and philosophy and cultural and intellectual history, towards the goal of recognizing global citizenship.

The methodology of this work follows the nomadism of its subjects, reconciling the tension between archive and memoir. While research was carried out in archives in three countries, much of this history is located within Rukeyser’s and Risenfeld’s personal memories and creative works. Spain’s Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica in Salamanca houses the Spanish Civil War archive and offered documents pertaining to the International Red Cross and the International Brigades. Mexico’s Cineteca Nacional and the Filmoteca Centro de Documentación at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) provided filmographies related to Janet Riesenfeld, with the Ateño de Español de México and Archivo General de la Nación

contributing contextual development for Spanish Civil War exiles in Mexico City. Research within the U.S. included heavy consultation with the Muriel Rukeyser Papers in the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. The interdisciplinary nature of “The Nomad Selves” results from these women and artists existing largely outside of “objective” and masculinist archives and following them to where they went in their lives and works. The sources and methodology mirror the nomadic resistance to settling into a single place or set of official documents while creating space for a more affective and subjective history—precisely how these *unarchived* “nomadic subjects” experienced the Spanish Civil War and Cold War exile.

For the US-born women under analysis in this dissertation, presence in Spain during the Spanish Civil War enabled personal development, growth, and heightened political consciousness. Janet Riesenfeld crossed into Spain under false pretense once the borders closed to unauthorized foreigners in her quest for love and flamenco. Early in life, Muriel Rukeyser protested social and political injustice through her writing, a quality intensifying after her personal awakening in Spain, where she was sent to report on the 1936 People’s Olympiad in Barcelona. In Chapter One, we find Rukeyser briefly caught up in a workers’ revolution in Catalonia when the protest games were canceled due to the military coup. Her life was one of the polyglot nomad, in command of several languages and genres and engaged in anti-fascist and anti-authoritarian protest. She documented the influence and importance of Spain through poetry, essays, and her autobiographical novel *Savage Coast*. Chapter Two continues to review the Spanish Civil War through Riesenfeld’s experience in Madrid, utilizing her published memoir, *Dancer in Madrid*, and archival material on the Spanish Civil War, the benefit concerts held in support of the

II Republic, reports and reflections by US nurses, aid societies records, and fundraising for Spain in the United States. It reveals how her time in the Spanish Civil War altered her political consciousness, as she danced in benefit concerts in Madrid and published a memoir upon her return home to call US citizens to action. An analysis of flamenco as dance, art, language, and Riesenfeld's experience demonstrates Braidotti's identification of the body, and its actual and metaphorical movement as a kind of cartography and map, as a nomadic form of knowledge and activism. Through dance, Riesenfeld formed a keen awareness of the sufferings and passions, the complexities and diverging perspectives of the Spanish, and European, people, and she was able to perceive conflicts beyond Rukeyser's poet's romanticized vision.

Chapters Three and Four analyze Rukeyser's and Riesenfeld's lives and works after the Spanish Civil War. Chapter Three, drawing on her poetry, essays, as well as the activist's archived papers at the Library of Congress, including her correspondence, drafts, and memberships, records of arrest and the FBI's House Un-American Activities Committee report on the American woman, reviews Rukeyser's continued writing and activism amidst the Cold War context, aiding the Spanish Republican exiles, writing protest poetry, translating Spanish works, namely Octavio Paz's, and joining a feminist tradition of challenging the status quo. As the "activist," her story runs parallel to Margarita Nelken's from Mexico in several ways. Chapter Four uncovers Janet Riesenfeld's life in Mexico City. From dancing to screenwriting, the US-born dancer engaged in what cultural historians refer to as the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema. She lived among Spanish Civil War exiles, marrying the actor and Spanish refugee Luis Alcoriza (1918-1992), and entering a kind of self-imposed exile of survival strategy and

opportunism, spending the rest of her life in Mexico. Riesenfeld and Alcoriza worked through the Cold War era with themes such as gender inversion and cultural parody. The analysis includes sources such as immigration and marriage records of Riesenfeld's move to Mexico and marriage to Spanish exile, and a film analysis of Riesenfeld's work in Mexican cinema illuminates her life in Mexico.

The women classified as “nomadic subjects” in this study engaged in physical and metaphorical movement and embody the fluidity of nomadism in four critical ways. In line with the nomad's resistance to rigid political and social codes, the first way in which the poet and dancer fit Braidotti's “nomadic subjects” is in their challenge of the sexual morals of their time. The nomad exhibits sexual autonomy and is in control of her sexuality. For the poet and dancer, this is significant in the context of what was expected of women during the Cold War era. Riesenfeld and Rukeyser demonstrated considerable sexual autonomy at mid-century—the former divorced, remarried and childless, the latter a single mother, while both had romantic affairs in Spain. The relationships they had do not appear to resemble the historical reality of marriage as a means of control over women, but rather as a means of self-discovery, political maturity, growth, and genuine love and passion. The analysis of their works and lives highlights their relative independence and politically progressive views on marriage, divorce, sex, and gender roles.

The second is Braidotti's classification of the modern nomad as polyglot and using the body as a map in shifting spaces. Rukeyser learned Spanish in Spain, as well as having an arsenal of linguistic abilities that eventually led to her extensive translation

work. Beyond her Spanish fluency, her various uses of language, more broadly conceived, permitted her to cross genres from poetry to novel, from memoir to reporting. As a flamenco dancer, Riesenfeld employed her body, a kind of cartography, to map herself onto Spain's cultural landscape during the Civil War.

The third rendering of Braidotti's conceptualization is the US women's various forms of communication as translation, as opposed to interpretation. While Rukeyser worked to translate works from various languages into English, a process linked to her uses of the lessons of the Spanish Civil War into her own domestic activism, Riesenfeld kept herself in a state of suspension continually losing herself in her posing as a foreign correspondent's interpreter in Spain, in her cultural interpretation of flamenco, and in her integration into the exile community in Spain.

The ways in which Spain shaped each woman, and in turn how each folded herself into the dynamics of the Cold War period leads to the last demonstration of nomadism: transnationalism versus internationalism. International is used here to signify organizational, corporate, or governmental relations across national lines at a structural or official level or a belonging to more than one nation. Transnational is conceived as a collaboration or identity *beyond* national borders or *outside* of nations. An additional arc this dissertation traces is the two women's responses to the Cold War, a conflict that brought greater internationalism and international politics, saw greater global travel, but it also enforced a return to more rigid boundaries and national borders. This was an intense fixity played out between various polarizations: the U.S. and the USSR, democracy and communism, east and west. While we see significant transnational

activism in the second part of the twentieth century on decolonialization, indigenous rights, etc., on a structural, official, or state level, the rigid national associations and contention affected issues of the nation and ethnic belonging, gender roles, and modern notions of progress. It also prompted two options for the nomad: to defy international orders or to subvert from inside them. The poet responded in her understanding of transnational humanitarianism, as she subverted dominant and oppressive structures from within the U.S. through various forms of activism. The dancer demonstrated her nomadic empathy through losing her own identity to one of international citizenship, integrating herself into Hispanic cultures.

Through Muriel Rukeyser, Janet Riesenfeld, and the nomadic framework, “The Nomad Selves” explores the ways the Cold War acted as a paradigm for understanding, and dismantling, the structure of all borders and narrow knowledges of our world; where the Spanish Civil War offered potential for different outcomes, the Cold War drove a reversion back to nationalistic rhetoric and construction of social and ideological divides. “Nomadic subjects” are hesitant to accept singular identities and strive to traverse multiple boundaries; the Loyalist cause in Spain served as a catalyst and fuel for Muriel Rukeyser’s and Janet Riesenfeld’s empathy towards the “other,” illuminating a more comprehensive and diverse history of the event and its impact. A focus on their empathetic responses to this event offers an alternative to a political history, a history that has been written within the fixed categories of nationalist and masculinist borders. “Nomadic subjects” offer, however, the ‘unselfed’ and ‘unpolitical’ narrative.

CHAPTER ONE

¡Viva la república!: Muriel Rukeyser's Experience of the Spanish Civil War

I see Europe break apart; Spain, from being a growth adhering to the Continent, like some vestigial organ, is the center again.

And, if we feel swallowed up, as every foreigner I've talked to does, that is a short feeling.

I think that will leave when we leave the country, and see that this is not a monster thing, that this is our lives catching up with us, the life of the world catching Spain and us.

-Muriel Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*⁵⁹

Sitting on the locomotive, the French countryside increasingly gave way to jagged green mountains, visions of the blue coast and green hills appeared as Muriel Rukeyser's train traversed the Pyrenees and made its way closer to the Spanish border in the summer of 1936. She was surrounded by passengers dressed in their wool jackets, hats, their suitcases, and many tourists not understanding the travel delays; they felt impatient, ignorant to the gravity of a civil strife among the Spaniards. However, the train ride was contemplative and exciting for her, a twenty-two-year-old US poet and writer. These travelers, out of place amidst a brewing civil war, heard and saw just in the distance Spain's grim reality of abrupt explosion of shells, the cracking of artillery, and the flickering of battle in the near distance. It seemed new, shocking, and disturbing to these witnesses, but violence and death was already ravaging Spain.

⁵⁹ Muriel Rukeyser, Rowena Kennedy-Epstein, editor, *Savage Coast: A Novel by Muriel Rukeyser* (The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2013), 231.

Francisco Franco and the other military generals rebelled against the II Republic and sent “death columns” through the country in July of 1936, including colonial troops recruited from Spanish Morocco—early evidence of the international nature of the conflict that Rukeyser perceived. Families were torn apart, and civilian men and women took up arms. The US poet watched the Popular Front soldiers with arm bands, appearing less than official with their sandals, and the armed peasants, at the various train stations on the way to Barcelona. Little could the train passengers imagine, passing through Cerbère, the last stop before the border, that in less than three years’ time a flood of half a million refugees, including women and children, would make the opposite and harrowing journey.⁶⁰ Rukeyser did not see this quite yet, but she would soon be swept up in the worker revolution in Barcelona and passionately write on the cause of Spanish freedom.

(Figure 1)



Figure 1: Muriel Rukeyser, Photograph. The young poet traveled to Spain alone at the age of twenty-two. Photograph Portrait of Muriel Rukeyser, Box I:61 Folder 6, Photographs, Library of Congress. Courtesy of William L. Rukeyser.

⁶⁰ For estimates on numbers of refugees leaving Spain, and settling in Mexico, see Patricia Fagen, *Exiles and Citizens: Spanish Republicans in Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974).

As a young but already established poet and writer, Rukeyser had been in London among the literary circle when she was sent at the last minute to cover the People's Olympiad for a *Life and Letters Today* colleague; these games were scheduled to take place in Barcelona in July 1936 to protest the German Olympic games that summer. (Figure 2) The games were canceled at the last minute, however, due to the Spanish Civil War, and Rukeyser would lose her new lover—a German athlete and socialist volunteer in Spain, Otto Boch—to the Saragossa front. She was witness to the outbreak of the war on July 17th, and before the war's end, she understood the gravity of the conflict beyond a nationally-bounded civil struggle. Although she wished to stay longer, foreigners were evacuated after five days Rukeyser's arrival to Catalonia. Upon her return to the United States, the poet began to write *Savage Coast*, an autobiographical novel about her five days in Spain at the outbreak of war and a workers' revolution, which would be published posthumously.⁶¹

⁶¹ Rukeyser published her accounts in Spain in a *Daily Worker* article in November 1936. She would extend the writing into her manuscript *Savage Coast*; however, it was not published until 2013 when it was recovered by Rowena Kennedy-Epstein.

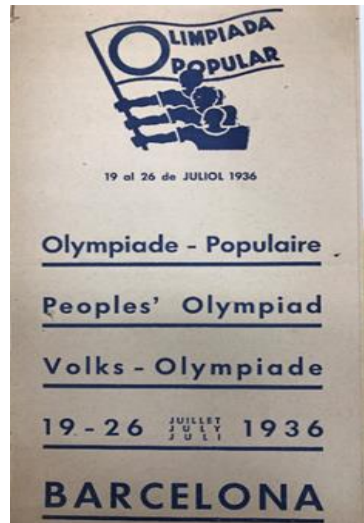


Figure 2: People's Olympiad Program. This program was preserved by Rukeyser, as she was dispatched to Spain to cover the games that were planned in protest to Hitler's Berlin Olympic Games in July 1936. Muriel Rukeyser Papers, People's Olympiad, Box I: 56, Folder 1, Library of Congress. Courtesy of William L. Rukeyser.

This chapter analyzes Rukeyser's early life and work and experience of the Spanish Civil War. It consists primarily of a close, critical reading of *Savage Coast* within the "nomadic" conceptualization, as the poet was a polyglot in language, genre, in her modes of activism, and continual identification with the "other." It also weaves together Rukeyser's firsthand documentary and emotional accounts of the war in Spain with women's antifascist activities. In writing *Savage Coast*, she was both a poetic scholar and historical agent, marking her as another "humane observer" reporting on the Spanish Civil War.⁶² However, women's writings and a gendered analysis helps to de-

⁶² Paul Preston's introduction to Henry Buckley, *The Life and Death of the Spanish Republic* characterizes Buckley, a British foreign correspondent in Spain during the II Republic and Civil War, as the "humane observer," (as opposed to the other professional writers in Spain, for his honest reporting yet, at times, emotional testimony. While Buckley provides a detailed account of the political developments and a

nationalize the “humane observer” and our idea of foreign participation in anti-fascism in Spain; more than emotional accounts, Rukeyser and Riesenfeld are empaths, allowing for greater identification with the cause or people of Spain propelling them to *action* in support of the II Republic by the end of their stays in Spain. Finally, this chapter highlights the passionate, foreign involvement in the Spanish Civil War, yet by amplifying US women’s voices and analyzing Rukeyser’s poetry as political, it seeks to demonstrate the nomad’s universalizing capacity for empathy. As the quote from *Savage Coast* that opens this chapter demonstrates, she saw the conflict as universal: as a Spanish war and a European conflict, it was a struggle of European and Atlantic scope, as it was even a part of herself.

The Prewar Polyglot

Rowena Kennedy-Epstein has argued that Rukeyser’s experience in Catalonia during the military coup, and the resulting general strike and collectivization was transformational in many ways, ensuring that the young poet would “write about Spain, its war, revolution, exiled, and dead, for over forty years, creating a radical and interconnected twentieth-century textual history.”⁶³ The foreign woman’s poems, reportage, memoir, essays and fiction on Spain combine several genres, as these “experimental and hybrid texts about the Spanish resistance document a multivalent reality that resists totalization, offering a

sentimental picture into the sufferings of war, he does not use his writing as an act of mobilization or activism in support of one side or another, as I argue the feminine “nomadic subject” does.

⁶³ Rowen Kennedy-Epstein, “‘Whose Fires Would Not Stop’: Muriel Rukeyser and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1976,” *Journal of Narrative Theory*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Fall 2013), pp. 384.

dilating dialogic representation of history inside an ever changing present.”⁶⁴ In other words, Kennedy-Epstein has pointed out that the US poet constantly recontextualized her present political moment in her work, and with the use of experimental forms and transgressing both gender and genre, Rukeyser offered “new possibilities for the representation of women and demonstrates the political and intellectual power of working across disciplines and forms.”⁶⁵ She was adaptable and saw the conflict with a much larger lens than the official Non-Intervention position or other foreigners’ accounts that confined the struggle to Spain in the 1930s. Instead, Rukeyser’s work demonstrates the continued importance of the Spanish conflict through much of the twentieth century and outside of Spain or Europe.

Expanding on Epstein-Kennedy’s use of Rukeyser’s works, the poet was the nomadic polyglot in language, genre, and social consciousness, before and following the Spanish Civil War. Rosi Braidotti’s theory of the twentieth-century nomad posits a “kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behavior.”⁶⁶ For Braidotti, the empathetic subject resists rigid boundaries and rejects strict binaries of “outsider” and “insider,” suggesting constructions of the “self” are changing and are fluid, serving a foundation for the ways in which women can contest cultural and national singularities. Rukeyser embodies this in her writing and uses of language, her reach into diverse social causes and organizations, her collaborative works,

⁶⁴ Kennedy-Epstein, “Whose Fires Would Not Stop,” 385.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 385, 391.

⁶⁶ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 26.

and her traversing of cultural and national boundaries. She sought to “trespass” into multiple creative worlds, cultures, and social conventions.

The polyglot commands several languages, both linguistically and different genres or modes of communication. Before her journey to Spain, Rukeyser had already become a recognized poet through formal training and publication. Born to a middle-class Jewish family in Manhattan, she lived in the West Village for much of her life. She studied English, History, Philosophy, and Physiology at Columbia University and Vassar College, and her credentials indicated she spoke French, Spanish and, to a lesser degree, German by the time she traveled to Spain.⁶⁷ By 1935 Rukeyser was already a prize-winning poet, having been awarded the Yale Series of Younger Poets for *Theory of Flight*, her first publication.⁶⁸ Rukeyser’s ability to speak different languages and relate on varying levels permitted a more nuanced understanding of the events in Spain than other foreign travelers and writers; she demonstrated an awareness of the different perspectives, and an intimacy with the people she encountered.

Despite educational training in Spanish, the US poet found herself in Catalonia during the initial days of the Spanish Civil War ill equipped to converse fluently with Spaniards. Picking up Catalan words and the beginnings of sentences, in *Savage Coast* she expressed regret and self-consciousness, a “poverty,” at what she viewed as a handicap. While traveling by train, “the wooden compartment was a clatter of Catalan,”

⁶⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Muriel Rukeyser: <http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS98155>. FIU Online Electronic Resources - U.S. Documents.

⁶⁸ Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, vii.

packed “tight with words.” Insufficiently armed with only a translation book that she earnestly searched through for meaning, Rukeyser could make out the titles of political factions but “everything else was lost. The barrier had sprung up immense in a moment; here were friends, and she could not reach over. She thumbed at the list of words.”⁶⁹ When she was able to provide brief Spanish responses, the American still felt “lame” for her inadequacies. The poet greatly valued transgressing linguistic barriers, and while she makes it clear that she had a deficient that summer of 1936, she was able to piece together the events and ideologies on her own, through translators, and in her more fluent, French.

Much of the intellectual life of Spain during the 1930s belonged to the so-called Generation of ‘27—at the same moment Rukeyser was witness to the Spanish Civil War. Through her life and work, the American utilized history and memory to connect across space and time the issues she saw most pressing, with 1936 particularly serving as a beacon for her anti-fascism. While her empathy possibly resulted in a muting of the “other,” romanticizing a unified, just II Republic, the poet applied emotion in her reporting, work, and activism, seeking a more human truth that could only be learned through feeling. The work by Spanish philosophers of the Generation of ‘27, namely María Zambrano, permits a greater argument for metaphysics, the emotions or spirit in history, and the “nomadic subject’s” ability to identify with diverse subjects and experiences. Zambrano, student of Ortega y Gasset and exile after the Spanish Civil War, critiques the overreliance on facts and rationality, replacing it with a philosophy of

⁶⁹ Ibid., 15, 16.

history of emotions. To Zambrano, a history of the “vast world of feelings... will be the most accurate history of humankind.”⁷⁰ She urges a history of mercy (the mother of all feelings) to achieve a closer “intimacy of the human condition” and a history that does not “destroy” or replace what came before it with new events—“a sort of parade of fleeting shining instants that are replaced by other shining instants”—but to build links and bridges.⁷¹ A history of emotions requires the historian investigate nontraditional sources, with literature being a valuable tool. Further, the US poet and activist did not separate her literary pursuits from social action: *Savage Coast* and her poetry was a hopeful means towards enacting change, including an end to the embargo against the Spanish government.

Literature, poetry, and the translation projects that could cross borders ensured that the legacy of the II Republic and the struggle of the Spanish Civil War survived after 1939. In arguing for transnationalism of translation, with Langston Hughes a key participant, scholar Evelyn Scaramella articulates, “The Latin word for “translation,” *translatio*, means “to carry across.”⁷² In fact, the *Alianza de Intelectuales Antifascistas* (Alliance of Antifascist Intellectuals), an institute supporting “revolutionary art for the Republican cause” with members from the Spanish avant-garde, the “Generation of ’27”, collaborated with foreign intellectuals to translate poetry and literature. The effort went

⁷⁰ María Zambrano, “Para Una Historia de La Piedad,” (1989) translated by Aurora G. Morcillo in *The Modern Spain Sourcebook: A Cultural History from 1600 to the Present* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 35-39.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 36, 37.

⁷² Evelyn Scaramella, “Translating the Spanish Civil War: Langston Hughes’s Transnational Poetics” *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (Summer 2014), p. 178.

both ways, with English works translated into Spanish, as well; however, the alliance was especially significant for intellectuals to publicize the Republican struggle in Spain.⁷³

Scaramella argues that the *Alianza* “valued the role of translation as a vehicle for social action and change, and recognized translation’s power to widely disseminate information about the Republican cause across international borders.”⁷⁴ While not having the fluency to work on translations yet, Rukeyser tried to narrate the Republican fight to a US public through literature with writing *Savage Coast* and her poetry.

María Zambrano argued that literature can act as a source of knowledge, with subjectivity based in poetics to counter rational philosophies with “affective consciousness or passionate reason.”⁷⁵ Therefore, Zambrano’s ‘poetic reason’ opens the possibility for using creative works in historical interrogation, as rational systems of thought are often inadequate in capturing the full range of human experience. In the same vein, Hannah Arendt argued—no doubt informed by her experience as a journalist covering the trial of Nazi war criminal, Adolf Eichmann—“facts” alone are not enough for the general public. In her doctoral dissertation, Valeria Pashkova nuances Arendt’s relationship between truth and politics. While needing to be informed by facts, the “quest for meaning” in “truth-seeking” “loses any connection to definite results because it has to

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 181.

⁷⁵ Works by María Zambrano include *Filosofía y poesía* (1936); *Pensamiento y poesía en la vida española* (1939); *La confesión como género literario* (1943); *La España de Galdós* (1960).

become adequate to what [Arendt] calls plurality as well as to the need of humans to ‘reconcile themselves’ to the world that they share with others.”⁷⁶

So-called “objective” facts do not always capture the emotional narratives of the forgotten through history. The “nomadic subject” recognizes, consciously or subconsciously, the blurred space between herself and the other, between her fight and others’ struggles, while seeking meaning not only through observation, but also one’s experience and the emotional responses to events. The Enlightenment ushered in a stark separation between masculinist rationality and femininized emotion or passion, a dichotomy challenged by Zambrano. While scholars recognize the existence of bias in war reporting as early as the nineteenth century, there were professional standards of objectivity and impartiality for the correspondent. The Spanish Civil War represented a vivid departure from the split between objectivity and subjectivity, as most journalists traveling to Spain “were marked out by their partisanship in favor of one side or the other;” however they were often accused of merely acting as propagandists by their critics.⁷⁷

The “nomadic subject” casts new light on the impact of the conflict for foreigners who arrived in Spain without existing political affinities. Historian David Deacon elaborates on the predominance of ideology surrounding the Spanish Civil War and

⁷⁶ Valeria Pashkova, "Arendt's Political Thought: The Relationship between Truth and Politics," *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing* (Western Sydney University, 2016).

⁷⁷ Greg McLaughlin, "Journalism, Objectivity and War," chapter in *The War Correspondent*, 33-62 (London: Pluto Press, 2016).

argues that correspondents were not exempt from impassioned stances. Deacon describes how the Civil War produced both “elective and experiential affinities” for journalists in Spain. He notes that during the earlier period of the war, between late 1936 and early 1937, there was a high percentage of “stringers” reporting on the conflict, writers and correspondents with only contingent or loose employment or affiliation with news agencies.⁷⁸ He cites examples of such correspondents dispatched to Spain without a preexisting “elective affinity;” interestingly, they are both women, Virginia Cowles and Frances Davis. Questioned by a male correspondent and propagandist, Cowles explained her non-committal position and was met by skepticism and an attitude of impossibility: “No-one comes to Spain without *idée fixe*.”⁷⁹ While it was more common for female writers and correspondents to *become* political after arriving in Spain, as was the case for Riesenfeld with Rukeyser intensifying her commitment, the experience of the Spanish Civil War either deepened or altered political commitments for most males, as well.

Indeed, witnessing the war could change one’s political sympathies, as it did for the early Nationalist supporter and adversary of the so-called “Reds” Sefton Delmer of the *Daily Express*. He shifted his leaning after witnessing Franco’s violence, yet applied his preconceived political boundaries: “I found myself sharing the thrill of the reverses with which the Reds were inflicting on the side I would certainly have chosen had I been

⁷⁸ David Deacon, “Elective and Experiential Affinities: British and American foreign correspondents and the Spanish Civil War,” *Journalism Studies*, 9:3 (April 2008), pp. 392-408.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Deacon, “Elective and Experiential Affinities,” 397.

a Spaniard.”⁸⁰ This masculinist violence, perpetuated even through experiential affinity, contrasts to the emotional documentation of war by “nomadic subjects” such as Rukeyser. The feminine ability to understand through feeling and the nomad’s identification beyond defined points provides a sense of compassion or mercy that can achieve greater internationalism and deeper knowledge of history that transcends language boundaries, including the barriers faced by Rukeyser and serves as historical example of Zambrano’s “poetic reason.”

While lacking fluency, the nomadic poet *felt* her way through Spain and in her ability to understand the events in Spain and build metaphorical bridges. Later, Rukeyser acquired enough Spanish to provide English translations throughout *Savage Coast* and translated works by Mexican poet and writer Octavio Paz, which will be further discussed in Chapter Three. Despite not having the ease of spoken language, Rukeyser acknowledged that there was space to understand the conflict in Spain without the meanings of words: the Catalan women on the train “were leaning forward, screaming in argument, friendly, shrill, at the top of the voice, yelling across [her], filling the room with fists, round and shaking before each other’s faces...the shrieking blotted out all but vehemence.”⁸¹ Arguing that more than politics was at play in Spain, Rukeyser recalls a conversation with a fellow American, “It seems more a question of the presence of belief, of feeling.”⁸²

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Rukeyser, *Savage*, 16.

⁸² Ibid., 50.

Rukeyser was not only a nomadic polyglot in language and genre, but also in her constant immersion into new experiences and identities. The poet even took lessons on the mechanics of aviation for her book of poetry, *Theory of Flight*.⁸³ This collection can be viewed against Rukeyser's later works, as they provide insight to her early, pre-Spanish Civil War experience of social and political awareness. She critiqued war early on, born on the eve of World War I but she remained more within the genre of poet and producing poetry than as an overt political pacifist. Her later works (which she regarded as her more mature works) became more clearly political, particularly after being a witness in Spain, experimenting with several other genres that were more documentary and biographical. As a nomad, she continued to throw herself into new experiences and more clearly protested politics and war after the Spanish Civil War.

Many scholars and writers who examine foreigners in Spain during the Civil War are eager to define it as "The Poet's War," or the war in which creative and intellectual minds sought a universal battlefield for democracy and justice; therefore, it is imperative we recognize women's contributions to the genre.⁸⁴ Braidotti argues, "Writing is, for the polyglot, a process of undoing the illusory stability of fixed identities bursting open the bubbled of ontological security that comes from familiarity with one linguistic site."⁸⁵

⁸³ FBI, Muriel Rukeyser, 6.

⁸⁴ Michele Haapamaki, "Writers in Arms and the Just War: The Spanish Civil War, Literary Activism, and Leftist Masculinity," *Left History*, 10.2 (Fall 2005), pp. 33-52. Also see, Cunningham, Valentine, ed. *Spanish Front: Writers on the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), Paul Preston, *We Saw Spain Die: Foreign Correspondents in the Spanish Civil War* (New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), Adam Hochschild, *Spain in Our Hearts: Americans in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016).

⁸⁵ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 15.

Rukeyser exposes this “false security” in her continual deconstruction and critical consciousness of accepted codes and categories by crossing genres and languages, blurring her position after Spain between tourist and exile, and not conforming to the Cold War politics of anti-communism and dominant gender ideologies. Further, Zambrano’s theory of the “poetic reason” allows a deeper knowledge into human experiences and she argues the genres of novel and poem most closely capture experimental feelings, “the true life, the truth about the things that happen to people and their inner sense.” All events and experiences, and “objects of knowledge,” are felt. For the philosopher feelings “constitute the entire life of the soul, that they are the soul,” illuminating much more than what is offered by the scientific approach adopted by the historical profession during much of the twentieth century.⁸⁶

Scholars who minimize or blur divisions between the poetic and historical writing help illuminate the human condition of twentieth century traumas, displacements, and, in fact, the experiences of the Spanish Civil War. Marcus Rediker’s “poetics of history” shows us the importance in the twenty first century, with so many competing “truths,” of embracing emotions and storytelling in historical narrative.⁸⁷ Alicia Suskin Ostriker critically points out how women’s poetry represents an important, varied and collective feminist genre. Rescuing it from historical “ghettoization” is crucial, as scholars are now fully appreciating women’s contributions and inventions in modernist writing. Further,

⁸⁶ Zambrano, “La Piedad,” in and translated by Morcillo, *Modern Spain Sourcebook*, 36.

⁸⁷ Marcus Rediker, “The Poetics of History from Below,” *Perspectives on History* (Sept. 2010).

Zambrano reminds us about *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* in that “before history appeared, there was a prehistory of history: poetry.”⁸⁸

Indeed, for Rukeyser being a polyglot was not in words alone but also in action, and her empathy with the collectivizing anarchists in Catalonia certainly had far-reaching roots. Jane Cooper, who provided the foreword to Rukeyser’s *The Life of Poetry*, reminds us that Rukeyser “repeatedly, put her body on the line.”⁸⁹ At only nineteen years old Rukeyser was arrested for covering the Scottsboro Trial in 1933, understood by many, including Rukeyser, as an unjust trial against nine black boys falsely charged with raping two white women in Scottsdale, Alabama. The poet was detained overnight for “fraternizing” with African Americans and “inciting negroes to insurrection” by speaking with reporters and relaying “calls” to an African American student conference at Columbia while covering the trial, but was also thanked for this volunteer work with the Emergency Unemployment Relief Committee.⁹⁰ At twenty-two years old Rukeyser took active interest in workers’ rights and safety as “she was at Gauley Bridge, West Virginia, making a unique poem/documentary about tunnel-drillers dying of silicosis--a clear case of industrial greed.”⁹¹ Rukeyser exemplifies the nomad’s ability to find unity, and

⁸⁸ Zambrano, “La Piedad,” in and translated by Morcillo, *Modern Spain Sourcebook*, 35.

⁸⁹ Muriel Rukeyser, Foreword by Jane Cooper, *The Life of Poetry* (Ashfield, Massachusetts: Paris Press, 1996), xiii.

⁹⁰ Report on arrest, February 15, 1933, Box I:6 Folder 1, Muriel Rukeyser Papers, Library of Congress Manuscripts Division (LOC), Washington, D.C.

⁹¹ Rukeyser, *Life of Poetry*, xiii.

therefore, to fight for the marginalized through constant movement and crossing of boundaries.

Rukeyser employed poetry as a means of political action to help make change for affected Gauley Bridge workers. A letter from April 1936 from Indiana House Representative Glenn Griswold directly called on Rukeyser to publicize on the Gauley Bridge issue in anticipation of hearings to form a committee and appropriations for investigating the industrial wrongdoing and health issues. A return letter to Griswold in 1938 affirms the poet's many works and talks about Gauley and asked his advice and help in going ahead on a film project about the workers and their illnesses. A letter from Paramount Pictures, Inc. in 1940, however, expressed disinterest that a producer would accept Rukeyser's manuscript that was based on her poem in *U.S. 1*, as well as casted doubt on adopting her more poetic style. Columbia Films also flatly denied the manuscript for film.⁹² As this chapter will demonstrate, Rukeyser's impulse towards social action intensified in Spain, resulting in the conflict to shape the future of her life's work and activism, but was often met with the same apathy, rejection, or suspicion.

Savage Coast is both novel and poetry, and as Braidotti points out, nomadic styles do not only include multiple languages but a rejection of "mainstream communication."⁹³ In addition to mastering multiple languages and genres, the nomadic polyglot, as represented by Rukeyser, blurs borders. English scholar Rowena Kennedy-Epstein

⁹² Screenplays and Television Outlines April 1936, Box I:42, Folder 7, Rukeyser Papers, LOC.

⁹³ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 16. Braidotti elaborates on writers like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker who invent new English dialect.

recognizes that Rukeyser's writings after the Spanish Civil War repeat the same themes and re-contextualize throughout her political life commitments, continually shaping the poet's political stance. After Kennedy-Epstein rescued *Savage Coast* from Rukeyser's unpublished manuscripts in 2013, she observes that Rukeyser universalized the struggle in Spain by eliminating the place names (France and Spain) when writing her manuscript introduction. This literary license signals a desire on the part of Rukeyser to allow readers to place themselves in any moment, country, or war. And as historian Helen Graham has established, "Spain is thus doubly emblematic of a larger European story, in prefiguring the many other latent civil wars across the continent."⁹⁴

The nomad identifies more universally than nationally, and Rukeyser's nomadic inclinations contributed to her active engagement and support of the II Republic after she was witness to the first days of war in Spain. Within her papers preserved from the People's Olympiad, Rukeyser kept handwritten notes of names, places, and things she encountered in on her trip, these notes match the general storyline of *Savage Coast*. In her aim to invoke empathy from her readers, Rukeyser consciously omitted the place names that she originally drafted in the opening scene of the novel. Although the People's Olympiad in Barcelona was stifled by the outbreak of the Civil War, Rukeyser left Spain a changed person due to the collective, revolutionary environment, a sexual awakening, and emotional and political response and activism for the Spanish cause and antifascism more broadly.

⁹⁴ Helen Graham, *The War and Its Shadow: Spain's Civil War in Europe's Long Twentieth Century* (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2012), 1.

Savage Coast is an autobiographical reflection on Rukeyser's time in Spain and about her nomadic self in the form of a poetic, yet documentary, novel. "Helen," is the protagonist's name, as well as Rukeyser's own middle name. Helen enters into a journey in Spain that closely paralleled the poet's real-life experience, including a love affair with a German exile and Olympiad, Otto or "Hans." Rukeyser's personal archive of the People's Olympiad inventories who was with her; among some noteworthy figures she traveled with and interacted with included two Jewish people, two English couples, a Spanish family, Catalans, women from Latin America and Belgium, the Hungarian Olympic team, a Spanish professor, "peasants," "searchers," "shopkeepers," and "soldiers."⁹⁵ Her account notes the stop in Moncada, in which Helen meets the socialist German Olympiad, Hans. *Savage Coast* documents their ensuing love affair, the general strike in Catalonia, and a workers' revolution in Barcelona. The gathering of athletes turned into an energized anti-fascist moment, and the collectivized, revolutionary spirit of Barcelona mixed with Rukeyser's burgeoning sexual awakening and intensified political commitment.

Destination, Barcelona: General Strike and War

In a nomadic fashion, Rukeyser opens her account of the war from a train that is in motion and blurs boundaries by recognizing the interior, personal war that mirrored the civil war passing by the window outside. Rukeyser's numerous publications reflect that

⁹⁵ Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, 12-18.

the Civil War and European conflict guided much of her perspective and work thereafter. *Savage Coast* poetically recalls Rukeyser's initial self-consciousness, immaturity, and recognizes the drama built up within her own internal turmoil alongside the waging civil conflict stirring in Spain:

It was all new and must be important, must be valuable, in the same way that she was used to thinking she must grow to be valuable. It was too much to carry, all this self-consciousness, and it was beginning to relax from her in the heat and adventure here. She always drew into herself so painfully, conscious of herself years ago as the white, awkward child, and later as the big angry woman. Being that conscious, she knew enough to train most of it out of her, and had grown into a certain ease, an alliance among components, that resembled peace. But her symbol was civil war, she thought—endless, ragged conflict which tore her open, in her relations with her family, her friends, the people she loved. If she knew so much about herself, she was obliged to know more, to make more—but whatever she had touched had fallen into this conflict, she thought dramatically... She was bitterly conscious of her failure, at a couple of years over twenty, to build up a coordinated life for herself. This trip to Europe was to be a fresh start, in the same way that college had given her a fresh start. And now, nearing the end, with her work done and this week to spend at a People's demonstration, as she chose, the tension was breaking a bit. The nerve in her leg, which had been so disturbing all year, was almost the only reminder.⁹⁶

This passage and her early works highlight Rukeyser's existing desire to "grow to be valuable," but she became fully rooted in her purpose after witnessing the passionate response for justice in Spain. Her identity was more than "a big angry woman" or an imposed, singular subjectivity; instead, she embraced her nomadic complexity, her "alliance among components." Everything had "fallen into this conflict," her "fresh start" was her passionate antifascist writing and activism. More than Buckley, Rukeyser wove herself into the Spanish conflict and the struggle against fascism outside of national

⁹⁶ Ibid.

borders. Her word choices are telling; while national alliances failed to preserve democracy in Spain or peace in Europe, she found a “peace” through her empathetic response to the Spanish, international, and human conflict.

In only five days—her first time to the country—Rukeyser would empathize with the Spanish cause of the Popular Front so intimately that she would maintain devotion through the end of the war and commit to the refugee’s cause the rest of her life. While the poet prefaces her novel with the disclaimer “none of the persons are imaginary, but none are represented at all photographically,” indeed, she inserted herself into *Savage Coast*.⁹⁷ Nonetheless, Rukeyser employed extended definitions of documentary, “a form characteristic of the 1930s Popular Front modernism with which Rukeyser herself has been aligned.”⁹⁸ In this way, Rukeyser moves from poet to novelist, reporter, and activist. While her style and identity is dynamic, the American maintained her poetic style in all of her works, and as will be discussed later, believed society feared the use of poetry precisely for its power to challenge categories and society’s divisions.

As Rukeyser’s poetic reflection opening this chapter reveals, Rukeyser very early connected the civil conflict to struggles that Europe and the Americas would face between justice or democracy and reactionary fascism and authoritarianism. She placed herself in a broader narrative, finding unity and common paths. This new knowledge shaped Rukeyser’s mature political and artistic consciousness and can be made apparent through her subsequent life works, commitments, and activism. *Savage Coast* blends a

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁸ Kennedy-Epstein, “Whose Fires Would Not Stop,” 389.

style of poetic narrative with war reporting and is therefore, a historical text documenting the early conflict:

Everybody knows how that war ended. What choices the armed men in their sandals and sashes running blind through the groves; what defeats, with cities bombed, burning, the plane falling through the air, surrounded by guns; what entries, drummed or dumb, at night or with the hungry rank of the invaded watching from the curbs; what changes in the map, colored line falling behind colored line; what threat of further wars hanging over the continents, floating like a city made of planes, a high ominous modern shape in the sky.⁹⁹

Rukeyser began writing about her experience in Spain in November 1936, taking heed of the task pleaded of her and foreigners to rally support for a democratic Spain. Numerous scholars have researched and published on the activity and contribution of volunteers and writers in the Spanish Civil War, which defied the official policy of Non-Intervention; however, less attention is committed to US women's literary works and civilian aid societies on the spread of awareness of the Spanish Civil War and the anti-fascist movement.¹⁰⁰ The works are valuable sources for remembering the female experience at such a monumental period of history, which add a rich transatlantic history of war, trauma, and activism—lost when we focus on male writers of the Spanish Civil War alone.¹⁰¹ Although Rukeyser briefly witnessed the Spanish Civil War surrounded by

⁹⁹ Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, 7.

¹⁰⁰ See also Peter N. Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994); James K. Hopkins, *Into the Heart of the Fire: The British in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Judith Keene, *Fighting For Franco: International Volunteers in Nationalist Spain during the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 2001).

¹⁰¹ Works include George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, originally published in the United Kingdom, 1938; Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (Scribner, 1995, first published, 1940).

mostly foreigners, her sensationalizing of it translated to a wider awareness of ideological conflict engulfing the West.

The poet acknowledged the Spanish conflict as central to the broader battle that was to ravage Europe, its varying causes, and provided different perspectives.

Europe, the thought of Europe swelled over the horizon...Paris made it worse, with its posters and notices of gas-masks and the gossip of cellar drills and war ritual. But all of it was beginning to wear away. France, strongly Popular Front, was a pillar after England's mixed politics and mad conversation. Sun was restoration after London, and Spain, flooded with sun, backing a People's Olympiad, had shaken her free before she reached the frontier.¹⁰²

Rukeyser wrote of the armed peasants she saw throughout the journey, guns, slogans, and the news circulating about a revolt in Morocco. While papers reported minimally on the prospect of war at this early stage, Rukeyser claims Spaniards all knew that something significant was happening, violent and political, "something to do with generals."¹⁰³ Indeed, military officers had concocted a rebellion from Spanish Morocco, primarily led by Generals Franco, Mola, and Fanjul and Colonel Carrasco, organizing Moroccan soldiers and the Army of Africa that when they invaded Spain in July, invoked fear, death, and destruction in the countryside.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, 12, 13.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁰⁴ Since the February elections there were several strikes, political assassinations and violence, and general disorder across Spain. One of Franco's protests was the removal of right-wing officers from his commands, and the generals' political intrigue with the Carlists and Falange. A British plane was chartered to transport Franco from his semi-banishment in the Canaries to Morocco, where he took command of the Army of Africa on July 9th. On July 12th a parade was held in Morocco where slogans of "crusade" and ¡*Arriba Falange Espanola!* spread. Funerals were held on July 14th for Lieutenant Castillo, leading Socialist, and Calvo Sotelo a leading Falangist, each murdered by their opposition and bringing tensions to their ultimate

The poet's ability to travel through and observe small towns during the journey from Paris to Barcelona provided her some knowledge of ordinary Spaniards' experiences and perspectives in the early stirrings of war. Historian Hugh Thomas confirmed that in the early days of war, "So now there was to spread over Spain a great cloud of violence, in which all the quarrels and enmities of so many generations would find full outlet. With communications difficult or nonexistent, each town would find itself on its own, acting out its own drama."¹⁰⁵ Despite views of the global Popular Front's or leftist artists' ideological or romanticized projections onto the Spanish conflict, physical travel grounded Rukeyser's affective mythification of Spain in real experience. Further, we see Rukeyser's transnational view of war in Europe and a feeling that France and England were already gearing up for war and the mixed politics of London might prove detrimental to the protection of a leftist coalition in Spain.

Rukeyser's dramatization of the war was grounded in an acute awareness of international contexts despite the official policy of appeasement dictated from London, Paris, and Washington of Hitler's rearming and, arguably, early aggression in Europe.¹⁰⁶

boil. In Melilla, Morocco left-wing supporters were arrested and some executions took place. Historian Hugh Thomas argues, "Melilla was henceforth ruled by martial law; and the manner of its insurrection was the model followed throughout the rest of Morocco and Spain." (Thomas, 132) Paul Preston confirms Thomas's portrayal of popular violence on both sides of the Civil War, but he argues there was more concerted and officially sanctioned violence by 'death columns' from Morocco through Spain. See Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (New York and London: Harper Colophon Books, 1961), 117-138 and Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company,) 2012.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, 142.

¹⁰⁶ Gaynor Johnson, *The International Context of the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge Scholars, 2009) and Helen Graham, *The Spanish Civil War: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Rukeyser's character "Olive" critiques Englishmen's sporting instincts as a way to comment on larger attitudes of the compliance towards war, "These English and their 'being sporting,' ... At home they're being sporting to Hitler, in the Mediterranean with Mussolini, and here they want to play games with the generals. Look at them run and line up with the Fascists. That's what I'm afraid of."¹⁰⁷ At the same time, Rukeyser disdainfully recalls a rich and snobbish American woman also on her train, she called her "Peacock." In Helen's explanation of the People's Olympiad, Peacock is unable to understand why there are "games against games" and expresses the inability to grasp the political importance of the games in Barcelona. At the same time, Peacock brags her husband will meet very important figures in Berlin and throughout the autobiographical novel expresses fear of the supposed "Reds" in Spain. This consciousness is one demonstration of Rukeyser's nomadic ability to see beyond mainstream discourses and official policy. Even more, she did not identify with all US travelers, very often distancing herself from her compatriots and other foreigners that behaved as tourists and did not attempt to fully understand the conflict, demonstrating her transnational sympathies.

Amidst the poet's emotional, outsider's relationship with Spain and in route to Barcelona, Rukeyser depicts to her audience the motley crew of fellow travelers, from Spanish nationalists to communists from the U.S. She records varied conversations and experiences that expanded her consciousness and illuminates different perspective of the war. On the journey into Spain from France, Rukeyser captured the passions and

¹⁰⁷ Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, 102, 103.

divisions plaguing Spain during early July of 1936. She recalled the loudness of the locomotive being “wiped out by a tremendous conversation. Seven Catalonian peasant women discussing Spanish politics will wipe out any noise, any scene, fill a compartment to henhouse madness, fill the head with “comunista, “monarchista,” “facisti,” “republica,” until the next town is reached, they all descend, and peace and slowness returns.”¹⁰⁸ The humorous image of a boisterous henhouse quickly settling into quiet normality paints a realistic portrait of the absurdities that engulf civil conflict among ordinary civilians.

In Rukeyser’s novel-like reporting on the first days of the Spanish Civil War, Helen’s journey to Barcelona is interrupted by a hold in Moncada due to the general strike in Catalonia. Rukeyser documented the perceived unity and fervor of comradeship in the first days of war. “The whole of Catalonia, according to the bus-driver, was in the United Front: only the church, the generals and the wealthy had rebelled. “And,” added the lady, “he says everyone is with the Anarchists this time—the Front is really strong.”¹⁰⁹ (Figure 3) The government had been censoring news, however. Buckley, as a British correspondent, recalled during the assault on Madrid, “We spent much of our time in [the Telephone Building] during the first months of war, for our stories were censored there and afterwards we telephoned them to London from the fifth floor of the building, still with the watchful censorial eye, and ear, keeping guard.”¹¹⁰ Popular

¹⁰⁸ Rukeyser, *Barcelona, 1936*, 9-10.

¹⁰⁹ Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, 61.

¹¹⁰ Buckley, *Life and Death*, 254-256

misunderstandings of the unity of the Popular Front contrasts with political division and competition. Contemporary correspondents and more recent scholars have debated the Communist party's role in "counterrevolution," suppressing the collectives and worker's militias especially in Catalonia, and what effects this had on the Republican effort in the Civil War. While the Popular Front's shared goal was to defeat fascism, later, there was manipulation by Soviet advisors to take over the war effort for self-serving purposes, causing division and violence against anarchist and other leftist revolutionary forces.¹¹¹ Such divisions of the Spanish Left were numerous, complex and, ultimately, proved perilous to the II Republic.



Figure 3: "Zaragoza," Photograph by Muriel Rukeyser, Barcelona, 1936. Library of Congress. Courtesy of William L Rukeyser.

¹¹¹ Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015) (First Edition 1991). See also George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* and Buckley's *Life and Death of the Spanish Republic*.

With her previous sympathies for workers' rights and social justice and being engulfed in the worker's revolution in Catalonia, Rukeyser combined her ability to trespass into multiple subjectivities into a heightened desire to be active for the Republican effort. Helen observed, "the gray-haired man with the mourning band, surrounded by the Hungarian team...the armed workers, the town, alert, faces leaning from the row houses. The environment compelled Rukeyser's protagonist to self-reflection: "I wish now, for the first time, that I were really active."¹¹² Helen took an active voice in suggesting that the passengers *do* something to show they were "with the town." A group of the foreigners on the train organized a monetary collection and draft a memo to present the town letting them know the travelers were "not against them."¹¹³ The town mayor happily received the gesture, "Compañeros!" Rukeyser narrates a meeting between this small group of train passengers and Catalan President, Lluís Companys, in which the train's support was fully acknowledged, welcomed, and returned with a promise of every effort to ensure safe passage to the passengers. But when Helen repeatedly asked the others on the letter committee if they ought to state their sympathy, she was met with rejection, since others believed that, as foreign nationals, they had no place in Spain's politics. This remained with Rukeyser, and perhaps is a microcosm of her perspective of the lack of action, deficit of the empathy she, and others, called for.

¹¹² Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, 45.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

Leaving the meeting, Helen reflected, “It was, again, a humiliation [to her] to not be able to speak” and the barrier as a “foreigner” and “tourist” was a source of frustration.¹¹⁴

Rukeyser remained during her trip an empathetic observer while in Spain. The poet picked up on the false security of the popular speculations about the strength of the Front, the failed rebellion, and General Manuel Godeu’s defeat in his efforts in the coup, while recounting concern and unity among some of the foreigners. Rukeyser provides more ominous foreshadowing against the immediate fervor of comradeship of the Worker Revolution in Catalonia. The sounds of war contrasted sharply with cheers of “Viva la República!” Rukeyser described the anxiety of the sounds of war in the distance as “a deep roar” of “some sick enormous animal.”¹¹⁵ These few days, Helen observes the everyday activities, political conversations, and mobilizations of the local townspeople and the of trade union strike, *Huelga General*. Trucks with “U.G.T” (Union General de Trabajadores) and “C.N.T.” (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo) populated the roads. Young men, some described as boys, carried guns. Several days into Helen’s trip, her group received word that in Catalonia a general strike was still on except for the gas, water, electric, and food industries, but that shots had not been fired in Barcelona yet.¹¹⁶ The Popular Front, the leftist coalition of unions, communists, radical socialists, and the moderately socialist Republican government, united for the February 1936 elections to

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 75-76.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 63.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 132.

defeat the Right, a coalition of Clericals and Monarchists led by Gil Robles.¹¹⁷ But after the elections and victory for the Popular Front, strikes and church-burnings increased, as anarchists were not happy with unemployment, the coalition, and still outraged by a brutal response to a strike of Asturias Miners in 1934. According to Buckley, the general strike and many of the church burnings were responses to Fascist violence against workers and opening fire on streets.¹¹⁸

According to one of the foremost historians of modern Spain, Paul Preston, violence was ubiquitous early in the Civil War. "Anti-communism, a reluctance to believe that officers and gentlemen could be involved in the deliberate mass slaughter of civilians and distaste for anti-clerical violence go some way to explaining a major lacuna in the historiography of the war."¹¹⁹ He observes scholarship has focused on brutality existing on two opposing sides and of equal degree. Preston, in a bid to identify the conflict as a kind of "holocaust" due to the loss of innocent life, posits that the violence was indeed different, ultimately, violence began with the rebels.¹²⁰ The Popular Front's violence of "revenge" certainly combined with ongoing military atrocities by rebels.¹²¹ Conversely, the rebels were part of "a prior plan of systematic mass murder" evidenced

¹¹⁷ See Henry Buckley, *The Life and Death of the Spanish Republic*, for a firsthand reporting on a more detailed and investigative account of the union strikes and political factions and turmoil in Spain through the 1930s.

¹¹⁸ Buckley, *Life and Death*, 199.

¹¹⁹ Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), xii.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, xiii.

first in Morocco, the initial location for organization and rebel recruitment.¹²² In this vein, he argues that leftist violence was retaliatory, and “hot-blooded and reactive” mostly by anarchist groups in discordance with the Republican government.

Margarita Nelken, Spanish writer, politician, and activist, represents these very tensions of the Popular Front in Spain. As a German and French Jewish woman born in Spain to middle-class parents, Nelken sympathized with and advocated for multiplicity of causes that also crossed borders. During the II Spanish Republic she supported landless laborers and women’s social liberation, for example in divorce reforms but was absent on the date of the women’s suffrage vote. Elected to the Cortes in 1931 as the Badajoz PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party) Deputy, although moved steadily towards the Communist party and critiqued the moderate Republican coalition and Socialists. The activist went into exile to the Soviet Union in 1935 for speaking out in support of the revolutionary workers’ strikes of 1934 and for accusing the Ministry of the Interior in Extremadura of repression. These experiences championing for the working and peasant classes radicalized her position by the eve of the Spanish Civil War. She was concerned with the Popular Front, in the coalition with the moderate bourgeois government of the II Republic that she felt insufficiently protected (or perhaps accommodated the conservative opposition) the rights of Spain’s poor and landless.¹²³ However according to Henry Buckley, the Anarchist movement and control in Barcelona was cut off and a kind of

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Paul Preston, *Doves of War: Four Women of Spain* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 323, 338.

hindrance to the overall defense, at least in the defense of Madrid and the Republican government.¹²⁴

Amidst this faction-driven violence, full-scale war arrived with the generals' coup. The empathy Rukeyser felt as a nomadic and poetic subject allowed her to see the emotional impacts and scenes of the war and differentiates herself from Buckley in the ways her emotion led to empathy and, ultimately, a desire to become involved. The poignant ways for her readers permits the transgression of history and the "objective" archive.¹²⁵ Rukeyser's poetic vision enables a universality of the emotional and destructive impact of war in various scenes. With an awareness of the raw gendering of violence where two young boys, she observed playing nearby "savagely" tormented a doll against the backdrop sounds of their own laughter and "the hammering of the gunbutts on the door" while tearing her limb from limb.¹²⁶ In her manuscript notes, Rukeyser outlines "Child motif" and lists under it how she will illustrate her impressions:

Pregnant woman on platform
Little boys in trees
Baby with soup
Fighting German children
Peasants' questions¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Buckley, *Life and Death*, 237.

¹²⁵ Several scholars critically question the place of the archive in historical writing, see Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever* (1995), María Elena Martínez, "Archives, Bodies, and Imagination," in *Radical History Review*, (2015), and Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power: the making of modern memory," *Archival Science* 2 (2002), 1-19.

¹²⁶ Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, 104.

¹²⁷ Manuscripts, Box I: 56, Folder 4, Rukeyser Papers, LOC

On the same page and underneath “Facts,” Rukeyser includes: “Olive at her most beautiful when least afraid; ‘Understanding’—Hans; New beginning after loss of fear; Discussions—Helen, Peter, Olive, America, John Reed.”¹²⁸ Rukeyser contrasts the audible assaults with children’s uninhibited ways of dealing with the surrounding violence, capturing the more ordinary and indirect cruelties of war.

The poet captured the juxtapositions between ordinary life and war: “It was the bomb that stopped the roosters. The soft, tremendous explosion shook the town, their cages, the train. Immediately a ghost of smoke...all the eastern sky was mottled brilliant.” Rukeyser was then witness to the more extreme demarcations of a society ravaged by general strike and civil warfare, with disappearing food, rotten bananas “going like gold” in such early days of conflict.¹²⁹ The poet illuminates the less sensational aspects of war with the commentaries of foreigners, including the surprise at the absence of profiteering or being price-gouged during their stay in Moncada.¹³⁰ The poet then showcased the nuances of war with somewhat disturbing, yet comical, descriptions of looting children, targeting crucifixes and religious art. She observed one group, led by the oldest of the mere age of six, with guns awkwardly in hand, and only minutes later, a haranguing mother rushing over to scold them. Rukeyser’s anecdote then transitions away from the

¹²⁸ Ibid., Rukeyser references the revolutionary journalist and hero for radical intellectuals, John Reed, a few times in her narrative, and was questioned later in her life by the FBI if she was a member of a John Reed Club.

¹²⁹ Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, 89.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 128, 129.

more eerie primitiveness of war, as Helen's friend mocked, "There's your looting...there's your Spanish violence! I hope the whole goddam train saw that."¹³¹

Not simply an observer, the female "nomadic subject" challenges or critiques dominant discourses, including cultural mores on sex. Rukeyser experienced a sexual liberation in Spain in her affair with the socialist German athlete, Otto, who appears as "Hans" in *Savage Coast*. At their first meeting there is a silent connection between the two, yet it intensified with Helen's perception of Hans' sureness about the cause of the People's Olympiad and the defense of the Republic. Meeting only earlier that day, they spend an intimate night together on the train. In explaining feminist nomadism, Braidotti argues that "feminist theory is not only a movement of critical opposition of the false universality of the subject, it is also the positive affirmation of women's desire to affirm and enact different forms of subjectivity."¹³² Braidotti further articulates the position that "feminism is neither about feminine sexuality nor about desire—it has to do with change."¹³³ Her argument involves a critical redefinition's of female subjectivity, and it is nonetheless productive to think in terms of sexuality and sexual expression. Desire is not the endpoint but a vehicle for locating one's self, and through a relationship with Otto, Rukeyser initiated a transformational path towards rebirth, sexually and politically.

Despite a postwar ideological return to more rigid sexual norms across the Western world, the feminine "nomadic subject" continued to break with tradition,

¹³¹ Ibid., 137-139.

¹³² Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 158.

¹³³ Ibid., 183.

particularly with definitions of female purity and virtue. Spain's long and complex process of constructing a national identity around Catholicism was brought to a climax under Franco following the Civil War. The dictator's re-Catholicization of the country following the secular reforms of the II Republic focused largely on women. Spanish historian Aurora Morcillo identifies and terms the brand of femininity championed by the regime as "true Catholic Womanhood," an intersection of women's sanctioned citizenship with fulfillment of traditional gender roles within the family and devout Catholic piety.¹³⁴ Rukeyser's sexual awakening inside of Spain coincided with the final years of the II Republic's gender egalitarian platform and contrasts with the narrative of cultural and religious conservatism in the country.¹³⁵ Rukeyser later married, yet was divorced within weeks, and had her son, William, outside of marriage. She remained a single mother through her life. While Rukeyser's relationship with Otto was a passionate love that made a profound impact on the poet, and she invoked his memory countless times, *Savage Coast* is not a "love story" and is indeed dedicated to, and focused on, capturing the mood and emotions of those early days of strike and war.

Together, in association with the People's Olympiad, Helen and Hans secures a truck ride to Barcelona, with Rukeyser capturing the feeling of risk already present traveling through a country at war. Just the day prior, reports in the town, according to the poet, claimed that no shots had been fired yet in the region's capital city. However,

¹³⁴ Aurora G. Morcillo, *True Catholic Womanhood Gender Ideology in Franco's Spain* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000).

¹³⁵ See Mary Nash, *Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War* (Denver: Arden Press, 1995).

while headed for the city, Helen's entourage builds a wall of bags and suitcases to protect themselves from stray fire while seated in an open-air truck. Indeed, the poet described seeing bullet-holes already puncturing building facades and lined across automobiles. Helen, just like Rukeyser, stayed at the Hotel Olimpiada in Barcelona, and while romanticizing the events and revolutionary fervor in Barcelona, maintains a reporter's caution, "The whole of Catalonia, according to the bus-driver, was in the United Front: only the church, the generals and the wealthy had rebelled."¹³⁶ Sentimentalized, the anarchist fervor struck the labor-sympathetic poet, resulting in her reporting on the workers' revolution euphoria. Rukeyser captures the early and premature declarations of victory and a contagious passion to mobilize, through radios calling citizens to action and reports of rebels roaming the countryside trying to flee towards France.¹³⁷

A Call to Foreigners, A Poetic Resistance

Foreign volunteers flocked to Spain to stop and defeat fascism in Europe. "Hans," inspired by Otto's escape from Nazi Germany and eagerness to volunteer with the International Brigades, sought freedom in Spain: "If it is only a question of Spain, we may see a free republic, everything will be ahead of us... You will not know how long it has been since I could see the future."¹³⁸ Significantly, close to forty thousand volunteers joined the International Brigades, with origins from fifty-three countries. Twenty-six

¹³⁶ Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, 61.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 133.

hundred volunteers from the U.S. joined the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.¹³⁹ A focus on the International Brigades, including the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, reveals much in the way of political ideologies, class consciousness, commitment to anti-fascism, and bravery; however, a study of volunteer combatants produces a predominately masculine and spatially and temporally narrow narrative. While Spain in the 1930s offered the potential for greater transnationalism and a unity beyond national borders, the international dynamics of the Spanish Civil War expose the limitations of masculinized politics.

As many other foreigners, Rukeyser was moved by what she witnessed and inspired to take action to support what she saw was just. When Hans had asked Helen if she wanted to stay in Barcelona, Rukeyser muses through her protagonist, “She wished again that something might be said on a less simple plane, that their words might not be all clichés and repetitions. But it was unnecessary and ruinous to hope for that, and it was only a flash; she saw down the great walk, down the stream of foreigners. No words could ever mark them down, the sun, the flags, the war. Here she was,” and she wished to stay.¹⁴⁰ Both Rukeyser and Otto felt a commitment to stay and contribute to the revolutionary cause in Catalonia; but while the German Olympiad took off for the front—and died fighting in Saragossa in 1939—officials evacuated the poet with other foreigners from Spain in 1936. Rukeyser was unsuccessful in her continued attempts to be sent back to Spain before the war’s end. Her future body of work, however, is a call to action for

¹³⁹ Faber, *Anglo-American Hispanists*, 4.

¹⁴⁰ Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, 139.

US citizens and demonstrate how the nomad's poetic style holds greater possibility for the transnational ideal of cooperation across boundaries. (Figure 4)



Figure 4: Popular Front march, Photograph by Muriel Rukeyser, Barcelona, 1936. Rukeyser took this photograph of men with fists raised, marching in solidarity with the Popular Front in Spain. Library of Congress. Courtesy of William L. Rukeyser.

Although Spanish and foreign women actively discussed and participated in the Spanish Civil War, and the lives of high-profile women such as Gerda Taro and Kati Horna are just recently gaining attention by historians, the general literature analyzing international volunteers in Spain is still a highly masculine one. A reading of foreign women's works on the Spanish Civil War contributes to the deconstruction of some mythologies formed around Spain and the Western Left in 1930s Europe. Further, the poetic and emotional works of non-Spanish women may challenge the characterization of the foreign intellectual Left as heroes of the working class in Spain to justify involvement in war. Paul Preston demonstrates how war correspondents fully came of age in Spain,

how crossing the Pyrenees for most foreign journalists and writers altered their whole perspective and made them not just observers but participants. Writers and volunteers believed adamantly that what they fought for and supported in Spain was right and just. Still, the mass suffering and violence of modern warfare between Spaniards and subsequent defeat of the Popular Front left many foreigners feeling that the conflict was a personal one. Indeed, the romanticism and mythology of Spain altered foreign volunteers and intellectuals' realities and shaped a generation of male writers and activists, but many women, as well.

Adam Hochschild researched US volunteers in Spain, two of which were Lois Orr and her husband Charles. Lois was nineteen years old when the couple arrived in Spain in the fall of 1936 from honeymooning in Europe. The two, like Rukeyser, already had leftist leanings and loved Barcelona and reflected on it in a romanticized way for its dedication to revolution and anarchism. In turn, the travelers felt welcome: "Then they reached Barcelona at last, a big banner at the railway station read WELCOME FOREIGN COMRADES."¹⁴¹ Lois referred to the moment in Barcelona as an "anarchist millennium" and wrote "about the life-changing months she spent in Spain" in an unpublished memoir.¹⁴² "As a proper internationalist radical, however, Lois was shocked that for many Catalans, region mattered more than class." She remarks, "This spirit of nationalism has no place in a workers' world, of course."¹⁴³ This demonstrates how

¹⁴¹ Adam Hochschild, *Spain in Our Hearts: Americans in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016) 51.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 57.

simplistically she viewed Spanish political events and society during this time. Like Lois and her husband, and many of the foreigners in Spain, Rukeyser's days were surrounded by other foreigners, and to a lesser extent, Spaniards. For the poet, the experience was a transnational one in many senses; from the objective of the People's Olympiad to the Popular Front and worker-led revolution in Barcelona with appeals for foreign aid, the Spanish Civil War offered an antidote to nationalism and well-defined national identities.

Rukeyser's energetic and passionate response to the events in Spain certainly mirrored other intellectual's idealization of leftist politics and potential for transnational solidarity. Michele Haapamaki interrogates the romanization of the masculine literati and volunteers in Spain, "The fact that Spain was hardly a "Poet's War," and that at least 80 percent of British volunteers were working class, does not diminish the Spanish Civil War as an event of primary importance to leftist intellectuals seeking to legitimate their political credibility."¹⁴⁴ Literary historians, for Haapamaki, were the "builders of this entrenched myth," constructing "the narrative of the Just War, which has served as a rich field for recent historians to explore issues of leftist politics, culture, masculinity, and heroism." Looking to women's writings adds a needed dimension to myth-busting and leftist literary political legitimacy that cuts down the gendered assumption that participation in the "Just War" was a heroically masculine memory.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Haapamaki, "Writers in Arms," 33-52.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

Despite many foreigners' holding idealized and often simplistic visions of a unified fight for justice in Spain, the II Republic made several pleas for international help. A poster, "Defend the Republic: write to your friends all over the world," printed by the *Comissariat de Propaganda de la Generalitat de Catalunya*, presented an image showing a hand inserting a letter into a postbox.¹⁴⁶ The poster demonstrates the support and desire for international aid on the side of the Republic early in the Civil War. A similar poster printed by the *Ministerio de Propaganda* in Madrid. The image shows a white dove flying above the globe with a letter marked "España" with contributors from around the world and a compass shown in the corner.¹⁴⁷ The dove is a symbol of peace and demonstrates the support and desire for international aid on the side of the Republic and for preservation of peace. At the end of 1936, about six months after the Nationalists' coup, the Spanish government appealed to the League of Nations for a breach of the Non-Interventionist Pact and aid from the democratic nations due to the fact "that the capital of a State Member of the League has been reduced to ruins, and that the women and children of this capital have been butchered in hundreds by bombing planes."¹⁴⁸ By way of air raids and machine guns on the ground, civilian casualties populated the war, and while such violence galvanized Rukeyser's transnationalism, the leading democracies in

¹⁴⁶ "Defensa la República : escriu als teus amics de tot el mon" (Barcelona: *Comissariat de Propaganda de la Generalitat de Catalunya*, 1936), Wolfsonian Archives, Florida International University Library (FIU).

¹⁴⁷ "Defiende a la República : escribe a tus amigos de todo el mundo" (Madrid : *Ministerio de Propaganda*, ca. 1937) (Valencia : Lit. S. Dura Socializada U.G.T.-C.N.T.) Wolfsonian Archives, FIU.

¹⁴⁸ "Appeal by the Spanish Government to the League of Nations, 11 December 1936," — 95th Session of the Council of the League of Nations, Second Meeting 11 December 1936, found in, Alun Kenwood, ed., *The Spanish Civil War: A Cultural and Historical Reader* (Providence Oxford: Berg Publishers, Inc., 1993), 65.

the west maintained a detached and national agenda. Their interests in Non-Intervention allowed for increased geopolitical conflict and growingly vocal expressions of nationalism through the appeasement of Germany and Italy that permitted their involvement on behalf of Nationalist Spain.

Spanish women petitioned for foreign action and support for the II Republic, as well. Isabel de Palencia, writer and diplomat, was acting foreign minister for the II Republic in Sweden and had been delegate for The Association of Spanish Women, that she was vice-chairman, at the Congress of the International Suffrage Alliance. Still a member of the Socialist Party and acting as delegate for the Republican government, she traveled to Edinburgh (half Scottish herself) in October of 1936 to deliver a speech against Non-Intervention.¹⁴⁹ Groups committed to revolutionary change, whether for women's status in society or workers' rights, gazed toward Spain as the European battlefield for freedom.

Marginalized groups sympathized with the II Republic and its defense against the coup and fascism, including many European and American Jews.¹⁵⁰ In a transnational study of Jewish antifascist solidarity, Raanan Rein highlights that 38 percent of US volunteers in the Spanish Civil War were Jewish, when the group only comprised four

¹⁴⁹ Isabel de Palencia, *I Must Have Liberty* (New York: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1940) and Buckley, *Life and Death*, 236, 237. See also Fagen, *Exiles and Citizens*.

¹⁵⁰ In addition to Jewish Americans, African Americans who volunteered in the International Brigades in Spain also viewed the conflict as part of a larger struggle against fascism and for civil rights. Many African Americans, particularly those involved in leftist politics during the 1920s and 1930s, felt compelled to take action when Mussolini invaded Ethiopia. Unable to affect change there, Spain became the place in which action could be taken. Many volunteers who experienced pervasive racism in the U.S., felt that the II Republic stood for freedoms regardless of one's color, see *Invisible Heroes*, Domingo and Torrent (2014).

percent of the general population in the U.S.¹⁵¹ While many scholars have written on Jewish subjectivity as particular and marginal, lending to a universalism of politics, Naomi Seidman clarifies the theories put forth by Isaac Deutscher and Hannah Arendt of Jewish political identity. In repeated historical moments of social injustice, we often see a heightened sympathy and compelling feeling to action among Jews. Rein argues for the Spanish Civil War:

Many of these volunteers held internationalist views, and the idea of emphasizing their Jewish identity was alien to them. But in fact—as is reflected, for example, in the letters they sent from the Spanish trenches to their friends and relatives or in their memoirs—they also followed the Jewish mandate of *tikkun olam*, a Hebrew phrase meaning “repairing the world,” or showing responsibility for healing and transforming it. Many volunteers attempted to block, with their own bodies if need be, the Nazi and Fascist wave sweeping across Europe, thus defending both universal and Jewish causes.¹⁵²

Perhaps Rukeyser’s Jewishness and middle-class status—her father was German Jewish and worked in real estate contracting, at one point downsized the family due to financial troubles following involuntary bankruptcy—heightened her ability to empathize with the working-class.¹⁵³ She surely had been attuned to workers’ issues—in 1933 investigating the Gauley Bridge drillers’ contraction of silicosis and publishing often with *New Masses* and other communist-supporting or left-leaning periodicals. As early as

¹⁵¹ Raanan Rein, “Tikkun Olam and Transnational Solidarity: Jewish Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War,” *Contemporary Judaism and Politics*, pp. 207-230. Accessed January 26, 2020 via Academia.edu. Rein’s statistics come from Martin Sugarman, *Against Fascism—Jews who served in The International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War*, p. 2, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/spanjews.pdf>

¹⁵² Rein, “Tikkun Olam,” 207.

¹⁵³ FBI, Muriel Rukeyser.

Theory of Flight Rukeyser confronts her Jewishness, and she continues to grapple with Jewish identity in the twentieth century in later works. Riesenfeld, Rukeyser, Nelken and other American and European Jews found the fight against oppression in Spain to be part of the struggle against Nazism and anti-Semitism.¹⁵⁴

Most Jewish volunteers and writers in Spain did not organize along their Jewish subjectivity; however, we must consider the significance of the Jewish experience and situate it within the historical revolutionary Left. Here it is useful to consider Naomi Seidman's Jewish "politics of vicarious identity" and Deutscher calls the "non-Jewish Jews" people perpetually "on the sidelines of various European cultures...living on the margins of Christian society."¹⁵⁵ This marginality, according to Deutscher affords an expanded perspective, an "epistemological advantage, the ability to view systems of belief with a skepticism history had made a Jewish characteristic."¹⁵⁶ The inability to "reconcile" or assimilate wholly forces a universal view and ability to relate outside

¹⁵⁴ For Jews in the Spanish Civil War, see Peter N. Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994) and Adam Hochschild, *Spain in Our Hearts: Americans in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016). For African American volunteers in Spain, see *Invisible Heroes: African Americans in the Spanish Civil War*, directed by Alfonso Domingo and Jordi Torrent (2014). American women are documented in the Spanish Civil War in the film *Into the Fire: American Women in the Spanish Civil War*, directed by Julia Newman (First Run Features, 2007). The documentary shares the stories of 16 of the 80 women who joined as nurses, writers, and journalists. For Jewish political identity see Naomi Seidman, "Fag-Hags and Bu-Jews: Toward a (Jewish) Politics of Vicarious Identity," in *Insiders/Outsider: American Jews and Multiculturalism*, ed. David Biale, Michael Galchinsky, and Susannah Heschel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 254-268, for further analysis. See Hannah Arendt, "We Refugees," *Menorah Journal* 31, No. 1 (January 1943), pp. 69-77 and *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age* (New York: Grove Press, 1978) and Isaac Deutscher, "The Non-Jewish Jew" in the *Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays*, Tamara Deutscher, ed. (New York: Hill and Wang and Oxford University Press, 1968).

¹⁵⁵ Seidman, "Fag-hags," 255, 256.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

narrow confines, much like the nomadic subject *vicariously* taking up the politics of another.¹⁵⁷

Race, as well as religion, inspired many anti-fascist volunteers' activism outside the U.S. African American woman Salaria Kea (1917-1990) alleged that she had not been particularly political before Spain, but witnessing what was happening to German and European Jews in the 1930s sparked her desire to fight fascism on any front. She likened this violence and discrimination abroad to the Ku Klux Klan in the U.S. and sympathized more broadly with people facing injustice. She attended a meeting of diverse foreigners in New York to help the II Republic and was impassioned to sign up to go to Spain as a nurse in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.¹⁵⁸ Other African American volunteers connected the prosecution of Jews in Europe, Italy's invasion of Ethiopia—the one African nation that had been free of colonial denomination—to the Nationalist coup in Spain backed by international Nazi-fascism.¹⁵⁹ Taken together, we might see the Spanish Civil War as a critical example in which Jewish, nomadic identity, whether vocalized or quietly present, mobilized various women around a universal struggle against oppression and social injustice.

Because of the U.S.'s official Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War, volunteer military service as well as fundraising and aid work became one of the most

¹⁵⁷ Seidman, "Fag-hags and Bu-Jews" 257-258.

¹⁵⁸ *Into the Fire*, Newman.

¹⁵⁹ *Invisible Heroes*, Domingo and Torrent (2014).

important activities by Americans. Due to the nature of the work, it went largely under the radar of government policy.¹⁶⁰ Eric R. Smith discusses aid relief organizations to uncover the critical role of women in this effort, while examining the nature of aid work and the popular representation of Spain as victim and in feminine terms. These gendered frameworks made the efforts a space in which women could advance. Despite continued hierarchies in such organizations, excluding women from top leadership positions, their work was feminist in nature. Smith points out that such philanthropic work was representative of the feminism of the era, which was situated between the two larger waves of women's movements. Feminism of the 1930s was more individual than collective and appeals to maternity played a key factor in mobilization. Aid to Spanish women and children and medical and care efforts allowed for women to work, and in some areas of relief campaigns, women comprised most of the membership and had greater access to leadership in the relief campaigns.¹⁶¹

In some cases, it was women who initiated and led relief and aid efforts. Nancy MacDonald (1910-1996) formed the Spanish Refugee Aid (SRA) in 1953, after years of soliciting donations for exiles of the Spanish Civil War in France.¹⁶² (Figure 5) The

¹⁶⁰ Twenty-six nations met in London in September of 1936, the International Supervisory Committee on Non-Intervention in Spain. For Buckley, this had definite consequences for the defeat of Spanish Republic and the fate of Europe, "...in this Spanish tragedy is wrapped the whole collapse of our Western Democracy and, I am afraid, it marks the opening scene to a major tragedy in which our British Empire will be involved. The people of Spain called to Democracy and received no answer." Buckley, *Life and Death*, 199, 236.

¹⁶¹ Eric R. Smith, "American Women and Anti-Fascism in the Spanish Republican Relief Campaigns, 1936-1939," In *The Spanish Civil War: Exhuming a Buried Past*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013).

¹⁶² Nancy MacDonald came from a wealthy American family and took up the cause of European refugees, until her retirement in 1983. She continued her work noting the prolonged dire situation for the Spanish exiles in France, with little opportunity for solid paying jobs, high medical issues, little in the way of unemployment and social welfare benefits. Box I:56, Folder 5, Spanish Refugee Aid, 1953-1978, Muriel

organization's sponsors consisted of notable figures including Hannah Arendt and Mrs. George Orwell, and Mexico's former president Lázaro Cárdenas served as honorary chair for several of the initial years. MacDonald worked for decades to find Spanish refugees living in France sponsors to send needed funds for food, medicine and medical treatment, sewing machines, and basic necessities. She included status updates and biographies of sponsored exiles, many of which Rukeyser saved in her SRA papers, and the founder explained her mission for the project: "There is something humanly unsatisfying about writing out a check for some big relief agency. The essence of our project is that you, personally, send off regular packages to a specific family abroad, and enter into correspondence with them on a friend-to-friend basis."¹⁶³ In this pamphlet and letter to potential contributors, MacDonald continued writing on the "moral and psychological lift" that comes from such personal and cultural exchange.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, Rukeyser continued her financial support of the SRA with monthly or quarterly sponsorship for exiles in France through her death in 1978.¹⁶⁵

Rukeyser Papers, LOC. See also Nancy MacDonald, *Homage to the Spanish Exiles: Voices from the Spanish Civil War* (New York, NY: Insight Books, 1987). For a closer examination of the exodus from Spain, see Abdón Mateos Lopez, ed. *¡Ay de los vencidos! El exilio y los países de acogida* (Madrid: Universidad Nacional Educación a Distancia, 2008). In particular, Immaculada Colomina Limonero analyzes childhood and generational impact of exile in "La realidad del mito. Españoles en la Unión Soviética, años 1939-1941," in *¡Ay de los vencidos!* and "The American Opportunity. Estudio del libro recopilación de memorias Solos en América" in *El exilio republicano de 1939 y la segunda generación*, Manuel Aznar Soler and José Ramón López García, Eds. (Barcelona: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2011) 263-266. For more on humanitarian aid for women and child refugees of the Spanish Civil War, see Immaculada Colomina Limonero, "Fuera de los campos. Acciones de ayuda humanitaria para las mujeres españolas refugiadas en Francia" in *Haciendo frente al horror de la guerra con la solidaridad: La maternidad suiza de Elna (1939-1944)* (Madrid: Universidad Nacional Educación a Distancia, 2013).

¹⁶³ Spanish Refugee Aid, 1953-1978, Box I:56, Folder 5, Rukeyser Papers, LOC.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.



Figure 5: Child refugees, Spanish Civil War, Postcard. Families with children were displaced during the Civil War. Catalonia July 1938. AMERO_POSTALES_2100_R. *España. Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte. Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica.*

US women's domestic relief work for the II Republic stretched beyond conventional roles in fundraising or medical aid. Smith argues that women's work included the material aid, but also entailed pushing a political consciousness that involved pressuring Congress to overturn laws prohibiting Spain from acquiring aid and defense materials it needed. "Spanish aid as it proceeded became increasingly 'feminine' - if not feminist- in its goals and intentions so that the aid movement's intended goals served a feminist agenda while advancing a post-gender political order."¹⁶⁶ Constance Kyle, an US social worker who spent a year in Spain during the Civil War, supervised relief homes that cared for roughly six hundred Spanish children. Upon returning to the United States, she helped the New Spanish Youth Delegation and the Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy in a San Francisco conference and fundraising event, titled

¹⁶⁶ Smith, "American Women and Anti-Fascism," 20, 21.

“Inside Story of Spain: Coming Direct from the Battlefields of Spain.”¹⁶⁷ (Figure 6) As a firsthand witness, Kyle spoke to audiences on the need for support towards the Spanish Republican cause.

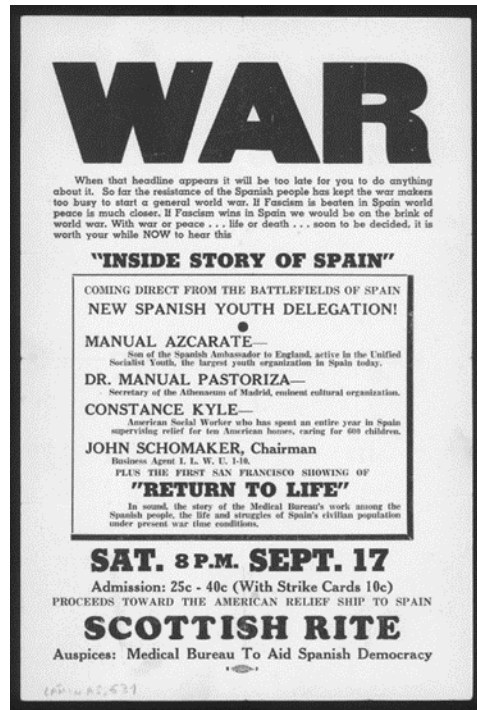


Figure 6: Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy, Pamphlet. PS_LAMINAS_0631. *España. Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte. Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica.*

Muriel Rukeyser’s story of her life-changing experience and impassioned move to action rings true of many antifascist women inside and outside of Spain. Rukeyser’s account is both an emotional response to early days of war and collectivizing in Barcelona, as well as provides collaboration with the leading first-hand witness account but from an American woman’s perspective. From a historical point of view, we can see

¹⁶⁷ Pamphlets, ES.37274.CDMH/10.54/LAMINAS, 631, Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy, Centro documental de la memoria histórica, Salamanca, Spain.

the array of ways women engaged in the defense of Spain for the Republican effort, from writing to fundraising from abroad. Rukeyser's life trajectory as a "nomadic subject" is also not unlike Spanish women on the Left. Margarita Nelken's activism was not confined to one issue, nor to the conflict in Spain. These women, like so many other passionate observers, saw the Spanish Civil War as a symptom of the larger struggle against Nazi-fascism throughout the continent, as well as the place in which appeasement and Non-Intervention had absolute and destructive consequences for Spain and Europe. For the women not on the frontlines of the Spanish Civil War, creative and emotional responses to the war become critical texts for understanding antifascist activism in all of the ways it was experienced. As Kennedy-Epstein reflects on Rukeyser's archived papers and writings, they are "materials for developing her 'poetry of witness,' one meant to move the reader towards actions."¹⁶⁸ Indeed, Rukeyser heeds the call by Catalan leaders to return home and share the experiences of the Spanish people with "Barcelona, 1936," a documentary essay published in *Life and Letters Today* shortly after her return. She expanded this witness report shortly thereafter into *Savage Coast*. Although not in Spain very long, Rukeyser's subsequent career shows even greater commitment to the activism that fully developed in Spain. She protested the U.S. barriers to Spanish acquisition of defense supplies and published on Spain repeatedly.

Rukeyser was able to extract larger, universal meanings and imperatives in the specific conflicts she witnessed and after leaving Spain felt that poetry was the genre that could most acutely resist injustice. Her explanation of the "fear of poetry" allows readers

¹⁶⁸ Rowena Kennedy-Epstein, Editor, "Barcelona, 1936" & Selections from the Spanish Civil War Archive," Muriel Rukeyser, *Lost and Found: The Cuny Poetics Document Initiative*, 5.

to understand her conceptualization of the role of poetry in democracy and social change. For the American, poetry can “confront the meanings of the war against fascism” “by bringing people together” because of its demand for “full consciousness on the part of the writer, and full response on the part of the witness/reader to the truths of feeling.”¹⁶⁹ Rukeyser had always had a political consciousness. However, her “moment of proof” or “genuine exchange” of the relationship between poetry and democracy fully developed during the Spanish Civil War.¹⁷⁰ For the poet, war reporting, the novel, and poetry did not have to separate; in fact, *Savage Coast* fluidly integrates them all. Capturing the emotion of poetic vision, the personal narratives of novel, and the relative fairness of the observer and journalist balanced with her own sympathies, Rukeyser produced a text full of the complexity of the human experience. Always dismantling boundaries, socially, politically, and in her crossing genres, *The Life of Poetry*, which began to develop in the immediate years following the II Republic’s defeat, may be viewed as an assertion that a life with poetry and imagination, allowing oneself to see the full human experience through emotional connection, can help bring about unity, and therefore, peace. “The work that a poem does is a transfer of human energy, and I think human energy may be defined as consciousness, the capacity to make change in existing conditions.”¹⁷¹

For Rukeyser, poetry is the word’s resistance to authoritarianism, a genre that enables a more emotional and truthful recanting of lived experiences of war and trauma.

¹⁶⁹ Rukeyser, *Life of Poetry*, xv.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, xv.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, xi.

However, it also moved the US poet to action and to instigate others to act. During her university studies at Vassar, Rukeyser's perspective on Spain had been partly shaped by a lecture given by the Spanish poet, Federico García Lorca in January 1930.¹⁷² The US poet's notes include a discussion of Lorca's explication of the prominent young generation of poets and writers, known now as the *Generation of '27*, and the modernist movement to redefine Spanish national and regional cultural and character.¹⁷³ This set the stage for Rukeyser's romanticized but keenly interested attitude about Spain when she was dispatched to cover the People's Olympiad. Her practical education at the outbreak of war would shape her writings and activities towards sympathy and activism for the Spanish Loyalist cause.

Transnationalism and internationalism played significant roles in assessing foreign participation and influence in the Spanish Civil War. The unity of the People's Olympiad and worker revolution in Catalonia inspired Rukeyser's hope and sentiment of the transnational potential for resisting global fascism. At the same time, official foreign aid to the II Republic and the foreign brigades were largely driven by political party or union identification and membership. Most significantly, the Soviet-led Communist International (Comintern) has been challenged by historians for creating more division and hostility within the Spanish Left towards the end of the war.¹⁷⁴ Internationally minded communism in Spain was still institutionalized by party affiliation even if not by

¹⁷² Notes, Box I: 56, Folder 4, Spain, Rukeyser Papers, LOC.

¹⁷³ See Felipe Díaz Pardo, *Breve historia de la Generación del 27* (Chicago: Ediciones Nowtilus, 2019).

¹⁷⁴ Remi Skoutelsky, *Novedad en el frente: Las brigadas internacionales en la guerra civil* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 2006).

national borders. Volunteers from the U.S. in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade often discussed their political affiliations before 1936 as having a significant impact on their departure to Spain.¹⁷⁵ Ultimately, masculinized politics still predominated. For artists, writers, and journalists, politics could hold less weight on their writings and perspectives of the conflict, especially when studying foreign women.

The Spanish Civil War became one of the most literary of wars, with “‘poets exploding like bombs,’ and Rukeyser was very much a part of this literary production.”¹⁷⁶ The personal transformation of Rukeyser and Riesenfeld and the focus of their works on the Spanish Civil War demonstrates how the period’s literary idealization of Spain was fertile grounds for activism but was not an exclusively masculine phenomenon. The conflict united left-leaning activists and intellectuals who sympathized with the II Republic’s democratically elected government. This translated into international support for the Popular Front and perhaps the subsequent voluntarism as the war’s narrative became a legendary fight against fascism more broadly. The abundance of analytical work on literature, film, and art joins the larger narrative of foreign participation in the Spanish Civil War as male dominated. Michele Haapamaki interrogates the romanization within masculinity, “The fact that Spain was hardly a “Poet’s War,” and that at least 80 percent of British volunteers were working class, does not diminish the Spanish Civil War as an event of primary importance to leftist intellectuals seeking to legitimate their political credibility.” Literary historians, for Haapamaki, were the “builders of this

¹⁷⁵ *Invisible Heroes*, Domingo and Torrent (2014).

¹⁷⁶ Kennedy-Epstein in Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, xii.

entrenched myth,” constructing “the narrative of the Just War, which has served as a rich field for recent historians to explore issues of leftist politics, culture, masculinity, and heroism.”

Looking to women’s writings adds a needed dimension to the “myth-building” and leftist literary political legitimacy that cuts down the gendered assumption of participation in the “Just War” as a heroically masculine memory.¹⁷⁷ (Figure 7) While female journalists and war correspondents in Spain, like Gerda Taro and Martha Gellhorn, are gaining attention in the historical record, the poet and artist employ a skill of imaginatively and emotionally elevating a cause. Braidotti’s conceptualization of the nomadic subject is an inherently feminine one. The historical condition of ‘woman’ as the perpetual “other” creates her nomadism, and Braidotti argues difference, and specifically sex difference, is concept rooted in fascism’s hierarchal, exclusionary, and binary ways of thinking.

In the European history of philosophy, “difference” is a central concept insofar as Western thought has *always* functioned by dualistic oppositions, which create subcategories of otherness, or “difference-from.” Because in this history, “difference” has been predicated on relations of domination and exclusion, to be “different-from” came to mean to be “less than,” to be worth less than. Difference has been colonized by power relations that reduce it to inferiority, as Simone de Beauvoir pertinently put it in *The Second Sex*.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Haapamaki, “Writers in Arms,” 33. See also James K. Hopkins, *Into the Heart of the Fire: The British in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), Paul Preston, *We Saw Spain Die: Foreign Correspondents in the Spanish Civil War* (Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), Adam Hochschild, *Spain in Our Hearts: Americans in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016), and Sebastiaan Faber, *Anglo-American Hispanists and the Spanish Civil War: Hispanophilia, Commitment, and Discipline* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

¹⁷⁸ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 147.

The essentialism and “lethal connotations” built by Western male thinkers make it imperative for feminist scholars to acknowledge this “sex difference” and the long process of linking “subjectivity and masculinity.” The nomadic, feminist reconceptualization is necessary in order to disrupt “classical subjectivity” for its “potential forms of empowerment for women.”¹⁷⁹ While male poets certainly draw on emotion, and Buckley as a correspondent sympathized with Spaniards, a feminine or feminist perspective has the potential to launch a less hierarchal subjectivity, one that potentially can de-“other” more effectively and empathetically, than a masculine subjectivity.



Figure 7: Pro-Republican foreign volunteer with rifle, Barcelona, 1936. Muriel Rukeyser Papers, People’s Olympiad, Box I: 56, Folder 1, Library of Congress. Courtesy of William L. Rukeyser.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 149.

A reading of foreign women's works on the Spanish Civil War contributes to the deconstruction of some mythologies formed around Spain and the Western Left in 1930s Europe. Preston demonstrates how war correspondents fully came of age in Spain, how crossing the Pyrenees for most foreign journalists and writers altered their whole perspective and made them not just observers but participants. Writers and volunteers believed so adamantly that what they fought for and supported in Spain was right and just, so much so that they became more fervent activists. Still, the mass suffering and violence of modern warfare between Spaniards and subsequent defeat of the Popular Front left many foreigners feeling that the conflict was a personal one. Riesenfeld and Rukeyser offered readers a sense of their own struggles; they connected with the war raging outside. Riesenfeld and Rukeyser belong to the class of foreigners that Preston positions in *We Saw Spain Die*.¹⁸⁰ By reviving their memories, we can conceptualize these women as representative of the larger antifascist movement and culture of the 1930s and better complete the picture of US involvement in the Spanish Civil War, adding a vision of art as *nomadic* activism.

One of Rukeyser's most significant collections, *The Life of Poetry*, demonstrates an intensified commitment to the uses of poetry in resistance and the critical impact of the Spanish Civil War on her consciousness of social justice. According to Jane Cooper, longtime friend of the poet and author of the foreword to the 1996 reprint, *The Life of Poetry* was a product of lectures given at Vassar College in 1940 combined with a series

¹⁸⁰ Paul Preston, *We Saw Spain Die: Foreign Correspondents in the Spanish Civil War* (Skyhorse Publishing, 2009).

of other talks she gave through the World War II period.¹⁸¹ It is significant to note the context: the Spanish Civil War ended in 1939 with the defeat of the Popular Front, and war now raged throughout the rest of Europe. The aftermath was more violence with Hitler's aggressions towards European Jews, Roma, and homosexuals, and the stirrings of US Cold War anti-Communism were on the rise. Against this backdrop, *The Life of Poetry* opens with Rukeyser's memory of departing from Spain in the early days of the Civil War: "In time of crisis, we summon up our strength. Then, if we are lucky, we are able to call every resource, every forgotten image that can leap to our quickening, every memory that can make us know our power. And this luck is more than it seems to be: it depends on the long preparation of the self to be used."¹⁸² Rukeyser acknowledged the power her memories of witnessing war in Spain would have on her moving forward, applying the learned lessons into a commitment towards collective activism and halting future injustices and violence. This commitment to activism was not widespread enough to avoid the atrocities of World War II.

Rukeyser recalls her and the other evacuated foreigners being tasked with the responsibility by Spaniards to "go home: tell your peoples what you have seen."¹⁸³ Rukeyser's reader has a sense that the poet and those foreign witnesses to the anti-fascist struggle in Spain were in a sense now refugees, even while half a million Spaniards would indeed become actual political exiles within three years. Foreigners had a keen

¹⁸¹ Muriel Rukeyser, *The Life of Poetry*, foreword by Jane Cooper (Ashfield, Massachusetts: Paris Press, 1996), xv.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 2, and Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*.

ability to be messengers, as “outsiders,” with a “realization [that] was fresh and young, we had seen the parts of our lives in a new arrangement... I began to say what I believe.”¹⁸⁴ In *The Life of Poetry* (a blend of self-exploration, activism, and poetry), Rukeyser explores this fear while defending her view of the potential role of poetry for building democracy and social change. Part One of Rukeyser’s *The Life of Poetry* is appropriately titled, “The Resistances.” Rukeyser had begun using poetry as a language of sociopolitical critique and it was indeed a powerful language of resistance and historical reflection for her. Rukeyser led courses on poetry at the California Labor School in 1945 entitled “Poetry and the People.” Topics included “The Fear of Poetry” “Poetry of Resistance” “Poetry of Russia, China, and Latin America” “Poetry and Belief” and “The Background of Poetry.”

Rukeyser’s teaching position occurred while the poet was under surveillance by the FBI, who included in their report that these seminars evidenced Rukeyser’s suspicious activity. Rukeyser’s argument of the “fear of poetry” is reinforced by the FBI’s inquiry, a report that will be further analyzed in Chapter three.¹⁸⁵ The theories of María Zambrano can be employed to illuminate how women artists like Rukeyser challenged notions of absolute subjectivity while simultaneously connected to the embodied historical circumstance of the Spanish and European conflict. María Zambrano’s “exile ontology” challenges the political consequences of “egocentric confinement and inability to relate to the other,” as positivist subjectivity and overreliance on reason fed “the

¹⁸⁴ Rukeyser, *Life of Poetry*, 3.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

violent outbursts in the twentieth-century European wars.”¹⁸⁶ Rukeyser’s nomadic subjectivity supported her empathy for the Republican, antifascist cause abroad and she used her poetic style to communicate her ideologies and position to a broader US public.

“Mediterranean” is the American’s poetic ode to Spain and the Spanish people, which was published in 1938 as a pamphlet for the Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy, which she worked with upon her return to the U.S. This poem and an earlier publication in 1937 in *New Masses* constituted part of Rukeyser’s vigorous attempt to educate and impassion the US public about the Spanish Civil War. Kennedy-Epstein characterizes the poet as continuously “publicizing, fundraising and advocating for the Loyalist cause.”¹⁸⁷ The poem in *New Masses* is premised with, “The sights and sounds of the first days of the Spanish war stamp on the poet’s mind more than visual-aural impression.”¹⁸⁸ Rukeyser calls her and the foreigners’ evacuation an exile into the sea, “goodbye into exile.” Due to her awakening in Spain, Rukeyser symbolically adopts the exilic title. Snippets of memories of war and resistance dot the poem, “The truckride to the city, barricades, bricks pried at corners, rifle-shot in street, car-burning, bombs, blank warnings, fists up, guns busy sniping, the torn walls, towers of smoke.” The collage of images that stuck with the poet resemble the later reporting of Janet Riesenfeld, including shortage of essential consumption, violence against ordinary citizens, and the makeshift ways the Popular Front regiments were dispatched to the front or defended their cities:

¹⁸⁶ Karolina Enquist Källgren, *María Zambrano’s Ontology of Exile: Expressive Subjectivity* (Palgrave, 2019), 11.

¹⁸⁷ Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, xii.

¹⁸⁸ Rukeyser, “Mediterranean” in *New Masses*, Muriel Rukeyser Papers, Box I:42 Folder 4, LOC.

“girl’s hand with gun, food failing, water failing...the breadline shelled, the yacht club arsenal...a time used to perfect weapons.”¹⁸⁹

Of the international volunteers in Spain, Rukeyser writes in *New Masses*, “I saw first of those faces going home into war / the brave man, Otto Boch, the German exile, knowing he quieted tourists during machine-gun battle, he kept his life straight as a single issue.”¹⁹⁰ While she respected his commitment immensely, unlike Boch’s more masculine activism, Rukeyser’s evolved into a feminine and *multiple* subjectivity. Additionally, the poet blends reporting of what she hears of the Popular Front and the amateur militarism or lack of arms, “Machine gun marks the war. Answered unarmed, charged the Embarcadero, met those guns. And charging through the province, joined that army. Boys from the hills, the unmatched guns, the clumsy armored cars. Drilled in the bullring. Radio cries: To Saragossa! And this boat.”¹⁹¹

In her poem, “Mediterranean,” about the Spanish Civil War, Rukeyser, as a Jewish American, invokes connections of religious persecution, the Jewish European past, and the construction of divisions: “Mountains whose slope divides / one race, old insurrections, Narbo, now moves at that colored beach.” She recalls scenes from the war of the destruction of religious symbols, but a particular successful plea to not burn a church: “They smashed only the image / madness and persecution.” Rukeyser more generally muses about the Mediterranean, Spain, and their historical significance in the

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

present: “Saw where Columbus rides...discovery, turn back, explore a new-found Spain...saw our parades ended.” Like Rukeyser’s poetic quote that opens this chapter, Spain “again” became a beating “organ” of Europe, central to European and Atlantic events, culture, and politics. But the Spain to be defended now was one attempting to change from the conquest of earlier centuries, it was a Spain that could be a beacon of social justice. She identified the sea as the “frontier of Europe...a field of power / touching desirable coasts...the moving water maintains its boundaries, layer on layer, Troy-seven civilized worlds, Egypt, Greece, Rome, jewel Jerusalem, giant feudal Spain, giant England, this last war.”¹⁹² Where surveys of European history tend to differentiate Northern Europe from Southern Europe, or in the twentieth century in particular, designate a few sentences to Spain or recast it to the periphery altogether, Rukeyser centers Spain “again” within a link across time and space in the hopes of writing a new historical chapter.

Concluding her homage to the Spanish people and their struggle, Rukeyser recalls in “Mediterranean” a speech by the People’s Olympiad Barcelona organizer urging the international community that arrived for the games to action. The speaker rallies the foreigners that they “...came for games, you stay for victory; foreign? your job is: go tell your countries what you saw in Spain.”¹⁹³ This plea and invitation to involve oneself resonated immensely with Rukeyser; many of the athletes, the organizers and politicians within Spain, and Rukeyser acknowledged the international dynamic of the conflict.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

Over the last decade, the importance of poetry to historical understanding has become more accepted with the expansion of transdisciplinary studies and the rise of the history of emotions.¹⁹⁴ In the 1930s, Rukeyser was prescient about the place of poetry: “The poem is the fact, memory falls under.”¹⁹⁵ In writing for the foreign observers and sympathizers, she weaves her reflection of the wider significance of the emotional and practical experiences gained during the Spanish Civil War:

If we had stayed in our world / between the table and the desk / between the town
and the suburb / slowly disintegration / male and female / If we had lived in our
cities / sixty years might not prove / the power of this week / the overthrown past
/ tourist and refugee.¹⁹⁶

Rukeyser poignantly credits the ability to move outside binary systems and subjectivities (including gender) and to be transient, contributing to the empathy demonstrated towards Republican Spain.

Once the fanatic image shown, enemy to enemy, past and historic peace wear
thin; hypocrite sovereignties go down / before this war the age must
win...Barcelona everywhere, Spain everywhere...The picture at our eyes, past
memory, poems, to carry and spread and daily justify....Exile and refugee, we
land, we take nothing negotiable out of the new world; we believe, we remember,
we saw. Mediterranean gave / image and peace, tideless for memory...For that
beginning / make of us each / a continent and inner sea / Atlantis buried outside /
to be won.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ See Jan Plamper, “The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns,” *History and Theory* 49 (May 2010): 237-265, Marcus Rediker, “The Poetics of History from Below,” *Perspectives on History*, (Sept. 2010).

¹⁹⁵ Rukeyser, “Mediterranean” in *New Masses*, Muriel Rukeyser Papers, Box I:42 Folder 4, LOC

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

With “Spain everywhere” and armed with their past observations, memories, *and* poems, the foreign observers will commit to fighting injustice in other places and times. The poet’s focus on water and its connectivity, specifically the “inner sea” and the buried utopia beneath the Atlantic, highlights her transnational and universalist subjectivity after her witness of the Spanish Civil War.

Alongside her personal growth and political consciousness, Rukeyser reflects on her own country, its inaction, and a dividing Europe. For Rukeyser, the signs were clear, the Spanish conflict laid at the heart of the ominous currents spreading and taking place outside. Rukeyser concludes *Savage Coast* with the memory of speeches given to the crowds of foreigners and Olympic athletes: “You are not strangers to us...if you have felt inactivity, that is over now. Your work begins...tell your countries what you have seen in Spain.”¹⁹⁸ (Figure 8) Rukeyser’s papers at the Library of Congress show that she preserved a newspaper clipping of a book review on Arthur M. Landis’ *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade*. The poet drew a sketch of a man’s face on the next page amidst reviews and articles about volunteers. Perhaps the sketch was of Otto, which Kennedy-Epstein also guesses in her forward to *Savage Coast*. Rukeyser’s memory of Otto and the volunteers in Spain stayed with her throughout her life. The page that bares Rukeyser’s admiring doodle also has a review for *The West on Trial: My Fight for Guyana’s Freedom* by Cheddi Jagan, as well as *They Shall Not Pass: The Autobiography of La Pasionaria*.¹⁹⁹ At this time in 1967, Rukeyser was connecting universal struggles for

¹⁹⁸ Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, 269.

¹⁹⁹ *National Guardian* (April 15, 1967), 16, 17, Box I:56, Folder 4, Rukeyser Papers, LOC.

freedom. The American remembered thinking in 1936 that the United States would surely act to defend democracy in Spain and aid the II Republic. Her writing and work following the Civil War demonstrates the poet took heed of the call to action and did not confine it to one nation.

Rukeyser never forgot her traumatic loss of love and the transformative effects of the Spanish Civil War and Otto's influence. Kennedy-Epstein analyzes Rukeyser's 1974 *Esquire* article as reflective on the interconnectedness of several revolutionary moments to the Spanish Civil War, including the POWs in Vietnam and the protesting black athletes at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics. In *Savage Coast*, "Helen" contemplates, "Life within life, the watery circle, the secret progress of a complete being in five days, childhood, love, and choice."²⁰⁰ The poet's attention to "choice" is noteworthy, as Rukeyser carves a life for herself committed to social activism and action through writing and poetry. She may have been a writer aware of social injustice before her journey to Spain; however, the Civil War strengthened her evolving ideologies turning them into firm political conviction, witnessing the war influenced her choices and those of others to grow and be committed to a cause with far-reaching awareness, connecting events across the globe.

²⁰⁰ Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, xxvii, 267.



Figure 8: Street Meeting, the Square, Barcelona, 1936. Rukeyser described listening to speakers during the General Strike and marches in loyalist support by many foreign participants in the People's Olympiad in Barcelona in *Savage Coast*. Muriel Rukeyser Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division. Courtesy of William L. Rukeyser.

Indeed, Rukeyser demonstrated her ability to see and feel the great significance of the Spanish Civil War in her creative decisions in writing *Savage Coast*. Her manuscript notes include a list of characters but with the specification, “characters not to be important, to develop in one line.”²⁰¹ For the US poet, it was the conflict, the event, the feelings in Spain that she most wanted to capture and share to US readers. In fact, in Rukeyser's manuscript of *Savage Coast*, she simply recalled the mythology:

Spain—a great whale stranded on the shores of Europe
—Edmund Burke (somewhere)

²⁰¹ Manuscripts, Box I: 56, Folder 4, Rukeyser Papers, LOC.

—Extracts. Moby Dick²⁰²

Rukeyser surely did *not* see Spain as Europe's stranded whale. Rather, what she witnessed she felt was much more universal.

Conclusion

The nomadic subject, as embodied by Rukeyser, experiences a fluidity of identity and moves between experiences with a sense of empathy that unites seemingly unrelated parts. Rukeyser was able to quickly take on the revolutionary spirit in Barcelona as her own while identifying the conflict with her life and politics. She applied the impressions and teachings to later work, stacking them within her dynamic subjectivity as a woman, as middle class, and as Jewish. Her poetry and creative feminist works expose the intersectionality of experiences and identities that complicate binaries, categories, and assumptions about experiences. Rukeyser provides a legitimate methodology of the use of poetry and other artistic and creative works as sources of historical inquiry.

Combining memory and the emotional responses to war with the more objective “facts” provides additional perspectives on an event. Rukeyser’s personal transformation and the focus of her work on the Spanish Civil War demonstrates how the period’s literary idealization of Spain was a compelling force towards activism that was not exclusively a masculine phenomenon. Using a conceptualization of the “nomadic subject” exposes the possibility of a natural link between feminist subjectivity and anti-fascism—when more broadly defined. Indeed, a feminist perspective can help to expand

²⁰² Ibid.

the Spanish Civil War into an Atlantic lens. Rukeyser participated in a student-led protest of the U.S. embargo of the II Republic when they were under threat by fascism. She repeatedly put her body on the line: in Scottsboro, West Virginia, Barcelona, as we will see later in Vietnam and South Korea. The activist poet shows us expanded ways of going to battle. Her life turns the perception of masculinized war and war reporting on its head; she teaches that while war destroys, poetry (and protest poetry) creates.²⁰³ Rukeyser challenged official discourses and demonstrated empathy for Spaniards and their cause, a conflict she saw in a larger framework. US women's works may challenge the myths that glorify battle created by the foreign literati in Spain (such as Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*) by elevating the emotional experience, as well as amplifying the Jewish contributions in the fight against fascism and other injustices.

It is difficult to tease apart the US poet's string of engagements, writing, and activism as distinct from each other or consider them in isolation. The nomad transforms herself through different experiences, and by the time "Helen" reached Barcelona, Rukeyser conveys a sense that personal conversion, emotionally and politically, that transpired aboard the train filled with other foreigners, Spaniards, and, most of all, Otto—a large source of her inspiration. The Catalan family, the Olympiads, the images of destroyed churches, the trains and trucks filled with revolutionaries, "It means always learning to accept a position deeper in a group, deeper in a society of one sort or another."²⁰⁴ Rukeyser was exposed to ideologies of various persuasions and witnessed first-hand the violent effects of war. Further, her intimate and loving connection with

²⁰³ Rukeyser, *Life of Poetry*, xvii.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

German-socialist revolutionary volunteer, Otto, surely influenced her sympathies. Rukeyser reflected in *Savage Coast* on her stay in Spain, “I am changed...I was almost born again.”²⁰⁵ Although Rukeyser demonstrated a propensity towards activism and social justice early in life, her convictions matured and took more matured and political shape on this journey to Spain.

Indeed, Rukeyser was not alone in viewing the Spanish conflict as representative of a larger battle between fascism and democracy; “Nomadic” women’s biographies help to situate the Spanish Civil War in a more Atlantic context. Amidst Non-Intervention, Rukeyser’s and Riesenfeld’s attempts to inform the public of the dangers of reactionary fascism by publishing for US audiences, helped (or had the potential to help) to traverse Anglo-Hispanic political and cultural frontiers. However, Rukeyser repeated this campaign throughout her life and in many different forms, marking her as the activist nomad, like Margarita Nelken. Other women, Spanish and foreign, who experienced war, trauma, and exile, reacted in more survivalist ways as we will see through Janet Riesenfeld, the dancer.

Blending journalism and poetry, Rukeyser concluded *Savage Coast* with a friend’s question, years after the Civil War; “Why do you care about Spain so much?” Rukeyser mused silently, “Not to let our lives be shredded, sport away from politics, poetry away from anything. Anything away from anything.” Her friend insisted: “It was so long ago.” But Rukeyser’s last thought: “*Going on now. Running, running, today.*”²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, 266.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 298.

CHAPTER TWO

The Dancer in Madrid: Riesenfeld's Experience in the Spanish Civil War

España prefiere morir de pie que vivir de rodilla
Spain prefers to die on her feet rather than live on bended knees

-La Pasionaria²⁰⁷

The lights were dim and the wail of the guitar resounded through the Monreal Academy, a dance studio located in a small apartment off an alley in Madrid called “The Street of the Moon.”²⁰⁸ She moved slowly but with cunning intention, like a preying cat. Making dramatic movements with her skirt as she then walked and abruptly halted, her body held tall with all the strength of a regal statue. Strong, lifted chin, arms slowly raising about her in a swirling motion, then quickening her pace, she defiantly stomped and the *cante jondo* (deep song) drove her to dance proud and rapid movements like the matador's *desplante*²⁰⁹ enticing and agitating a wanting bull. The US traveler, Janet Riesenfeld, danced flamenco—the musical tradition woven into Spanish historical identity—in Madrid, which was in the thick of the Spanish Civil War during the fall of 1936.

Around the same time that Riesenfeld displayed her dance skills in war-torn Spain, in Los Angeles, the composer Hugo Riesenfeld received a response from his

²⁰⁷ Dolores Ibárruri quoted by Riesenfeld in Janet Riesenfeld, *Dancer in Madrid* (New York & London: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1938), 27.

²⁰⁸ Riesenfeld, *Dancer*, 130.

²⁰⁹ The *desplante* is a longer *llamada* or call, the flamenco dancer's signal to the musician of a change in pace or choreography, or an entrance. <http://eduardo-guerrero.com/en/espectaculos/desplante-2/>

inquiry with the U.S. State Department. They assured him that despite his fear, his daughter, Janet, was safe in Madrid after having arrived in Spain four months earlier. At a young age she was professionally trained in flamenco in the United States, performed in Mexico under the name Raquel Rojas, and in the Summer and Fall of 1936 journeyed to fulfill a concert engagement and danced among the “gitanos” of Madrid.²¹⁰ The experience of dancing in Spain opened a space for the American to share the passion that drives both the flamenco performer and the resoluteness in which Madrid’s citizens defended their city during the Spanish Civil War. In her memoir about Spain, Riesenfeld illuminated this Spanish quality, and the commitment to defend democracy, by quoting Dolores Ibárruri (*La Pasionaria*), the same that opens this chapter.

This chapter continues to analyze the unarchived experiences of the Spanish Civil War. It begins with a brief explication of Riesenfeld’s embodiment of the “nomadic subject,” which primed her drive for and ability to transgress cultural boundaries and demonstrates the nomad as “interpreter”—in language and as cultural intermediary. It then analyzes her political awakening in Spain in support of II Republic and reviews her memoir, *Dancer in Madrid*, as another example of women’s emotional yet documentary accounts of the Spanish Civil War. The work expands the understanding of US women’s broader contributions to the Loyalist cause while also arguing that the US dancer created an affective mythology around Spain and the culture of flamenco. Significantly, much of the unwavering resistance and defense of Madrid took place in cramped apartments that

²¹⁰ “L.A. Dancer Safe in Spain, Father Told,” *Oakland Tribute*, 11/14/1936, p. 5. While the term *gitano* bears a history of marginalization, racism, and discrimination, referring to people of Roma decent in Spain and subjected to discriminatory policies since the fifteenth century, I use it where Riesenfeld used it herself and popular folk attributes much of modern flamenco to gitano culture in Spain.

acted as dance studios, groups practiced performances for the stages and streets of Madrid to support the II Republic in the early months of war in 1936. At the *Teatro de la Zarzuela*, the largest theater in Madrid and remaining in business through the Civil War, Riesenfeld danced in one of the last significant banquets held in Madrid during the war. A massive crowd enjoyed hundreds of performers as well as paid homage to the recently executed and beloved poet Federico García Lorca.²¹¹ Therefore, the last section of the chapter looks more closely at dance as a potential political form.

The Nomad's Heart Knows No Boundaries

Janet Riesenfeld embarked for Spain, like Muriel Rukeyser, young, at the mere age of twenty-one, to follow her love of flamenco and a Catalan man named Jaime Castanys. Like Rukeyser, she too developed a keen emotional and politically driven response to the war. Daughter of Jewish Austrian composer Hugo Riesenfeld, young Janet grew up in the wake of her father's rising musical success, living a privileged life.²¹² She had learned Spanish (elevated no doubt by having a Spanish governess) and began studying dance (only through her own insistence). First, she trained in ballet, but did not care for it and modernist dance was not yet popularized:

But one day, in one of the programs that my father put on at the Rivoli Theater, I saw a Spanish dancer. I was so impressed with her work that I went back-stage to

²¹¹ Riesenfeld, *Dancer*, 193, 199. For a brief history of the *Teatro de la Zarzuela* in Madrid, see their website, <http://teatrodelaZarzuela.mcu.es/en/quienes-somos/historia>

²¹² Hugo Riesenfeld was born in Vienna and became the first violinist at the Vienna Imperial Opera. Janet Riesenfeld states that he was elected as spokesman by the orchestra when they organized to demand higher salaries. The Opera directors fired Riesenfeld for such an unheard of request. This set young Hugo to immigrate to the United States, eventually marrying Janet's mother, who was an American singer. Janet Riesenfeld does not mention her father's experience or the context of anti-Semitism in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Europe. Riesenfeld, *Dancer*, 10, 19.

meet her. When I told her that I had always wanted to be a dancer, she asked my father's permission to take me to her old dancing master.²¹³

After rejecting ballet, Riesenfeld studied flamenco with instructor Maestro Ortega for two years, then her family moved to California where she continued learning the Spanish folk dance and met Jaime Castanys. This first romantic meeting in Hollywood was brief and the American went on to marry another man. Years later, while going through a divorce, Riesenfeld crossed paths with Jaime again in Mexico City from a meeting through mutual friends.²¹⁴ They fell deeply in love this time—her divorce would become finalized during her stay in Spain—but when Jaime's family business called him back to Spain, he asked her to wait for his word before joining him across the Atlantic. Impatient, Riesenfeld planned to meet Jaime in Madrid and pursue a career in dance. It was July 1936, and she did not have a political leaning regarding the country's state of affairs or party factions. Compelled by the awaiting reunion with her lover, the dancer left Paris for a Spain draped with cultural idealization of a beloved, yet exoticized, Spain. This was to change.

Janet Riesenfeld embraced the *gitano* tradition of resistance, mimicking it, respecting it, and adopting it to support democracy in Spain. At the start of the Spanish generals' coup on July 18, 1936, Riesenfeld was uneducated on the politics of the electoral forces of the Popular Front in the February elections that year, but her early affinity towards flamenco might be considered a "nomadic aesthetic." Female writers like Virginia Woolf, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison used the word to "redesign the

²¹³ Ibid., 17-18.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 13-19.

boundaries” of English, demonstrating theorist, filmmaker, and feminist scholar Trinh T. Minh-ha’s argument that for marginalized groups—specifically women of color—“to write is to become.”²¹⁵ Although Riesenfeld’s first choice of style, dance, was not writing, Braidotti elaborates that “nomadic aesthetics is the counterpart of [this] politics of peripheral resistance to new hegemonic formations.” One cannot “separate the question of style from political choices.”²¹⁶ Indeed, towards the end of her stay, she had become an avid supporter for Spanish democracy and the Loyalist cause. Posing as a translator for the foreign press to enter Spain, Riesenfeld produced a memoir, *Dancer in Madrid*, shortly upon her return to the United States.

Narrating Riesenfeld’s relation to the events in Spain provides greater illumination of foreign women’s activities in Spain and for the Republican cause during the Civil War. Dance historian Mark Franko explores Martha Graham’s ballet for its creative value, but more significantly “reevaluate[s] her work from the perspective of politics and world events, literary modernism, and major trends in anthropology, psychoanalysis, and criticism.”²¹⁷ Like Riesenfeld, anti-fascism and the Spanish Civil War made an impact on Graham and influenced her work. As many others, Graham “remained aloof from left-wing politics of the early 1930s.” The explicit and implicit

²¹⁵ Trinh T. Minh-ha quoted in Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 16. See also Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

²¹⁶ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 16.

²¹⁷ Mark Franko, *Martha Graham in Love and War: The Life in the Work*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3. Martha Graham (1894-1991) was an American modern dancer and choreographer, traveler, and cultural ambassador. Graham created a lifelong profession in dance, founding a dance company, The Martha Graham Dance Company many of her works served as social and political expressions of her contemporary moment, whether the Spanish Civil War, World War II or inspired by mythology and American history. See also Martha Graham, *Blood Memory* (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

anti-fascist message of her 1938 *American Document*, as well as other works, shows a “personal and political coming of age” spurred by the fight to preserve democracy in Spain and Europe more generally.²¹⁸ Riesenfeld also experienced a political awakening in Spain that set off a commitment to democratic values and anti-fascism, a position on the periphery of the official decision of Non-Intervention and anti-Communist discourse that lay beneath appeasement to fascism in Germany and Europe. Both women maneuvered similar worlds colored by fascist crisis, war, and the postwar transitions and Cold War contexts where anti-fascism was often conflated with communism and transgressing traditional gender norms could be deemed subversive. Therefore, the dancer allows historians to tell a larger narrative that opens ongoing questions about gender and Spain’s placement in broader European and Atlantic histories. As argued throughout this dissertation, the “nomadic subject” sees and acts beyond borders; through the historical examples of Riesenfeld and Rukeyser, the Spanish Civil War and exile fuses with other conflicts, challenges, and anti-fascist activism.

Not only does her memoir serve as historical text, but layering the nomadic conceptualization permits envisioning Riesenfeld’s dancing body as part of her political evolution and resistance to fascism. Through her experience with dancing in Spain, she grew in political awareness towards the Loyalist cause. As will be elaborated on later, the flamenco body, as all dance and art forms, can act as communication with an audience, while choreography might serve as a cultural map in the spatial metaphor for movement

²¹⁸ Franko, *Martha Graham*, 4, 5.

into other cultures and subjectivities.²¹⁹ Considering dance as text fulfills Braidotti's desire to create "new modes of thought" through nomadic formations and alternative accounts and subjectivities.²²⁰ By dancing flamenco to support the II Republic, Riesenfeld, like Rukeyser, demonstrated a "kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behavior."²²¹ Where our default code is linear and binary, following hegemonic categories of nationality, gender roles, or other static identities, an instinct for nomadism guides the activist and artist to trespass rigid lines and speak or act out against injustice or oppressive laws.

Despite disguised as a translator, Riesenfeld's main activity in Spain of flamenco signifies her as the cultural interpreter through affectionate mythification. As opposed to Rukeyser, who while in Barcelona predominately documents and did not yet have language skills to be an effective conduit between Spaniards and foreigners, the dancer attempted to mimic the "other." She employed her understandings of flamenco in Spanish benefit concerts, immersing herself into society instead of remaining on fringes among other foreigners. Broader meanings of interpretation, especially when considering dance, implies a certain degree of mutual constitutive, two-way process. Initially, the American's desire to learn and perform a cultural "other" was not rooted in a direct knowledge of the complex fabric of Spanish history and society. However, her witnessing

²¹⁹ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 16, 17.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

the defense of Madrid provided an intimate view into the emotions and passions of Madrileños.

While the dancer held an exoticized vision of Spain when she crossed from France to Spain in 1936, her memoir tells a story of political awakening and growing empathy. As argued previously, the nomadic subject's empathetic productions based on exposure to diverse groups and cultures maybe be a form of activism. Travel, either symbolic or actual, is central to Braidotti's conception of nomadism and Riesenfeld and Rukeyser's physical presence in Spain contributed greatly to the coalescence of first-hand account and a deep understanding of the conflict with their cultural understanding and empathetic inclination towards the "other." Through her career during and following her time in Spain, Riesenfeld demonstrated an ability to transcend static categories and divisions between herself and others. She embodies the "nomadic subject" in her artistic collaborations and inclusion of themes of cultural and political empathy.

Riesenfeld grew up hearing mythological stories but understanding the true-life struggles embedded in them. Her father's Russian musician friend, Josiah Zuro, frequently told her fantastical bedtime stories of wicked queens and kings executed by revolutionary subjects and one-legged horses. Riesenfeld recalled, however, "When I was older his stories took on a more serious and realistic coloring and had the grasp of a highly intelligent man who understood the major problems and needs of the world."²²² She had a long history of seeing real life in story. Riesenfeld and Rukeyser certainly

²²² Riesenfeld, *Dancer in Madrid*, 15.

belonged to the class of foreigners that, as Preston observes of others in Spain in *We Saw Spain Die*, was drawn to Spain by what it deemed just. Predominantly a narrative of male journalists, Preston's book also includes Virginia Cowles, Josephine Herbst, and Martha Gellhorn. By reviving the memories and artistic productions of Riesenfeld and Rukeyser, we can conceptualize women as more than outliers of the larger antifascist movement and better complete the picture of US involvement in the Spanish Civil War.

Furthermore, the work of the activist and artist goes beyond reporting by illuminating the nomad's ability to see beyond the political and national divisions of war. *Dancer in Madrid* was Riesenfeld's call to action for Americans to support Republican Spain and gain awareness of the complexities of the conflict and atrocities committed during the Civil War. The US dancer understood that the passions of the Spanish Civil War, uniting or dividing people, revealed more than rational explanations of politics, parties, national and lingual difference. She explored the deeper truths of the human condition that one must *feel* in her memoir—it was not only Orwell and his male contemporaries who wished to be “involved in mankind,” writing memoirs illuminating twentieth-century war.²²³ Predominantly male perspectives, such as Orwell's, focus on and are slanted towards categories of “politics,” finding fault with one political faction or union over the other and has come to dominant “history.” The “nomadic subject”

²²³ Ibid., 4. See George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (Orlando: A Harvest Book, Harcourt, Inc., 1952). The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have resulted in the displacement of millions of people from their homes due to political, economic, and humanitarian crises. In June 2018 The UN Refugee Agency estimated 68.5 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide. <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>. Accessed August 16, 2018.

contributes to a rewriting of history that pays attention to the feelings of participants that cannot be explained with *rationalized* thinking.

The Innocent Witness to War

While seated on a train, the young American woman's journey began with the overwhelming excitement of an outsider's fantasy of Spain as a "mad mixture of fiestas, sunshine, *manzanilla*, gypsies, music, and dancing."²²⁴ The porter advised, "There is a revolution in Spain." The travelers around the American seemed to know as little of the events in Spain as she did. "A revolution in Spain? I'm glad it's nothing more serious. A matter of two days, maybe three," said a Dutchman.²²⁵ When the border was pronounced closed, and she and the other foreigners could not cross, Riesenfeld's main concern was to find a way to her fiancé, Jaime, even expressing annoyance at "the whole business." After two weeks trapped in Hendaye among "a bevy of ambassadors, newspaper correspondents, and refugees, the dancer finagled her way across the Pyrenees border as a Spanish translator for a New York newspaperman, Eddie Hunter, sent by his syndicate to cover Barcelona."²²⁶ Six months later, she departed from Spain with a profound awareness of the Spanish conflict and the ideological battle between fascism and democracy in Europe. One must question this emphasis and if the new political outlook was overdrawn for effect. It is possible that both the dancer and Rukeyser invested in narratives of

²²⁴ Riesenfeld, *Dancer in Madrid*, 8.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 31, 32.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 33-44.

“political awakening” to show a broader, unpolitical US public that the Spanish conflict held a critical importance beyond its national borders.

Already during those weeks waiting to cross into Spain, Riesenfeld experienced the first emotional effects of the revolutionary atmosphere. She remembered the feeling of unity with strangers, “everyone, including myself, was united in the vast brotherhood of the beret, regardless of age, sex, or station in life.”²²⁷ Spanish historian Mónica Moreno Seco clarifies that the outbreak of conflict had a particular effect of merging diverse leftist groups under the meaning of republicanism or the Republic, however, in the practical sense of the word many key factions and figures of the Spanish Civil War, such as Margarita Nelken, Dolores Ibárruri, and Federica Montseny, were not “republicans.”²²⁸ Still, for the dancer, like Rukeyser, Spain and the Civil War provided a space to realize a sense of equality and liberation under the banner of support for the II Republic and anti-fascism. Once in Madrid, Riesenfeld was exposed to diverse groups, including ordinary Madrileños, flamenco dancers, bullfighters, a circle of government bureaucrats through the Press Building with her alias as a newspaper translator, and Jaime.

Early into Riesenfeld’s stay in Madrid, she found an apartment with the help of her dance friends that would only be six blocks from their street and flamenco dance studio. Paying only the equivalent of thirty dollars a month, the American noted that while it would not normally be as preferable to be situated on an inner court lending itself

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

²²⁸ Mónica Moreno Seco, "Republicanas Y República En La Guerra Civil: Encuentros Y Desencuentros," *Ayer*, no. 60 (2005): 165-95. Accessed November 14, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41324906>.

to darkness, this apartment helped keep her safe. “I never had to worry about stray bullets entering my windows. Nor did I, through the subsequent bombing of the city, indiscriminate and ubiquitous, have to rush out in the middle of the night to take refuge in a cave or cellar.”²²⁹ Riesenfeld’s personal experience highlights the constant threat and universal danger to citizens in Madrid, and foreign visitors, already in the early months of the war. It did not matter whether one was political, military, or Spanish, the Spanish Civil War was fought on all fronts.

Riesenfeld’s various relations in Madrid exposed her to strong loyalist sentiments. She was close acquaintance with the leader of the Militia of the Press, war correspondents, and loyalist fighters, as well as a wide circle of dancers and artists. To keep her cover in Madrid as a press translator, she made many appearances at the Press Building; she was asked to “report frequently to offset suspicion, explaining that because of the extensive spy system, any dissimulation was dangerous.” The dancer received and disseminated much information, however. Riesenfeld observed that the press presented a skewed image of the supporters of the Popular Front. She recognized that the coalition consisted of leftist Republicans, anarchists, trades unions, the Social Party, and the Republican Union, all with various leanings, “When you read that the Government was radical, red, you did not read that it was a coalition of all the democratic parties, some radical, it is true, others more conservative, but all of them with one purpose—to

²²⁹ Riesenfeld, *Dancer*, 82.

eradicate the Fascist terror.”²³⁰ Further, she had at some insight into the ordinary motivation:

You did not read that the average man who took up his gun to fight not only was not a radical but probably did not even know what the word meant. But he did know that the people did not want any regime, no matter what it was called, that catapulted him back into the misery and oppression that had been his lot in Spain until a few short years ago.²³¹

Indeed, the Left lost its unity throughout the duration of the war. Oral historian Isabella Lorusso summarizes that in 1937 Stalinists led by the USSR in Spain took control in Barcelona, and by extension the II Republic, and began to repress the POUM and anarcho-syndicalists in 1937.²³² Teresa Carbó, an active member of the POUM during the Civil War, explained to Lorusso that the Marxists wanted to unify the popular Left in Spain, but women in the Communist leadership, like La Pasionaria, they wanted nothing to do with.²³³ The personal testimonies of Spanish women who fought for the Popular Front illuminate an array of experiences and paths towards political activity, however, all echo the common theme of supporting a revolution premised on justice, equality, and freedom.

Through her personal friendships with Madrileños of different backgrounds, the American was attuned to various perspectives of the conflict but sensed the shared

²³⁰ Ibid., 68.

²³¹ Ibid., 68.

²³² Isabella Lorusso, Beatriz Gimeno, and Dolors Marín Silvestre, *Mujeres que lucha*. Madrid: Altamarea ediciones, (2019), 5. For a detailed analysis of Spanish communist women, see Adriana Valobra, Mercedes, Yusta, eds, *Queridas camaradas: Historias iberoamericanas de mujeres comunistas*, Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila editores (2017).

²³³ Ibid., 80.

emotional response to the Civil War. Where the dancer trained in the Albaicin studio—also the family’s home—Riesefeld was known by a large network, or what she would often lovingly call “a real gypsy *juerga* (spree),” as the “*Americanita*, who was going to try to dance *flamenco*.”²³⁴ She learned alongside some Spaniards of the will of the people and their capabilities under conflict; an elderly friend confessed, “Sometimes it seems to me that even I, a Madrileño, did not know the depths of my own people until now.”²³⁵

Through such conversations the American gained a sense of the history of inequality and tensions within a society still largely characterized as “feudal” with wide segments of the population “oppressed” by wealthy landowners. On the other side of the spectrum, the dancer recalls Jaime’s characterization of Andalusians as in perpetual *siesta* and Madrid only slightly more conducive to industrialism, “We could become a great industrial country with the proper discipline. It would take no time to have the machines and real progress if we had a small and efficient group to run things.”²³⁶ Riesefeld eventually formed her own perspective on the dynamics she was exposed to: “I already had found an apartment, seen Jaime every minute he was not working, and encountered a growing circle of friends, ranging from colorful and amusing gypsies to the aristocratic business associates of Jaime. I must say I preferred the gypsies.”²³⁷ Her friend with the Press Militia, Villatora, described some of the cultural reforms initiated by the II

²³⁴ Riesefeld, *Dancer*, 76, 77.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 117, 118.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

Republic, including traveling theater companies welcomed with enthusiasm by villagers and intended to correct the high illiteracy across Spain.²³⁸

Women's memoirs of war pay unique attention to the ordinary experiences during war and Riesenfeld paid significant attention to city's market women—a group not likely to be represented in official archives. During the American's stay in Madrid over six months, she grew to know the economic and consumer life, and ordinary forms of survival and resistance.²³⁹ Rosario was Riesenfeld's older roommate and helpmate, as Jaime also desired that his girlfriend had someone to look after her. The dancer states, Rosario "was to be my constant companion for the next four months," frequenting the commercial life of Madrid with her regularly.²⁴⁰ From a foreigner's perspective, albeit with some caricaturizing, "Marketing presented another difficulty. There was seldom a fixed price for anything. Bargaining is an essential, the most exciting part of the Spanish housewife's existence. Hours are spent pleasantly and inexpensively every day haggling over the price and quality of the most humble string of garlic."²⁴¹ When Riesenfeld left Madrid via the United States Embassy six months after her arrival to Spain, it was the market women that most imprinted her final memory. The dancer concluded her memoir with the lines: "Looking out of the window I could see Madrid in the early morning rain;

²³⁸ Ibid., 109.

²³⁹ Ibid., 80-82.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 80.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 82.

sodden piles of mortar, skeleton stone buildings gutted by fire, and before the opening markets endless lines of women in black.”²⁴²

The young American witnessed or heard first-hand accounts of the horrible atrocities committed by Franco’s troops, which poignantly shaped her own perspective of the conflict. One such story that made an impression on Riesenfeld came from Badajoz, describing the “vast herd of pale-faced men, women, and children who were to atone for their loyalty to a democratic ideal...It was still hot and bright when the horrified audience saw the arena, which had more than enough blood to slake its thirst, covered with the still inert mass of humanity.”²⁴³ The dancer’s reporting in Madrid in late September was already grim. Word that Generals Franco and Mola were redirecting forces towards the city and “it was said the Guadarrama and Córdoba fronts were worse than any during the World War” with circulating reports of already 350,000 Loyalist soldiers dead at that time in 1936.²⁴⁴ Sniping in broad daylight by Nationalists within Madrid, as well as indiscriminate executions not by the Government per se but the individual party committees. Even her neighbor in the above apartment, recounted to Riesenfeld by his frantic wife, was hurriedly taken in an unmarked car and without identification to the Commissariat of Chamberi. But when the wife called to verify, the office confirmed no such arrest order was made. Five days later the dancer’s neighbor was shown a photograph of her dead husband.

²⁴² Ibid., 298.

²⁴³ Ibid., 128.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 176.

Being a foreigner and civilian did not provide a buffer from the violence of the Civil War. When the US dancer was walking across Plaza Callao, “a deafening explosion threw [her] off [her] feet. Only half a block away, in one of the little streets that lead into the square, a bomb had fallen. A line of forty women and children had formed a queue the length of the street waiting for milk.” Not wanting to look, but thinking she might be of some help, “anything [she] might have imagined was nothing compared to the sight which met [her] eyes. No one could offer any help to what was left. When the ambulance arrived, only ten of the forty could be taken away on stretchers; the rest were shoveled up.”²⁴⁵ The danger persisted but the “chaotic” weeks gave way to greater “order” in October with a unified Junta in place and the Government moved to Valencia, and according to the American, “it was only the morale of the people which carried them through.”²⁴⁶ The dancer combines an observer’s reporting through her personal contacts as well as the nomad’s reflection on the feelings and mood she sensed around her.

From covert to overt acts of violence, the American experienced the war in Spain from the shifting dynamics of its capital city. Prior to the siege on Madrid, “the Rebels’ planes still flew over, black and ominous, relieved only by a white swastika...these planes, which we saw every day, were on their way to bomb the outlying villages.” Riesenfeld then recounts the floods of families moving into Madrid for refuge: “The newly installed families would go from one apartment to the other, receiving donations for their first meal. One family would give oil, another bread, and so on, everyone giving

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 184.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 181.

what he could spare.”²⁴⁷ These every day acts of support and kindness do not go ignored by the nomadic observer; Riesenfeld’s nomadic subjectivity was attuned to Spaniards’ nonpolitical sufferings and acts of resilience.

Gendered violence and women at war in Spain was both actual and symbolic during the Civil War. In examining paintings, particularly Aurelio Arteta’s *Tríptico de la Guerra* and *Retaguardia (Rearguard)*, oral and cultural Historian Miren Llona analyzes the symbolic use of femininity through motherhood, “Thanks to the incorporation of the female presence in the rear guard scenes, the paintings manage to increase the dramatic and emotional dimension of war.”²⁴⁸ In Nationalist and Loyalist imagery, women were often used as symbols of hope or evidence of the brutality of the opposing side, and ultimately, in Franco’s defeat of Republican Spain, rape was used as a tactic and evidence of victory.²⁴⁹ Sophía Rodríguez López reviews war-time images and propaganda to reveal the gendered violence of the Spanish Civil War, comparing messages across factions about women, sex, and violence. Historical memory of traumatic events can often be understood by an analysis of the experiences of women’s bodies and in the ways each

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 182.

²⁴⁸ Miren Llona, “From Militia Woman to *Emakume*: Myths Regarding Femininity During the Civil War in the Basque Country,” in Aurora G. Morcillo, ed., *Memory and Cultural History of the Spanish Civil War: Realms of Oblivion* (Leiden: BRILL, 2013). Accessed November 14, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁴⁹ Aurora G. Morcillo, *The Seduction of Modern Spain: The Female Body and Francoist Body Politic* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2010). Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica* (1937) famously includes a woman holding a baby during the bombing and destruction of the city with the Nationalist invasion and German bombers during Spanish Civil War.

side of a conflict represent the threat to such bodies as enlistment against enemies of “dishonor,” “brutality,” and “unmanliness,” needing to be destroyed.²⁵⁰ (Figure 9)

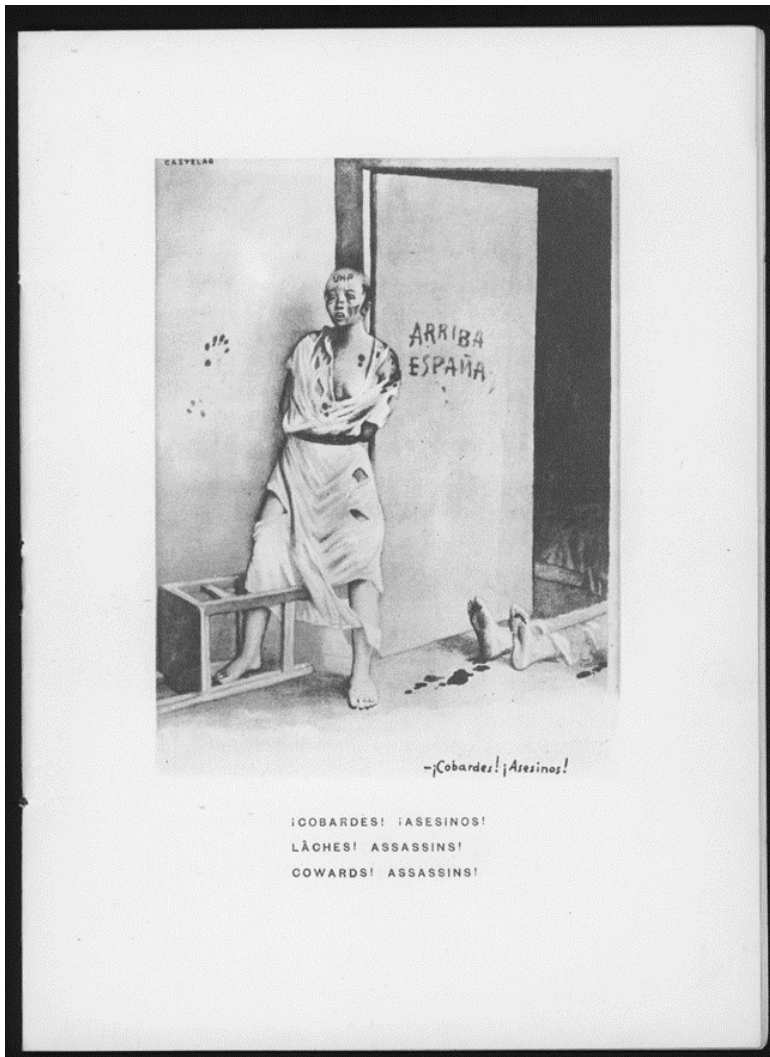


Figure 9: “Cowards! Assasins!” Alfonso Daniel Rodríguez Castelao drawing. A female figure is wounded, amputated, and shaven by the enemy, from an album of propaganda drawings commissioned by the American Medical Bureau Aid Spanish Democracy in defense of the II Republic. “Galicia Martir” prints produced by the Ministerio de Propaganda, España. Printed in Canada. (1937) PS_LAMINAS_0632_00005_AMB, American Medical Bureau Aid Spanish Democracy, Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica, Salamanca, Spain. Courtesy of Fundación Alfonso Rodríguez Castelao.

²⁵⁰ Sophía Rodríguez López, “*Corpus Delicti*: Social Imaginaries of Gendered Violence,” in Aurora G. Morcillo, ed., *Memory and Cultural History of the Spanish Civil War: Realms of Oblivion* (Leiden: BRILL, 2013). Accessed November 14, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.

The experience during the II Republic (1931-1936) and the violence leading up to and during the Spanish Civil War politicized many Spanish women, as well. While Remedios Varo (1908-1963), renowned Surrealist painter, dedicated her life in Spain to her artistic studies, not explicitly engaging in politics, she supported the Republic, as did many middle- and working-class and intellectual women. During the nationwide demonstrations ushering in the birth of the II Republic in 1931, Varo celebrated the new *la niña bonita*. During the Republican years, women won the right to vote and often held influential, politically active roles. On the more radical side, the anarchist women's organization, *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women), with their corresponding publication, was comprised of about 30,000 members during the II Republic. Prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, they advocated for an independent working women's union, wages for domestic work, and some held the belief of free love. With news of the military coup, *Mujeres Libres* mobilized toward the war effort.²⁵¹

While women often officially joined the large political unions at the start of the Civil War, such as the female section of the POUM, many young Spanish women in the 1930s always felt political.²⁵² In her interviews with "fighting women," oral historian Isabella Lorusso recorded revolutionary sentiments towards universal freedoms. Pepita Carpena remembers spending much of her time as a child with her Republican-supporting grandmother, and despite her family's continued conservative ideologies around the

²⁵¹ Mary Nash, *Defying Male Civilization*.

²⁵² Lorusso, *Mujeres que lucha*, 12.

Church, Pepita disagreed with the injustices of the institution. Later at a dance, Pepita was introduced to the CNT and did not hesitate to join in 1933 when she was only fourteen years old due to the concern over social issues. When asked who her political influences were, Pepita answered Lorusso that she had none. The rebellious spirit of family members provided an example for her, however, Pepita claimed her individual political and intellectual autonomy.²⁵³

Clothing served as a political marker as the supporters of the Popular Front fashioned blue working overalls, *monos*, and sandals.²⁵⁴ Jaime's feeling of being pressured to assume a pro-Government identity clarifies this well, "Nobody wears a hat here anymore, man or woman. You haven't even noticed that I haven't got a necktie on. It's all so childish. If I wear a necktie I'm an enemy of the Government; if I don't, I'm their friend. Naturally, everyone's going to walk around without one."²⁵⁵ Riesenfeld commented many times on the appearance of the soldiers and guards she crossed in what she likened to "house-painters' overalls;" in Barcelona the guards "were both young and, like everyone else I saw, dressed informally without neckties and with open sandals."²⁵⁶ However in Madrid, "they surprised the rest of the world and themselves as well by their superheroic defense."²⁵⁷ For women in the Popular Front, this took on particular significance.

²⁵³ Ibid., 15-19.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 52.

²⁵⁵ Riesenfeld, *Dancer*, 88.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 61, 98.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 98.

The propaganda materials depicting “the heroic figure” of the *miliciana* served as important wartime images and markers of a cultural shift. While most women maintained traditional feminine attire, even if modified during the war for efficiency, photographs of *milicianas* carrying rifles, breaking gender norms proliferated: “For women the wearing of trousers or *monos* acquired an even deeper significance, as women had never before adopted such masculine attire.” Helping to “minimize sex differences,” putting on this militia, revolutionary uniform marked women’s participation but also highlighted the social changes in society emboldening women, and a challenge to the gendered status quo.²⁵⁸ Anthropologist Mary Nash argues this shift was significant, yet the image and idea of Spanish women confidently marching towards the front with gun slung over their shoulders was used in the recruitment of males to fight instead of women; women, however, played the crucial roles of “building barricades, nursing the wounded, organizing relief work, sewing uniforms or knitting sweaters, carrying out auxiliary services, developing educational courses and professional training, and working in transport or in munitions factories.”²⁵⁹

Concha Perez recounted to Lorusso her shift from factory work manufacturing bullets to fighting at the frontlines. Already anarchists, the workers in her factory numbered 12 to 15 people before the war and almost 100 during it. When asked if women could fight in the trenches, she responded affirmatively; however, Concha clarified that most females filled non-combat roles in cooking, nursing, and washing. But Concha

²⁵⁸ Nash, *Defying Male Citizenship*, 52.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 58, 59.

fought, and in response to the inquiry if she could shoot, the Spanish anarchist enthusiastically replied that she could. Concha echoed Nash's argument that only some women shouldered rifles, and the repeated argument that a severe lack of arms and munitions within Republican Spain paved the way for a Nationalist victory. While the majority of women did not fight in the trenches, when Durruti recalled the women who were at the front, Concha said she disobeyed and that the decision by the anarchist leader was a tactical discrimination against women.²⁶⁰

The International Brigades also sent hundreds of auxiliary volunteers; however, hospitals often saw Spanish nurses attending to the foreign fighters. While care and a united front crossed nationalities, language could pose some barriers. Riesenfeld encountered such foreign volunteers, glimpsing what compelled these young fighters to sacrifice themselves in another country. She had received authorization "to pass freely to the ends of all fronts," as a result of her alias as a newspaper correspondent's translator. Despite her reminding the Anti-fascist Militia of Catalonia that she was merely the translator, "they waved [her] protest aside, saying that it was not too late for [her] to begin, and suggesting that [she] go to Saragossa and cover the Women's Battalion."²⁶¹ Riesenfeld refused that time, but weeks later she took the opportunity to visit the front near Madrid. She walked through a hospital and upon hearing English had a brief but meaningful connection with a wounded English-speaking fighter and Spanish nurse,

²⁶⁰ Lorusso, *Mujeres que lucha*, 88-89.

²⁶¹ Riesenfeld, *Dancer*, 66.

grasping the simultaneous barrier and universality of the civil war in Spain for Spaniards and foreigners.

Tears were in her eyes. Perhaps she would not have allowed herself this weakness for one of her own to whom she could at least have offered the consolation of understanding his words and answering them; but here she saw herself impotent before the barrier of a language she could not understand. She probably realized that he had not needed words or the knowledge of her language to make him understand the cause for which her people were fighting, and come and offer his life for it, and yet at this moment she was powerless to offer him the little comfort that a few intelligible words might have given him.²⁶²

Riesenfeld was sympathetic to the suffering and distance between this Spanish nurse and English patient, but she understood the cause for a Republican Spain superseded more artificial differences. At the same time, the dancer makes various references to language and the knowledge or “power” she was able to acquire through the ability to speak Spanish, a source of pride for the American.

Foreign women did join in either combat or direct political action, however, their numbers were small.²⁶³ Scholar Kenyon Zimmer estimates that one thousand women fought in the Popular Front militias despite government prohibitions and the international anarchist press largely ignored women’s contributions, however, “a number of female anarchists joined the International Group of the Durruti Column, and at least ten Italian anarchist women fought in Spain. Italian-American anarchist Maria Giaconi appears to have been one of those to break this gender barrier.”²⁶⁴ Giaconi migrated to

²⁶² Ibid., 169.

²⁶³ Kenyon Zimmer, “The Other Volunteers: American Anarchists and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Fall 2016), pp. 19-52.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 31.

Pennsylvania, joined a local Italian anarchist group, became a “noted radical speaker,” and corresponded with anarchist leaders. She was under watch by federal authorities but disappeared around the time of the Spanish Civil War and word spread she was fighting in Spain against Franco’s forces. “Giaconi was the only American woman of any political persuasion known to have” joined a militia section.²⁶⁵

Another notable female anarchist leader who took an active interest in the events in Spain was Emma Goldman. Goldman maintained correspondence with the C.N.T (Nacional Confederación de Trabajadores) leaders in Valencia during the Civil War and in her exile from the United States, spoke at a meeting in Conway Hall in London. She was the featured speaker and “eyewitness” to war, as she “just returned from the Spanish Front.”²⁶⁶ The sponsors, the C.N.T. and F.A.I in London, sought to raise awareness of the hunger, violence, and horrors experienced by “non-combatant women and children.” (Figure 10) More typically, however, US women assumed more traditionally gendered and supportive roles in the loyalist cause. Zimmer particularly points out that American Jewish anarchist women went to Spain as nurses: “Little additional information is available, but these women helped meet what was an arguably more critical need than that filled by foreign-born soldiers,” though some of these front-line nurses were armed and may have even undertaken limited combat roles.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ CDMH_PS_BARCELONA_Emma Goldman, Folder C0150, 0001-0040, Centro Documental, Salamanca.

²⁶⁷ Zimmer, “The Other Volunteers,” 31-32. See also Mary Nash, *Defying Male Citizenship*, and Lisa Margaret Lines, *Milicianas: Women in Combat in the Spanish Civil War* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Book, 2012).

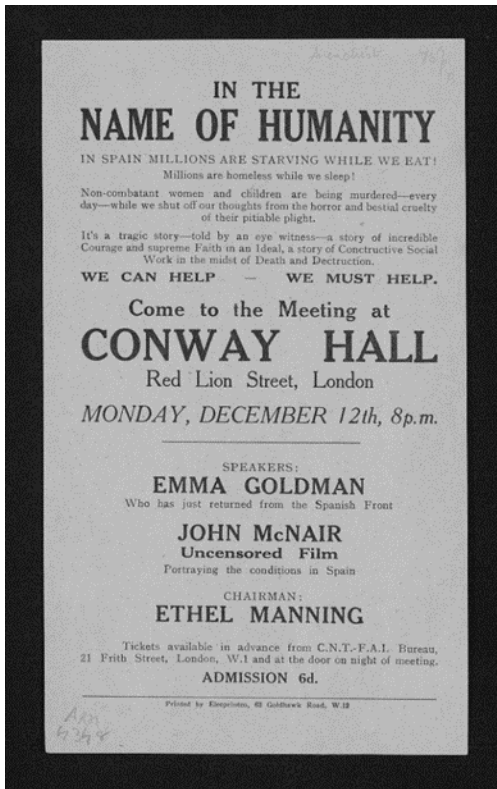


Figure 10: Meeting to support Loyalists in Spain, Flyer, London. A British flyer announcing a meeting to support Loyalists in Spain. Emma Goldman, a leader of the global anarchist movement, spent time in Spain during the Spanish Civil War and is one example of foreign women's work to aid Spanish democracy and anti-fascism. CDMH_PAMFLETOS_ARM_4348. *España. Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte. Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica.*

Indeed, one significant way US women participated in Spain was in nursing. In May of 1937 seventy-five surgeons, technicians, and mostly nurses from the U.S., with tons of medical equipment and 24 ambulances, deployed to three US base hospitals outside of Madrid and a mobile unit serving the front. "The Associated Press told how, one day in the first week of the American hospital, 900 casualties were treated with the

loss of only a single life.”²⁶⁸ The Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy’s collection *From a Hospital in Spain* is comprised of mostly personal letters to friends, therefore illuminate less of official procedures and stances of the Bureau and more of the lived experience of the US volunteers. (Figures 11 and 12) Mildred Rackley, Secretary for the American Base Hospital in Albacete, wrote of the supportive reception of her nursing corps in France and Spain, by workers, the World Committee Against War and Fascism, and by the cheers by crowds as ambulance units passed and official welcome by Luis Companys. “All the papers in Loyalist Spain have carried the news of the arrival of the first of the “Americanos” to establish hospitals to aid the Spanish people.”²⁶⁹ While international aid, from around Europe and the Americas had previously flowed into Spain, Rackley expressed global attention on the United States and its potential impact on helping Loyalist Spain.

²⁶⁸ *From a Hospital in Spain: American Nurses Write* (New York, NY: Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy, 1937). Internet Archive, The Library of the University of Texas at Austin, <https://archive.org/details/FromAHospitalInSpainAmericanNursesWrite/page/n1/mode/2up>.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.



Figure 11: US nurse attending to a soldier, Spanish Civil War. Of the 2,700 volunteers with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, 82 were women who predominantly served as nurses. CDMH_ARMERO_POSTALES_2006. *España. Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte. Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica.*



Figure 12: US nurses attending to a soldier, Spanish Civil War. CDMH_ARMERO_POSTALES_2022_R. *España. Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte. Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica.*

Most women from the United States who joined the Republican cause through volunteer brigades did so as nurses, such as Fredericka Martin who served in The American Hospital Unit.²⁷⁰ American nurses and medical professionals played a critical role in Spain, however, their experience and perspective often differed from women like Rukeyser or Riesenfeld. From a letter dated March 20, 1937, Martin wrote to her hospital in New York requesting support and aid. She describes desperation for more nurses in Spain. She discusses the hard work by “the girls” in her unit, long hours, determination, but while in good spirits. She claimed to have tried training Spanish women but with little success, implying that the work rested on US women's shoulders, the nurses were the backbone, preparing for surgery, while the doctors waited for everything to be in order. "You see it is the nurse that oils the cogs of the hospital machinery."²⁷¹ She called the “girls” from the U.S. "superhuman" and expressed immense pride she for them. From this account we see a more nationalistic sense of foreigners in the war effort in Spain. Language and professional barriers seemed to separate US and Spanish women serving as nurses and Martin demonstrated women’s critical support in the Spanish Civil War but a kind of hierarchy along national lines. This history offers a less empathetic history than the “nomadic” one of the artist, dancer, and activist.

²⁷⁰ See *Into the Fire*, directed by Julia Newman (First Run Features, 2020). Eighty women, predominately as nurses, joined the American volunteer unit, the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, in defiance of U.S. Non-Intervention policy. The film presents letter readings and interviews with female volunteers in the brigade and why they went to Spain, their role in setting up hospitals, tending to the wounded, and their shared commitment to fighting fascism.

²⁷¹ Hochschild, *Spain in Our Hearts*, 143.

While the roles for US female volunteers included meal planning, cooking, surgery prep, laundry, and cleaning, in addition to nursing, they also documented conditions within Spain. From Barcelona, Rose Freed wrote home about the marvelous scenery traveling from Cerbère to Barcelona, “There is no country in the world more beautiful than Spain. It is hard to imagine a heinous war in this idyllic country.” But Freed also comments on the overflow of refugees from the countryside to Barcelona, tripling its population. She attended banquets at Companys’s presidential palace in Barcelona and was to meet *La Pasionaria*. She was most in awe of the gratitude of the Spanish loyalists:

It is impossible to tell you how the Spanish people have catered to us. There is nothing we wish that is not granted to us. They look upon us almost as saviors. I feel embarrassed when I remember that ours is a common cause. What suffering these poor people must have endured to display such gratefulness towards our puny aid! They cut their choicest flowers and bring them as their humble offerings to our feet. At times I feel moved to tears, and you know how hardboiled I am, don’t you. My room is flooded with roses, hyacinths, narcissus, carnations, enormous violets.²⁷²

In Freed’s affectionate perspective she still identifies and communicates a narrative of Spain and Spaniards as “others.”

Sometimes women’s stories illuminate greater eagerness to serve in Spain than their male family members and approach the subject of war in more stark terms. Evelyn Hutchins, a female truck driver, stated, “I was much more aware of what was going on generally in the world and in Spain, and more concerned and interested than my brother. However, my brother and I have always been very close and when he discovered that I

²⁷² Ibid., 9, 10.

was trying, I was interested in and trying to go to Spain, he actually got there first." She describes her experiences as a woman but not a nurse or lab tech, the difficulty she had in joining and having the brigades place her. "I didn't fall into any kind of slot. If I was going to be a soldier it would've been easy...they found it very difficult to send me there as a driver."²⁷³ Hutchins describes her driving, challenges with potholes, having to drive at night without headlights and the dangerous terrain where one could drive off edges of roads. She called war: "Okay. If you're involved in a war, nothing is romantic." She describes war as extremely hard work, saying you cannot do anything you want to do when you want. "If you think it's an adventure, it's really not an adventure... Because there is nothing adventurous about killing anybody or being in that situation, or being killed or being hurt, there's nothing like that at all."²⁷⁴ This gritty and realist sentiment contrasts with the often romanticized tone in Rukeyser's and Riesenfeld's works, however, they all contribute to expanding the experiences of Americans in Spain during the war. While Hutchins was ultimately successful in breaking gender divisions within the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, her testimony reaffirms the typical categories imposed by the masculinized foreign anti-fascist volunteer units. Nomadic women like Rukeyser, Riesenfeld, and Hutchins, navigated the conflict in Spain in ways that transgressed categories of masculine and feminine roles, as well as national or political lines.

At home Americans continued their efforts for Spanish relief often through the American Red Cross. Ernest J. Swift was Vice Chairman of the American Red Cross

²⁷³ Ibid., 175.

²⁷⁴ Alvah Bessie and Albert Prago, eds, *Our Fight: Writings by Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Spain 1936-1939* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987), 177.

Society and his communication exposes an array of activities for the Republican cause within the United States. In September 1938, a letter to Swift from a member of International Red Cross committee and President of Spanish commission, thanking for 60,000 barrels of flour American Red Cross preparing to send with the “cooperation of the united states government.”²⁷⁵ Other acts included a letter in 1938 to the office of the International Red Cross in France, to the Junior Red Cross in Enderlin North Dakota. Received suitcase to be sent to a little Spanish girl. They collected clothes, towels, jewelry, soap, pencils, handkerchief, toothbrush, and books, “so many things you like and which a Spanish girl will appreciate too.”²⁷⁶ These documents attest to both the actions taken by ordinary women during the Spanish Civil War to support global democracy against fascism, as well as their efforts, like Riesenfeld and Rukeyser, in raising Americans to action despite official Non-Intervention.

Like many of the formal foreign correspondents documenting the Spanish Civil War, Riesenfeld’s loyalist sympathies grew as she witnessed the events. Journalist scholar David Deacon counted 163 correspondents paid by U.S. or British news agencies but argues this is a low estimate, with fifty-three percent of his sample reporting for the II Republic, thirty-four percent on the Nationalist side, the rest moved in between zones. Generally, the international press was more sided with Pro-Republic sympathies and, for most, these inclinations developed while in Spain, as international news was also more

²⁷⁵ Letter, Col. Div. G. Wavre, 9/29/1938. CDMH, C ESCI 070_0009, Folder 1, International Red Cross, Centro Documental, Salamanca.

²⁷⁶ Letter, 7/4/1938, CDMH, C ESCI-070_0024, International Red Cross, Centro Documental, Salamanca.

extensive in Republican areas.²⁷⁷ Deacon points out the criticism made by Historian Hugh Thomas regarding placing too much historical value on the writings of these foreign correspondents, and while Deacon admits they lacked historical and political depth and were partisan, he also points out, many were not educated in Spanish or conversant in language or culture.²⁷⁸ Riesenfeld and Rukeyser did command a degree of Spanish language, and the dancer, more fluent, immersed herself in the everyday culture of Madrileños. This linguistic ability elevates the importance and credibility of her account of the attitudes within Madrid during the first six months of war. Deacon argues, “It is precisely the engagement and immediacy of these journalist accounts that make them so valuable as material for historical analysis. As interventions du jour, they can be seen both as an information resource and as discourses that convey the acts of feeling that pervaded the journalistic and political fields of that period.”²⁷⁹ Journalists that crossed borders to cover the Spanish cities or fronts at war provide valuable, inside histories. Furthermore, women like Riesenfeld, dancing in the homes of ordinary Madrileños, transcended boundaries of language, nationality, and moved into these more intimate spaces illuminating more diverse perspectives within Spain than could be offered by the professional fields.

Riesenfeld’s command of the Spanish language worked to nuance the conflict in ways unavailable to many other foreign travelers or correspondents. In regards to a lack

²⁷⁷ David Deacon, “Elective and Experiential Affinities: British and American foreign correspondents and the Spanish Civil War,” *Journalism Studies*, 9:3 (April 2008), pp. 392-408.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 393.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

of Spanish, “The majority of [foreign correspondents]—and I met them later—were equally handicapped.”²⁸⁰ Without understanding Spanish, they had to rely on official handouts about developments that the dancer posits “were biased in favor of the side the writer happened to be reporting.”²⁸¹ She reckoned that few reporters would go out in the field to corroborate reports, “even those who did could only bring back statistical data or isolated reports of the horrors or unprecedented heroism.”²⁸² Riesenfeld’s unique ability to traverse worlds and languages provided her a more intimate understanding of the events around her.

Like Rukeyser, Riesenfeld consciously connected the civil conflict in Spain to outside forces in Europe and the broader ideological rifts. She witnessed the “rebel” bombers painted with swastikas and discussed the Moors under Franco’s command. Her friend at the Press Building, José María, explained one day, “We’re fighting Moors, Italians and Germans. The Moors have been promised territory in Spain, the Italians are to have Mallorca and the Balearic Islands, and Germany is to control our raw materials and have the Canary Islands for a naval base.”²⁸³ She felt certain that England would intervene to halt the support by Germany and Italy for Franco, while noticing Soviet first-aid planes. Ultimately, the young American concluded, as many others, that the foreign

²⁸⁰ Riesenfeld, *Dancer*, 67.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 167.

assistance to the Nationalist forces provided the critical advantage over the extremely poorly armed and largely internationally isolated Republican defenders.

Without the language barrier of most nurses and correspondents, the dancer's personal connection to many Madrileños enabled her increased knowledge of Spain to be more grounded to the everyday life of Spaniards. The American also grew in both self-awareness and an appreciation for the essence of the Madrileño, their grace, passion, camaraderie, the fierceness of the market women. Passionate about a free, democratic Spain, she writes "those months altered the whole pattern of my existence." ... "I returned with a deep awareness of others, not only those who were close by but those who had always seemed to be very far away" ... "Now universal problems are also my own."²⁸⁴ Spain, and the Spanish Civil War, provided the dancer with a lesson on the critical need to immerse oneself in the injustices of others, the broader fight against fascism, and to tear down artificial division or categories that separate groups. Her subjectivity as a "nomadic subject" permitted this awareness and although Riesenfeld is almost always cognizant of herself as an outsider, she feels the connectedness through her ideals and felt at home among the flamenco dancers and gypsies.

Interestingly, the only relation in Spain that called her an "outsider," having no legitimate stance on the conflict, was Jaime. Through Riesenfeld, we see Jaime's own transformation through those months. He had always referred to himself as a Catalan, now, as the fighting and conflict flared, he proclaimed himself as Spaniard and reminded her of her ignorance on the topic. This narrative reaffirms the tendency for a male or

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 1.

masculine and Nationalist subjectivity and binary system of thought to create barriers and borders and the “nomadic subject’s” ability to overcome them. While Riesenfeld’s reader senses the consequent self-consciousness of her status as a foreigner, it does not inhibit the dancer from cementing meaningful connects to the Spanish people and the conflict waging around her.

The young American awakened to the deep rifts within the Spanish people partly through her growing knowledge of Jaime and his conservative, wealthy Catalan family. Jaime continually showed an inability to keep amiable conversation with Riesenfeld’s press friends in Madrid. As war tensions intensified, the dancer learned more of Jaime’s vehemence for the loyalists’ efforts. Riesenfeld’s love affair with a Nationalist supporter provided her with a unique experience for an American woman to listen to various perspectives. Yet, their ideological differences and estrangement perhaps gave her a glimpse of the struggles ripping Madrid, and Spain, apart:

I was not the same person I had been six months ago. The problem was one for which I need as much objectivity as I could command. It wasn’t an abstraction, but an elemental, concrete question. Living in Spain meant that our whole life would be colored by the outcome of this political issue. In this generation in Spain even love is dominated by devotion to a social belief. If I, as an outsider, found it difficult to compromise, how could Jaime do so?²⁸⁵

The dancer’s reflection on her time in Spain moving her away from the “abstract” raises key questions about historical embodiment. There is a debate among anthropologists which contains the argument that embodiment offers the opportunity to overcome dualism, while others note the theory of embodiment in overcoming dualism

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 251.

merely advances new paradoxes by simply offering new ways to conceptualize difference. Margaret Lock's point about menopause is that it has no commonality among individuals, as it is not an organism's biological response to environment, but "a product of human activity and activity." Social and cultural characteristics change over time, space, and group; for example, in the much higher reporting among North Americans of "hot flashes" to the very low symptom reporting in Japanese women. To counter embodiment's answer to dualism, Anthropologist Tomi Bartole argues it achieves overcoming duality in "form" but not "essence."²⁸⁶ However, Riesenfeld's case allows scholars to ground embodiment from the abstract into the concrete in her taking up of the Republican cause as her own. This exercise demonstrates practical ways that historical actors do, in fact, challenge dualisms; if not achieving the goal in full, they move us closer to full acceptance of the multiplicity and fluidity of and between subjectivities and bodies. As Braidotti notes, the modern condition invalidates Cartesian mind-body separation (or at least consensus around it), as the embodied, "material nature of the subject" or "bodily materiality," experience is one—in Foucauldian fashion—of an "object of knowledge" and "site of multiple coding, of inscription."²⁸⁷ Riesenfeld, in her *knowing* of Spanish people and *acting* politically through folk dance, and Rukeyser, in her association of her own physical and emotional pain to the splitting of Europe and

²⁸⁶ Tomi Bartole, "The Structure of Embodiment and the Overcoming of Dualism: An Analysis of Margaret Lock's Paradigm of Embodiment," *Dialectical Anthropology*, Vol. 36, No. 1/2 (June 2012) pp. 92. See also Margaret Lock, "Cultivating the Body: Anthropology and Epistemologies of bodily practice and knowledge," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 22: 133-155. Lock criticizes the approach by bio-medicine and psychoanalysis to menopause in their framing it as "loss" or "lack" or *disordering* it. See Margaret Lock, *Encounters with Aging: Mythologies of Menopause in Japan and North America* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1993).

²⁸⁷ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 59, 60.

Spain within it, help to demonstrate the Foucauldian epistemology that “acknowledges the corporeal roots of subjectivity.”²⁸⁸ The body, like subjectivity, is multiple and many, therefore, challenges dichotomous thought.

Still, there is usefulness in examining the American’s perspective as a non-Spaniard, as Riesenfeld’s descriptions as an outsider are valuable to an understanding of the overall atmosphere in Madrid. She observed the food shortages and long market lines, the Nazi bombers flying overhead, snipers, and a proliferation of prostitution. She recounted witnessing displaced refugees flooding the city from towns devastated or starved, air raids terrorizing the population, and the apparent anxiety growing within Madrid. A woman’s perspective illuminates how war affects women’s lives and health more specifically, recounting the tragic events of friend whose wife needed medical assistance for a premature birth and could not find any, as doctors hurried to fronts to care for wounded soldiers. Her empathy allowed for descriptions of women, children, and wounded soldiers—histories less often recounted.

By the time of the siege on Madrid in the Fall, a poignant rift penetrated the relationship between the dancer and Jaime. Riesenfeld began to see that her ideological beliefs took her further from the Catalan’s staunchly conservative outlook towards the Spanish people and the liberalism of the II Republic. She was realizing her unwillingness to bend her beliefs to appease Jaime when she discovered he had implicated her by installing an older woman in her home who was later executed on charges of smuggling ammunitions to Nationalist snipers in Madrid. Riesenfeld ended her relationship with her

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

fiancé and, weeks later in the middle of the siege, she identified his body at the makeshift morgue for government assassinations of rebel spies. Foreshadowing Jaime's execution, earlier in her memoir, the young woman inquired about what she figured were isolated sniper shots she heard in her neighborhood. What puzzled her was why so many occurred at five o'clock in the morning. The Press Militia officer Villatora explained to her that was the firing squad at the prison.²⁸⁹

Historian Paul Preston affirms that there were real rebel threats and spying within the Republican zones.²⁹⁰ He writes, "In the case of the military rebels, a programme of terror and extermination was central to their planning and preparations."²⁹¹ The urban and rural working classes were numerically superior to the rebels and therefore an "immediate imposition of a reign of terror was crucial." While violence intensified on both sides before and during the Civil War, Preston argues that the Fascist paramilitary implemented a policy of violence, whereas supporters of the Popular Front carried out random acts that the government ultimately reined in by the end of 1936, with a more successful implementation of order at that time.²⁹² Further, Preston estimates that leftist-committed killings most likely comprised only about a third of those committed by the

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 160.

²⁹⁰ Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain*, (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), xiii.

²⁹¹ Ibid., xiv.

²⁹² Ibid., xiv.

rebels, despite popular and grassroots participation in leftist and working-class groups outnumbering Spanish, Nationalist forces.²⁹³

The violence, betrayal, loss, and siege became heavy on Riesenfeld and, in December of 1936, the US dancer secured passage home. She quickly published *Dancer in Madrid*, capturing some of the emotion embedded in the war:

What did death mean to those who remained? A greater vitality, a deeper intensity to justify living, a sharpening of the senses, an acute determination to live, to fight, to achieve today. All the tomorrows would not be enough—and there might be no tomorrow. *Mañana* is a forgotten word in Spain. Also forgotten are the ancient differences between the people themselves.²⁹⁴

For Spanish Republicans that survived, exile followed three years of civil war. Whether internally in Spain, or an embodied exile, abroad, Franco's fascist regime persisted for over three decades and many groups and individuals would not abandon the fight for democracy.²⁹⁵

Even before defeat, Riesenfeld recognized the kindness shown to her by her Spaniards acquaintances and the solidarity they felt with Americans in their desire for democracy. She recounted the day of Roosevelt's reelection and the "sincere admiration" of what they perceived represented the democratic ideal that saw no national boundaries:

Madrid, on that day, was as interested as any American. ...Friendly *milicianos* on the street, recognizing my armband, had stopped me and offered their

²⁹³ Ibid., xvi. See also Preston, *We Saw Spain Die*, 6, 7. Preston argues that 15,000 men, mostly German and African soldiers led by the rebel Spanish generals, crossed from North Africa to southern Spain in the first days of the coup.

²⁹⁴ Riesenfeld, *Dancer*, 3.

²⁹⁵ See Fagen, *Exile and Citizens*.

congratulations, feeling that it must be as much a personal issue with me as their own successful elections would be with them.²⁹⁶

Riesenfeld believed that this bond should have resulted in US support against fascism in Spain. This sympathy and sense of unified struggle against fascism attracted great foreign attention and debate to the conflict.

It is useful here to recognize the growing gaze towards Spain by travelers, volunteers, and academics surrounding the Spanish Civil War. The term used by historian and cultural scholar Sebastiaan Faber, *Hispanist*, whether university-affiliated or amateur, implies a degree of recognition as expert; however, as Faber notes, during the 1920s and 1930s the discipline was still forming and an array of actors were considered somewhat expert, including travelers. Therefore, we can use his non-academic term, “aficionados,” to insert women like Rukeyser and Riesenfeld into this classification, as at this moment the professional field was “unusually influenced by amateurs.”²⁹⁷ With the Spanish Civil War foreign volunteers, and particularly Riesenfeld, viewed it their own country’s duty to help the struggling and defensive II Republic. Yet, despite a wealth of volunteers and the war creating some hispanists, there was a hesitation. In the United States, “the field’s leading journal in the United States, *Hispania*, all but excluded the war as a subject.”²⁹⁸ This work fell in the hands of thousands of intellectuals.

²⁹⁶ Riesenfeld, *Dancer*, 283.

²⁹⁷ Sebastiaan Faber, *Anglo-American Hispanists and the Spanish Civil War: Hispanophilia, Commitment, and Disciple* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 8.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

Still, the major professional journals in the field abstained from passionate political discussions, almost not discussing the war at all. Columbia University founded *Revista Hispánica Moderna* in 1934, they did not mention the war until more than a year from its start. And when it did, it collected facts and news on literary topics. This section “would include regular, succinct, dispassionate updates on the lives, deaths, and sundry activities of Spanish writers, carefully subdivided into “izquierdas,” “derechas,” and “en el extranjero.” The self-imposed objectivity, though, and the section’s strict limitation to literary life, lend these paragraphs an eerie, decontextualized quality.”²⁹⁹ Faber additionally recounts the narrative of professor at the University of Colorado, Stuart Cuthbertson’s trek through Spain with his wife during first week of the Spanish Civil War. The narrative is patronizing and makes clear his sympathies with Nationalists while blaming “revolutionaries” on the Left, who he irresponsibly lumps all as Communists. In his essay “Escaping from the Spanish Revolution,” the traveling professor admits that he and his wife, in order to cross barricades, joked with and bribed “the Communists.” Faber argues, Cuthbertson had no knowledge of Spanish politics and no real interest in learning it: “the text becomes a painful example of a colonist kind of picaresque, in which the superior Americans save their lives by duping the poor, dense, but dangerous natives.” Despite what Faber characterizes as a form of detrimental orientalism, Cuthbertson was elected to be editor of *Hispania* sometime following his return and publication.³⁰⁰ This ambiguous positioning by hispanists contrasted to the open calls made by Rukeyser and

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 48, 49.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 50-52.

Riesefeld. The dancer published her memoir before the outcome of the war was to be determined, and so she maintained a hope that Americans and even the government would rise to action.

As amateur hispanists, but more importantly, as “nomadic subjects,” Rukeyser and Riesefeld entered Spain independent of formal professional or political affiliations yet were profoundly driven to action against fascism through their empathy. Still, they cannot be completely detached from the band of English-speaking intellectuals and academics in Spain. Westerners through history exoticized visions of the East in their pursuits of colonizing the “other.” Distinct from Edward Said’s more sinister conceptualization, US and British foreigners nonetheless “othered” Spain, which allowed for idealized (yet still distorted) representations of Spain, even if driven by affection.³⁰¹ In nomadic fashion, the poet and dancer’s hispanicism offered opportunity for growth and political awakening, direct engagement with the anti-fascist movement, and activism to preserve democracy in Spain through their personal relationships, writing, and dancing.

By the end of her stay, Riesefeld indeed gained a practical and realistic attitude, much altered from the mythical expectations she arrived in Spain with. Tragically for the II Republic, the United States never shifted away from its position of Non-Intervention. As Americans saw their nation to be the pillar of democracy and in light of official Non-Intervention, this put that task of defense of II Republic on the shoulders of volunteers

³⁰¹ Ibid., 7, 8. Faber argues that Anglo-Americans’ application of the “Black Legend” to Spain provided the contrast to “enlightened” visions of themselves, and this may have served to create later, passionate responses that the Americans and British ought to come to Spain’s defense in the 1930s.

and writers. Riesenfeld took it as her own responsibility to share her experience and knowledge of the events with as wide an audience as she could reach. As an amateur hispanist and traveler, she offered knowledge and an emotional account that even some professionals lacked. The dancer concluded that she was a burden on a people already strained and wished as an American to not be an additional responsibility to the government. As war reached Madrid's doorsteps, Riesenfeld felt the sharp reality of her status as a non-Spaniard and noncombatant. She contemplated on her position as an outsider. After returning home, Riesenfeld published her memoir hoping, that having been in Spain, she could open Americans' eyes to the struggles of the Spanish republic and people and the extent they were willing to sacrifice themselves. With this she felt she "would be doing something contributory."³⁰²

Upon return to the United States, the flamenco dancer reportedly turned down an acting role in order to finish writing her book on Spain.³⁰³ To this day, Riesenfeld's memoir remains in its original print; however, several book reviews of *Dancer in Madrid* were published upon her return to the U.S. These reviews are draped in praise. After commenting on Hugo Riesenfeld's reputation of absentmindedness, the reviewer contrasts an anecdote that he mistakenly shaves with shoe polish with the sharpness with which his daughter writes: "She tells a true story with restrained power and honesty."³⁰⁴ *Dancer in Madrid*, the *Lincoln Evening Journal* wrote that the book "has some of the

³⁰² Riesenfeld, *Dancer*, 282.

³⁰³ *The San Antonio Light*, December 31, 1936, p. 4A.

³⁰⁴ Marshall Maslin, "The Browser Talks of Books," *The Hammond Times*, 3/27/1938, p. 4.

cumbersomeness of a propaganda medium. Its merit lies in the fact that it is an apparently accurate delineation of the formation of a young girl's sympathies in this struggle." With a style that is "simple, without ornamentation or embellishment," the reviewer recognized the memoirist's close interactions and friendships with loyalists in Madrid, who were "so kindly and sympathetic, so determined, and so sadly abused by Franco and the rebels that she could not help but see things thru their eyes. Miss Riesenfeld left Spain a much sadder and wiser young woman."³⁰⁵ It was noticeable the mutual *sympathy* of the relationships the dancer forged in Spain. As a "nomadic subject" this connection, or further, *empathy*, became a focal point for her and for her readers.

Opinions about the Spanish Civil War across the western hemisphere varied, along with assessments of *Dancer in Madrid*. With Riesenfeld's book reaching reviewers in Canada, the *Winnipeg Free Press* pointed out the US dancer's sympathy to the Republican side and documentation of food shortage, bombardment, and Madrid's café life during war, "Miss Riesenfeld makes it quite a bit too real for pleasure." Not enthusiastic about her narrative, the reviewer moved onto another Spanish Civil War book that exposed some of the pro-rebel sentiment and the own reviewer's bias: "Mr. Drummond's book is a fantastic novel, painting the Nationalists in the brightest of hues." C.H. Drummond's book, *A Message to Burgos*, narrates a story of a Nationalist hero facing down loyalist terror.³⁰⁶ While *Dancer in Madrid* was quickly published, there was

³⁰⁵ Author unknown, "Footnotes," *Lincoln Evening Journal*, March 25, 1938, p. 8.

³⁰⁶ Author unknown, "Spanish Front," *Winnipeg Free Press*, May 7, 1938, p. 15.

clearly ambiguity around the memoir, especially considering that just a few years later there was extensive popularity of the war memoirs by Orwell and Hemingway.

Nomadism and Dance as Resistance

Like visual or fine art in the twentieth century, dance may be interpreted as political and cultural responses to the artist's or performer's historical moment.³⁰⁷ At first consideration women's cultural work appears to be the antithesis of political activity. However, as scholars have argued, art, poetry, and even dance took on political meanings against the ideological tense atmosphere of the 1930s. Just as Braidotti's travel, philosophizing, and writing is cartography (an "intellectual landscape gardening"), a "politics of locations applied to writing" that provides a frame of reference, for Riesenfeld, dancing flamenco served as a kind of cartography or political mapping of the body.³⁰⁸ During the Spanish Civil War, the American danced for benefits in Madrid and gained valuable insight into the mentalities and inner perspectives of Madrileños. The connection of women's work, charity and community involvement, and dance in the flamenco world may date back to 1879 with the "first exports of flamenco dance" with a

³⁰⁷ The twentieth century saw widespread turmoil and disruption and it is within this context that we must widen the scope of acts deemed "political." Helena Lewis' "political surrealism" argues that art and politics became inseparable in the early twentieth century, specifically a shift under Andre Breton's Surrealist leadership and revolutionary conviction. See Helena Lewis, *The Politics of Surrealism* (New York: Paragon House, 1988). For a historiography of gender and dance, see Elizabeth Claire, "Dance Studies, Gender, and the Question of History," *Clio. Women, Gender, History*, No. 46, *Dancing* (2017) pp. 157-185.

³⁰⁸ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 17.

fundraising Spanish fiesta to benefit flooding victims of Murcia and Almería in Paris.³⁰⁹

A form of activism, relief efforts financially aid victims in need as well as raising awareness to a broader, directly unaffected population. Indeed, even before writing *Dancer in Madrid*, Riesenfeld transformed into a historical actor in supporting the persecuted and an activist in her *public* dance for the Republican cause.

Dance and choreography, even more than poetry, defies “linguistic economies” that devalue non-reproductive modes and histories. Dance scholar Elizabeth Claire argues “the significance for feminist studies of understanding the articulation between the performativity and the embodiment of gender, the notion of an ontology of the present also seemed to open up possibilities for the art of gesture to be considered as escaping certain constraints imposed by the phallo-logocentric culture.”³¹⁰ Dance can serve as representation and mimicry of past narratives through the moving body, which includes interpretation. Historically, flamenco, in song and dance, is understood as a form of resistance and Claire, who extends Judith Butler’s contributions, argues of dance more generally, “choreography had historically been understood as a way of questioning the interaction of conventions that structure the representation of gendered identity beyond linguistic performativity.”³¹¹ The actual performance of flamenco is an act of defiance, the historical narratives of outsiders sexualized and gendered the dancing, flamenco body as “othered,” and practitioners employed and embodied such traditions in charitable and

³⁰⁹ Meira K. Goldberg, Michelle Heffner Hayes, eds., *Flamenco on the Global Stage: Historical, Critical, and Theoretical Perspectives* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2015), 29.

³¹⁰ Claire, “Dance Studies,” 161.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 162.

political activism. Riesenfeld combined such subjectivities in her copying of the flamenco artistic and political forms in Spain and during the Spanish Civil War. She helped to serve as an intermediary between Anglo-Hispanic cultures.

Dance was Riesenfeld's spatial metaphor, her way of mapping her path and identity—to learn flamenco, to go to Spain, to join the Loyalist cause, and to make a life in Mexico among Spanish Civil War exiles. While she engaged in international travel, the American moved through various spaces, using her body, in nomadic fashion, in an artistic and political form of movement and expression. Dance is an intentional act or expression of emotion, feeling, or communication, and performance for an audience intends for a response, creating a kind of dialogue initiated by the dancer. Flamenco particularly requires the dancer to be an active agent, as the history of flamenco is one of marginalization, tension, resistance, and cultural hybridity. The dancer is defiant in their movement and boisterous in their heelwork; the dance transfigures the dancer.³¹² The editors of *Flamenco on the Global Stage* aptly synthesize, “The flamenco body is a kinetic site of ideological resistance, its embodied articulation carries the cruel burden of marginalization and nomadism.”³¹³ The persecution of and discrimination towards *gitanos* and *gypsies* is traced well before the eighteenth-century Bourbon era, but it was then that the exclusions of these groups from national identity building was clear. Centuries of marginalization pushed *gitano* culture underground and in specific neighborhoods outside of bourgeois centers. In bars and homes during the nineteenth

³¹² Goldberg, *Flamenco on the Global Stage*, 124.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 1.

century, flamenco resounded of noisy confusion, creating a “ruckus,” and the *bullá* (or the dance) and *jaleo* (the song) complement the proud striking step of the flamenco dancer.³¹⁴ The debates about flamenco’s origins illuminate more about the social contexts in Spain’s history and perceptions about it from abroad than to expose an authentic character of the Spanish nation.

Flamenco is born from an interaction of historical and cultural forces and persecuted *gitanos*, romantic foreign observers, and performers who adapted the tradition at various times. Regardless of the mixture of influences in its development, flamenco as known in the twentieth century had been born from “a dance of the common people, situated in working-class and Gitano neighborhoods, far from metropolitan centers.”³¹⁵ In the early twentieth century the dance of flamenco represents the shifts to modernism across Europe, the embrace of “authenticity” in the rejection of a system that oppressed marginalized groups and lifted up the practices and beliefs of the elite.³¹⁶ Just as

³¹⁴ Ibid., 126.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 27. From the 1492 expulsion of Jews and Moors, forced conversions by the Inquisition, and the institutionalization of the myth of a monolithic Catholic Spain, discriminatory laws and politics waged against minority religions and the Roma (Gitano) people. Earlier protections against local discrimination ended with the Pragmática de 1499, which ordered *gitanos* who had not renounced their language and traditional attire, took up permanent domiciles and professions, or serve a master, would be expelled, or enslaved. During the 16th and 17th century *Siglo de Oro*, Spanish literature produced harmful stereotypes of the Roma, Jewish, and Muslim communities that remained in Spain. See Lou Charnon-Deutsch, “¿QUIÉNES SON LOS GITANOS?” LOS ORÍGENES DEL PROCESO DE ESTEREOTIPIZACIÓN DE LOS ROMANÍES EN ESPAÑA,” *Historia Social*, no. 93 (2019): 7. Accessed January 16, 2021. <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.fiu.edu/stable/26563499>; Teresa San Román, *La diferencia inquietante: Viejas y nuevas estrategias culturales de los gitanos, Siglo XXI de España* (Editores, Madrid, 1997); and Meira K. Goldberg, Michelle Heffner Hayes, eds., *Flamenco on the Global Stage: Historical, Critical, and Theoretical Perspectives* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2015). On the “orientalization” of Spain see Aurora G. Morcillo, “The Orient Within: Women “in-between” under Francoism,” in Fatima Sadiqi, Moha Ennaji, eds. *Women in the Middle East and North Africa: Agents of Change* (London: Routledge, 2010).

³¹⁶ Goldberg, *Flamenco*, 26.

foreigners in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries perpetuated visions of the Spanish people as the “other” in Europe, inside and outside of Spain we see the perpetuation of Spanish national identity as linked to “blackness,” antiflamenquismo, gitanismo, and political protest.”³¹⁷ Federico García Lorca is quoted in Goldberg as summarizing the internal and external constructions as mutually constitutive, “those who are persecuted: the Gypsy, the black, the Jew...the Moor we all carry inside us.”³¹⁸

Amid nineteenth century explanations and contemporary debates by poets, artists, scholars, and travelers, it can be argued that the styles identified as flamenco over the last century are products of heterogenous processes of migration and cultural practices that coalesced in Spain and developed particularly significant expression in late nineteenth-century Andalusia. Andalusian entertainment venues like street fiestas, cafes, *tablaos*, and in private homes fueled or inspired a broader artistic and folk tradition within and outside of the country.³¹⁹ Despite still exoticizing Spanish culture, desire for “authenticity” and primitiveness of modernism and growing affection for Spain and Spanish people, the popularity of flamenco on global stages rose in the first few decades of the twentieth century, attracting tourists and artists alike to visit to learn and perform the form.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 17.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 124. Within Spain there exists a lively debate on the etymology and origins of flamenco, as well as the place of flamenco in the cultural identity of Spain and Andalusia, see the volume *La poesía del flamenco* (2004), including Núñez, Miguel Roper. "Aproximación a La Historia Del Flamenco: El Problema Histórico, Cultural Y Etimológico." *Litoral*, no. 238 (2004): 6-31. The contributors of the volume attribute cultural significance of the *cante* or *jondo* as part of flamenco to “*gitano*” culture of Andalusia, while various etymologies still exist on the term.

³¹⁹ Núñez, Miguel Roper. "Aproximación a La Historia Del Flamenco: El Problema Histórico, Cultural Y Etimológico," *Litoral*, no. 238 (2004): 6-31.

Indeed, music, dance, and love attracted Riesenfeld to Spain, she anticipated “everybody’s dancing, especially my dancing.”³²⁰ She shared the exoticized images of Spanish culture with other modern primitivists of the early twentieth century, yet Riesenfeld aimed to cross the border separating the “self” and the “other.” During the American’s early weeks in Madrid, Riesenfeld observed that while there were some notable changes, some of the “same outward manifestations of a war that Barcelona had,” the “normal way of life” persisted despite what she noted, that the “enemy was only some sixty miles away.”³²¹ This business-as-usual extended to the arts and entertainment; Riesenfeld stated that movie pictures ran, “people still sat four hours over a cup of coffee in a café,” and the gala theatrical season was in full swing.³²² This reportage coincides with researchers’ evidence of the continuation of expositions, arts, and propaganda organized through the Spanish Civil War. The first couple months of war witnessed the greatest outpouring of banquet concerts in support of the II Republic.³²³

For a nominal entrance fee, you were able to see all the outstanding artists of Spain. These were benefit performances for the hospitals; in time of peace you could not have seen so many performers in one evening for any amount of money. They worked indefatigably, giving as many as give different benefits a day. As soon as they finished in one theater, they were hurried in cars to appear at another. Seldom have entertainers been so generous in devoting their services and talents.³²⁴

³²⁰ Riesenfeld, *Dancer*, 8.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

³²² *Ibid.*

³²³ Javier Tusell Gómez, *La Guerra Civil Española*, Exposición organizada por la Dirección del Patrimonio Artístico, Archivos y Museos (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1980).

³²⁴ Riesenfeld, *Dancer*, 97.

Riesenfeld danced every day at the Monreal Academy to prepare for the concert tour she was to join, though the studio was an intimate space in which this family of instructors and artists lived, socialized, and included the American. Riesenfeld claims that with her dance partners, they “were kept busy,” and “dancing as often as five times a day at the benefits.”³²⁵

As a dancer and novice writer, Riesenfeld was part of the visible increase of creative women on the Left during the 1930s. Dancers whose work and life blended art and politics included Martha Graham, Anna Sokolow, and Sophie Maslow. The latter two trained under Graham in The Martha Graham Dance Company, were Jewish, and took more direct political lines with union work and Marxist affiliations.³²⁶ Graham’s autobiography illuminates her philosophy of dance as a timeless art:

I think the reason dance has held such an ageless magic for the world is that it has been the symbol of the performance of living. Even as I write, time has begun to make today yesterday—the past. The most brilliant scientific discoveries will in time change and perhaps grow obsolete, as new scientific manifestations emerge. But art is eternal, for it reveals the inner landscape, which is the soul of man.³²⁷

Graham was not just a defender of the relationship of dance, art, and the human experience, but dance was a means by which she became politicized. She was invited to dance at the 1936 Olympics in Germany, and not unlike Muriel Rukeyser’s support for the protest against fascism and Nazism in Barcelona during the scheduled the People’s

³²⁵ Ibid., 134.

³²⁶ See Lynn Garafola, “Of, By, and For the People: Dancing on the Left in the 1930s” *Studies in Dance History*, Book 5 (New York: Society of Dance History Scholars, 1994) and Ellen Graff, “Dancing Red: Art and Politics” *Studies in Dance History* 5, no. 1 (1994).

³²⁷ Martha Graham, *Blood Memory*, 4.

Olympiad, Graham declined participation in Berlin in light of Nazi oppression of Jews.³²⁸ Highlighting the connection between antifascism and modern art, in 1937 Graham spoke at the American Artists' Congress second national convention, where Pablo Picasso also addressed the congress by telephone.³²⁹ Further, dance historians identify Graham's *Chronicle* (1936) as a statement on international conflicts of the 1930s, including the Great Depression and the Spanish Civil War. *American Document* (1938) "enacted an affirmation of democracy as a utopian invocation of national identity," informed by her antifascist politics.³³⁰ On the Spanish conflict, Graham explains:

Overseas, in Spain, the tragedy of the Civil War brought immediate response from artists. We all chose to respond to the horror of it in our own way. I chose *Deep Song* (in Spanish, "Cante Junto"). It was a solo piece like Lamentation, but here I used the bench in a more active way. The bare stage opened to me in my black and white striped paneled dress, while Henry Cowell's music began to play. This was in December 1937. The following year, with Anna Sokolow, Helen Tamaris, Hanya Holm, and Ballet Caravan, we performed in a benefit to aid the democratic cause in Spain.³³¹

Graham danced in a production by Hugo Riesenfeld, and while evidence of a direct relationship between the two dancers remains to be unearthed, we may imagine that upon Janet Riesenfeld's return to the United States and her publication of *Dancer in Madrid*, her work or ideas reached women like Graham, Maslow, or Sokolow. In 1939

³²⁸ Ibid., 151.

³²⁹ Ibid., 15.

³³⁰ Franko, *Martha Graham*, 38.

³³¹ Graham, *Blood Memory*, 153.

the latter dancer relocated to Mexico City, where Riesenfeld would also move following the Spanish conflict.³³²

Dancers' artistic, yet partisan, genres contrast to the traditional "expert" writers and observers in Spain in additional ways. Sebastiaan Faber argues:

The importance of particular national and cultural contexts complicate the notion of *Hispanism* as a cosmopolitan scholarly institution transcending national boundaries. Each national branch of the *Hispanist* community has its own particular genealogy, bound up with the history of academic institutions and intellectual life in their respective national communities.³³³

In this vein, the US women, including Rukeyser with her poetic vision, conversely offer a counter to this nationalized academic approach to hispanism and better transcend national categories because they lay outside official institutions or groups. Studying the hispanism and antifascist activities of female artists offers more universalizing, untraditional political, non-masculine, takes on history.

While Americans politicized dance around the Spanish Civil War, with Riesenfeld in banquet concerts in Madrid and Graham dancing to raise money to aid Spanish democracy at home in the United States, British antifascists also used the arts to support loyalists in Spain. The archives of the Spanish Civil War at the Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica reveal international pamphlets of concerts, fiestas, and town meetings hosted in Britain to raise funds and awareness for Spain. Dance, art, and fundraising blended in numerous examples demonstrate men's and women's indirect,

³³² This was as short film produced in 1922, see Tara Becker School of Dance, <https://www.tarabecker.com.au/martha-graham/>

³³³ Faber, *Anglo-American Hispanists*, 8.

yet valuable, politicizing for the II Republic. (Figures 13-16) Yet, the *Americanita's* flamenco dancing did not end with the defeat of the loyalists in Spain: Chapter Four explores Janet Riesenfeld's acting and writing career as "la bailarina exótica y vampiresa" in Mexico City, Mexico.³³⁴

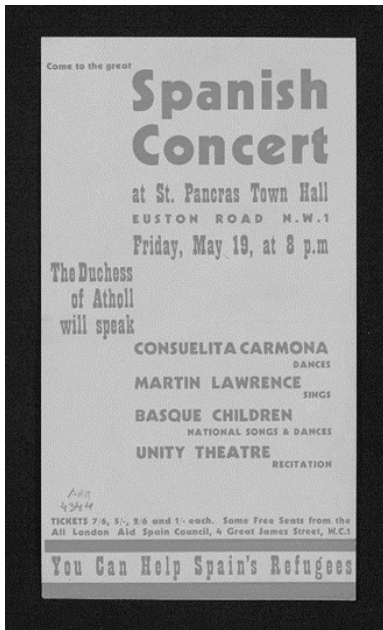


Figure 13: Benefit for Spanish Refugees, Flyer, London. Various entertainments used in fundraising benefits for Spanish Refugees in Britain. Many women in the United States, like Nancy MacDonald, organized funds on behalf of Spaniards displaced by the Civil War. CDMH_PAMFLETOS_ARM_4344. *España. Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte. Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica.*

³³⁴ Rocio Ramirez Hernandez, "Fallecio Janet Alcoriza," *Novedades*, 26 November, 1998, p. 7, E-05821, Expedientes Personalidades, Centro de Documentación, *Cineteca Nacional*, Mexico City, D.F., Mexico.



Figure 14: “Fiesta,” Seymour Hall, Flyer, London. One of several “fiestas” organized at Seymour Hall, during the Spanish Civil War to send food to Spain. In the U.S., local groups collected flour and other foodstuffs and clothing to send to children of Republicans in Spain. CDMH_PAMFLETOS_ARMS_R_4347. *España. Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte. Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica.*

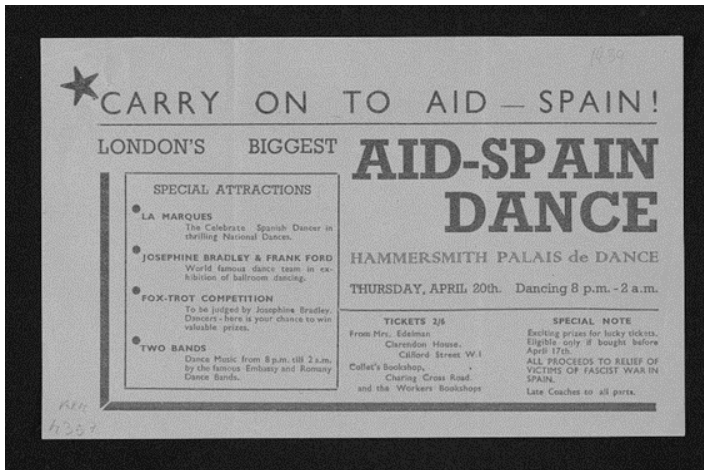


Figure 15: “Carry-On to Aid Spain!” Flyer, London. Several dances were hosted to raise money for the Spanish Civil War. The lineup included Spanish as well as US performers. CDMH_PAMFLETOS_ARM_4357. *España. Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte. Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica.*



Figure 16: Indian Committee for Food for Spain, Flyer, London. Various defenders of the Loyalists and Spanish Government in Spain used dance as a tool of fundraising and political support. CDMH_PAMFLETOS_ARM_4373. *España. Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte. Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica.*

Exodus (Conclusion)

Few belongings in hand, the exodus through the Pyrenees to the French border was unceasing and arduous for the Spanish exiles. Mothers carried children on their backs, disheartened at the unknown whereabouts of their sons and husbands. The future of these refugees was uncertain, as after three years of civil war they were weak, starving, and had witnessed brutality, the Republican government and Popular Front were now defeated by the Nationalist forces under General Franco. Towards the end of the Spanish Civil War, roughly five hundred thousand Spaniards lost their lives and the same number now fled in exile. The greatest number sought salvation first in France, where many were greeted by more hunger, mistreatment, and risk of being identified as a Republican and

forced to return to Franco's Spain. After 1940 there was also the threat of deportation to concentration camps following Nazi occupation, while men on scorched beaches in Perpignan died of thirst, hunger, and exhaustion.

Despite less primitive conditions, women did not escape the dangers of being a Republican exile in wartime France. Silvia Mistral (1914-2004), a Spanish anarchist journalist during the Civil War, published her diary that traced her journey out of Spain, recounted the horrid conditions experienced by many exiles, and expressed her relief in her passage to Mexico: "The country of salvation, it gives the lesson on humanity."³³⁵ The diary of Silvia Mistral, like many Spanish women fleeing Spain, illuminates the conditions of hunger and waiting as a refugee in rural France and the cruel and desperate conditions that the men faced in concentration camps on French beaches. While Mistral's position as a single, intellectual woman represents the minority of cases, she provides comments that reflect a broader sentiment among refugee women. She writes that some women, even after crossing into France, had decided to return to war-torn Spain. The answers the women in Mistral's diary provided indicate that they felt the need to continue to fight for Spain despite the dangers. They replied that in Spain they could be more useful towards the cause; however, in France, they would live idle in horrid conditions and near death.³³⁶ Mistral's observations that even ordinary women maintained strong

³³⁵ Silvia Mistral, foreword by José F. Colmeiro, *Éxodo: Diario de una refugiada española* (Barcelona: Icaria, 2009), 135.

³³⁶ Mistral had moved to Spain from Cuba when her Spanish born parents returned in 1920 to Galicia. Mistral's early adult life was in Barcelona, where she worked as a film critic and anarchist writer and was a member of the National Confederation of Workers (CNT). She was active at the front, chronicling the Civil War, the exodus from Spain, and French refugee camps. Mistral's diary—published in Mexico City in the

ideologies about the war helps explain Spanish exiles' collective struggle and unified efforts after defeat.

British correspondent in Spain Henry Buckley wrote on the half a million refugees fleeing Spain and Western democracies' contradictions. The inaction by Western democracies contributed towards the rebels' victory while at the same time they helped to salvage Spanish and Italian art: "But we cared nothing about the soul of a people which was being trampled on."... might as well let the works burn, "Better still if we had hearts big enough to cherish both, but since apparently we have not, it would at least have been a happier omen if such drops of the milk of human kindness which we still possess could have gone to the human sufferers."³³⁷ While of course Buckley was actively reporting on the II Republic and then the Civil War from the fronts of Spain, his moving account and commentary on action, and inaction, was published after Franco's victory (originally in 1940). Significantly, Riesenfeld, driven by her affectionate mythification of Spain, published for US audiences in 1938 with the hope of still being able to create a change of outcome.

Reading about Riesenfeld's and Rukeyser's transformative experiences at the outbreak of war demonstrates how the Spanish conflict and anti-fascism presented opportunities for political and social awareness growth. Many volunteers connected the Spanish Civil War to broader struggles outside of Spain. Yet, Riesenfeld additionally exhibited the qualities and subjectivity of the "nomadic subject," permitting her to form a

newspaper *Hoy*—tracks her voyage at the end of the war to France and to her ultimate destination to Mexico on board the *Ipanema*.

³³⁷ Henry Buckley, *The Life and Death of the Spanish Republic*.

more intimate relationship and understanding than many other foreigners in Spain. By engrossing herself in the language, folk culture of flamenco, and spending day in and day out with working class and artistic Madrileños, the US dancer may not have been employed as a formal correspondent, but her memoir shares a keen awareness of the complexities of war and of the tensions within Spanish society in the 1930s. By reducing the distance between herself and the “other,” between reason and passion, Riesenfeld adhered to the call to raise support for the Loyalist, anti-fascist cause in Spain with US readers. The dancer was the nomadic “interpreter,” using her body and physical movement through flamenco to empathize with Spanish culture and the people she formed most close ties to in Spain and align herself politically to the Republican cause and anti-fascist movement.

Although Muriel Rukeyser and Janet Riesenfeld were young and impressionable, their reflections demonstrate a lasting effect on an awakened global consciousness rooted in their passion for a democratic Spain. Through language and empathy, the “nomadic subjects” threw themselves into experiences that challenged the myths they held of Spain to develop a keen understanding of the perspectives of the conflict and its implications. The war transformed their personal and political awareness and influenced how they sought to engage the US public through writing and activism. The Spanish Civil War played important roles in the lives of Rukeyser and Riesenfeld. While Rukeyser was already politically leaning before entry, Riesenfeld was apolitical. It has often been tempting to essentialize women’s political identities, which would place Riesenfeld’s on the side of the Nationalists with Jaime, she exhibited political autonomy in developing pro-Republican sympathies despite his influence. The nomad’s willingness to set

themselves outside of dominant discourses or views and have an independent mind, also negates a temptation that Rukeyser was merely swept up in anti-fascist fervor exhibited by her love interest, Otto. The nomad's empathy towards the loyalists in the Spanish Civil War helps support the larger pro-Republican argument.

Located largely outside of the archive, the “nomadic subject” expands, transgresses, and knocks down boundaries, often in different and unique ways. While the experience in Spain bolstered Rukeyser's politics and we will see a life of political and social activism and engagement with writing, social and political institutions, and academia, Riesenfeld's form of activism maintained a more abstract form. Beyond writing *Dancer in Madrid*, Riesenfeld's nomadism would take her outside the United States to a kind of self-imposed exile, a successful career in film, and a survivalist strategy amongst Spanish Civil War exiles in Mexico City, Mexico.

CHAPTER THREE

A Paradigm of All Borders: Muriel Rukeyser, Spain, and the Cold War

*Poetess in OWI Here Probed by U.S. as Red...
a dark rather plump brunette...
violently partisan writings in the New Masses from 1936 until recently.*

-Howard Rushmore, writing about Muriel Rukeyser, *New York Journal American* (1943)³³⁸

Enrique, a Spanish Civil War exile in his 20s living in Paris, made an emotional plea to a young American woman, Barbara Probst Solomon, in 1947. Just prior to her first trip across the Pyrenees to Spain, Enrique instructed, “Look at it, Barbara, and then tell it to me when you come back.” Enrique admitted that the memory of his beloved homeland was fading, as he was just a child when he was forced to flee in 1939. He did not feel he could ask his male *camarada* who was illegally taking trips across the Spanish French border, Paco, “He is a man, and he is Spanish.” Enrique felt as a foreigner, and as a woman, Barbara Probst Solomon could be the emotional conduit his memory needed. He

³³⁸ Muriel Rukeyser, Federal Bureau of Investigation (File 77-6069, May, 31, 1943), FIU Online Electronic Resources - U.S. Documents. <http://purl.access.gpo.gov/GPO/LPS98155>. United States Office of War Information (OWI). Rushmore had once been a writer and film editor for the communist *Daily Worker*; the journalist, communist turned anti-communist, broke with his former affiliation in the 1930s and went on to testify on congressional committees against alleged and known communists. Ex-editor of *Confidential*, in the 1950s his journalistic writings attacked communism and alleged sympathizers while working with the FBI.. *Charlotte News* (Charlotte, North Carolina), July 9, 1955: 1. Readex: *America's Historical Newspapers*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2%3A1126167831380960%40EANX-16F7255F5CB7CF29%402435298-16F722D06585220F%400-16F722D06585220F%40>. *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), January 4, 1958: 1. Readex: *America's Historical Newspapers*. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2%3A1223BCE5B718A166%40EANX-12C1C5B474393E36%402436208-12C1BEFF2F76997D%400-12C1BEFF2F76997D%40>.

wished to see “the landscape...the trees, the colors...I know Paris, I know Mexico City....well remember it and tell me.”³³⁹ Solomon was a young, aspiring Jewish American writer who set off for Europe in 1947. First in Paris, the nineteen-year-old American became friends, and then co-conspirator, with young Spanish Civil War exiles and the remaining active members of the left-wing, non-Communist FUE (La Federación Universitaria Escolar) attempting to overthrow fascism in Spain from the outside.³⁴⁰ Solomon’s ability to pass as an innocent tourist in Spain, her gender contributing towards this presumption, made her an ideal candidate to drive the getaway car during several prison raids. Through her friendship with Spanish revolutionaries in Paris they hoped to restore democracy in Spain in the late 1940s. Therefore, she assisted in the escape of young Republican sympathizers from Francoist jails, distributing propaganda materials in Spain, and went on to a career as a Spanish correspondent, writer, and academic, devoting much of her attention to issues in Spain under the fascist regime.³⁴¹ The requests made of Solomon by the young, exiled Spaniards highlight how an “outsider” status can provide a privileged yet peripheral perspective on politics and social change; Solomon,

³³⁹ Barbara Probst Solomon, *Arriving Where We Started* (New York: Great Marsh Press, 1972), 52-56. While some Spaniards certainly went back to Spain in ensuing years by choice due to poor conditions in France or by threat or force by French officials in compliance with Franco, most Civil War exiles in Mexico could not return to Spain for fear of arrest and imprisonment. See Juan B. Vilar, “El exilio español de 1939 en el Norte de África,” in *¡Ay de los vencidos! El exilio y los países de acogida*, Ed. Eneida, Madrid, pp.189-233. Alicia Alted, *La voz de los vencidos: El exilio republicano de 1939*, Ed. Aguilar, Madrid, 2005, pp. 42-43. An estimated 465,000 Spaniards crossed the French border by the first few months of 1939. Vilar states that by the end of 1939 around 268,000 Spaniards returned home, with more leaving France by the end of the Second World War. However, in 1944 162,000 Spanish exiles remained in France, and as many as 40,000 Spaniards had fled to Mexico. More exiles returned to Spain with Franco’s loosening regulations in the 1950s, however many would never go back, even after Franco’s death in 1975; and most would permanently live abroad.

³⁴⁰ Solomon referred to the movement as Federación Universidades Españolas.

³⁴¹ Solomon, *Arriving*.

like Rukeyser and Riesenfeld served as a kind of Anglo-Hispanic cultural bridge after the Spanish Civil War.

With the Cold War intensification of rigid national borders and political structures, as well as gender ideologies, the “nomadic subject” and her building of bridges often placed her at odds with dominant politics and social codes. Additionally, the conflicts of the middle of the twentieth century produced mass mobilizations, dislocations, and exile. After the defeat of the II Republic in 1939, roughly half a million Republican supporters fled Spain, and while the majority settled in France, a significant amount of highly connected politicians, intellectuals, and artists made their way to Mexico. While most exiles dedicated their efforts to restoring democracy to Spain from abroad and experienced challenges assimilating into Mexican society, the U.S. and other democracies recognized General Francisco Franco’s fascist regime as a legitimate government.

A nomadic history surrounding the Spanish Civil War and analysis of Rukeyser’s challenge to the dominant political trends between the 1930s and 1940s problematizes an overreliance on 1945 in the Cold War periodization. She viewed the Spanish Civil War as a symbol for inclusion for those on the margins and this propelled her to continuously defend the II Republic and to support leftist causes at home, earning her status as a possible Cold War subversive.³⁴² While there are limitations to her vision of the

³⁴² The Spanish intellectuals in exile in Mexico no longer identified based on their socialist, communist, republican, or anarchist affiliations, but their works in refuge speak to a growing sense of unified strife and ongoing battle for the cause of a free Spain. In Mexico, writers called for an end to factionalism and setting aside individual differences. For such reasons, outside of professional, academic, and economic capacities, much of the political organizing by refugees circled around anti-fascist activities with a growing disillusionment among exiles that Franco would not be removed, see Cate-Arries, “Conquering Myths,” 230-232; Fagen, *Exiles and Citizens*, 39; Isabel de Palencia, *Smouldering Freedom*, 43; See Maria Labbato,

democratic potential in Spain, her and other women's location outside official parties provides a unique take on the narrative of "premature antifascists," the term often applied to U.S. volunteers in brigade regiments used to highlight strong worker and leftist activities and associations amidst growing anti-communism in the post-World War II period.³⁴³ The unique perspective of female writers and intellectuals on the Left contributes to a more holistic, empathetic historical narrative of the Spanish Civil War and anti-fascism that provides a trans-Atlantic lens that goes beyond the nation or party while recognizing their becoming victims of Pre-Cold War anti-communism, as well.

This chapter demonstrates how the nomad looked for a *transnational* world in a growing *international* world after 1936. Rukeyser increasingly became more rebellious in both linguistic boundaries and divisions of genre and knowledge. As the world around her became more rigid and fixed, the poet-activist attempted to universalize what was "marginal," clinging to the boundary-lessness that the 1936 Games in Barcelona provided: Spain offered a model for greater transnationalism, however, the proceeding the official Cold War had become for the poet the "paradigm" of borders.³⁴⁴ As the world was shaped by international politics that relied on the binaries of communism/capitalism, Soviet Union/U.S., east/west, the poet's ongoing work included intensified efforts to fight against the obstruction to democracy and social justice in Spain, within the United States,

"Spanish Civil War Exiles in Mexico City: Intellectual Refuge from a Gendered Perspective, 1939-1960," MA Thesis, (University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 2014).

³⁴³ See John Gerassi, *The Premature Anti-fascists: North American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, 1936- 1939* (New York: Praeger, 1986).

³⁴⁴ Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, 297.

and where authoritarianism lurked globally. She wrote on various issues, including war, workers' rights, authoritarianism, and social injustice at home and abroad. Her parallels with Spanish politician and exile Margarita Nelken offer further transnational insight into the challenges faced by women who did not conform in the post-1936 world, since on both sides of the Atlantic there was intense pressure to conform to Cold War ideals.

The Cold War offered two options for the “nomadic subjects,” to defy international orders or be inside to subvert. In her activism from within the U.S., Rukeyser responded differently from Janet Riesenfeld's more survivalist strategy, who defied international orders through her self-imposed exile in Mexico. Rather, the poet subverts political and gender prescripts from within the U.S. while during the Franco era in Spain Cold War discourses about femininity prevailed. As Aurora Morcillo argues, the Francoist state contributed to a postwar model of the “new woman” “rooted in traditional Catholic values of femininity.” Across the Atlantic historian Elaine Tyler May illuminates the link between political containment abroad and sexual and gender containment within the US nuclear family during the Cold War. The pressure to conform to ideals of domesticity relied on identifying foreign threats, including the risk of US women losing their femininity and sexuality if they flocked to industrial work like Soviet women, which became the center of conversation between then Vice President Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev during their infamous “Kitchen Debates.” Comparing and contrasting American and Spanish “nomadic” women's experiences, like Nelken, will help to further bridge and expand the history of the Spanish Civil War across time and an Atlantic perspective.

Examining the diverse aspects of the poet's activism exposes the profound imprint of the Spanish Civil War on her life, work, and broader commitment to social justice. She claimed to have been "born again" in Spain and engaged in direct political action upon her return, resulting in a kind of Cold War polarization due to anti-communism.³⁴⁵ In the post-Spanish Civil War period, her Jewishness and association with the radical Left continued to shape the poet's experience and attention to women's concerns across issues and geopolitical lines. By continuing to take inspiration from Braidotti's "nomadic subject," this chapter offers insight into Rukeyser's commitments to diverse issues and the fluidity of her activism: fluidity in her involvement in multiple causes and in the ways her activism took different forms. Nomadic subjectivity continually critiques binaries with the ability to identify more fluidly, which produces new ways of thinking that open possibilities for less political, cultural, and gendered divisions. The poet's correspondence, published and unpublished works, and the FBI's official surveillance reports on her supposed pro-communist activities demonstrate her continued support for the defeated II Republic against the backdrop of Cold War rigidity, which held the risk of marking a person as "red" or a communist sympathizer. As the nomadic women of this dissertation transgressed language and cultural barriers, physically and metaphorically, Octavio Paz's arguments on the work of translation helps to expand the women's work and activism towards greater social and political implications. Indeed, Rukeyser is the empathetic nomad in her continuously identifying with the other but in

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 244.

that process runs the risk of muting the other or unifies it to the point of sameness, ultimately bringing it into the self and a reflection on the self.

The Polyglot Part II

At each phase of her life, Rukeyser believed in the power of language and traversing linguistic and cultural differences. Following her witness to the Spanish Civil War and support on behalf of Spanish refugees, she worked from home in the U.S. on several translation projects throughout her career. The poet's most notable translation project was with renowned Mexican poet, Octavio Paz. As early as 1944 the US poet befriended Paz, as her diary notes meeting the Mexican writer for dinners in New York City to discuss writing and translating.³⁴⁶ She spent several years working with US publishers to have a collection of his poems translated to English, completing two books of Paz translations.³⁴⁷ As the polyglot nomad, the American therefore worked to cross the Anglo-Hispanic cultural and linguistic divide. Paz's theory on translation further advances Braidotti's "nomadic subject" as a *bridge* between the "self" and "other" through language.

The work of the translator is the oral and written version of the "nomadic subject." Octavio Paz himself argued that the work of translation was significant for

³⁴⁶ Translations, Box I:1, Folder 3, Rukeyser Papers, LOC. The poet received another memo in 1975 from a group of North Americans in Spain, addressed correspondence to a M. J. Falques and monetary support made out to Marie-Ange Falques. The memo outlines increased organization by the opposition and general unrest but also repression and torture of political prisoners, and asks for international support for intellectual prisoners.

³⁴⁷ CV (1975), Box I:9, Folder 2, Correspondence, Rukeyser Paper, LOC.

transculturation and learning about the world, however such work had become devalued over the centuries since the printing press and especially with the introduction of the copyright, as scholar Susan Bassnett explains. She plainly puts it: “The irony is, of course, that without translators, texts written in languages of which readers have no knowledge would remain unknown and unread.” She further quotes Paz, “Thanks to translation, we become aware that our neighbours do not speak and think as we do.” The differences, and similarities, among groups are made apparent through the work of translation: on a level all texts are “translations of translations of translations. Each text is unique, yet at the same time it is the translation of another text.”³⁴⁸ Paz captured the historical and universalizing action of translation:

Even the most isolated tribe, sooner or later, comes into contact with other people who speak a foreign language. The sounds of a tongue we do not know may cause us to react with astonishment, annoyance, indignation, or amused perplexity, but these sensations are soon replaced by uncertainties about our own language. We become aware that language is not universal; rather, there is a plurality of languages, each one alien and unintelligible to the others. In the past, translation dispelled the uncertainties. Although language is not universal, languages nevertheless form part of a universal society in which, once some difficulties have been overcome, all people can communicate with and understand each other.³⁴⁹

Paz continues, arguing the “universality of the spirit,” as was the case in Babel and discovering “existence of spiritual bonds.” For the Mexican poet, the modern era had ruined the sense of commonality and favorable, unifying force of translation due to variety and divergence of interests during colonizing the “other” or perceived “savages”

³⁴⁸ Susan Bassnett, “Translation,” chapter in Steven Earnshaw, editor, *The Handbook of Creative Writing* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 367, 368.

³⁴⁹ Octavio Paz, “Translation: Literature and Letters,” translated by Irene del Corral, in John Biguenet and Rainer Schulte, *Theories of Translation* (The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 152.

and “heathens,” to convert them and impose common language, but maintaining a sense of difference.³⁵⁰ Paz, and the work of translators, reminds us of the false dichotomy between the self and the “other.” Language is a form of identity, knowledge production, and cultural difference, and while translation acknowledges plurality without violence, it ultimately, obscures the “other.” The desire to understand difference and universalize it through translation, through the example of the US poet, the interpreter, as represented by Riesenfeld, seeks to leave the “other” unchanged, perhaps muting and obscuring her own “self.” Still, the dynamic exercise of translation, as well as the physical and cultural travel, is a natural task for the “nomadic subject” like Rukeyser.

Her attempts to bridge linguistic and cultural difference spanned beyond the Spanish-English divide. In addition to her continual work with Spanish refugee aid, collaboration with Paz, and translating Spanish poetry and children’s music, in her 1944 *Breaking Open* Rukeyser co-translated Inuit traditions in a third part, “Eskimo Songs in English.”³⁵¹ She also helped co-translate works by Nelly Sachs, Jewish-German and Swedish poet and outspoken voice for the Jewish people and was asked by Robert Payne, at the time Vice President and Chairman of the Translation Committee of PEN, to translate North Vietnamese writings in 1972 during the Vietnam War.³⁵² Ken

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 152, 153. On the origins of othering colonized peoples, Paz writes, “The savage represented civilized man’s nostalgia, his alter ego, his lost half. And translation reflected this shift: no longer was it an effort to illustrate the ultimate sameness of men; it became a vehicle to expose their individualities,” 153.

³⁵¹ Muriel Rukeyser, *Breaking Open* (New York: Random House, 1944).

³⁵² Poetry Drafts (1940-44), Box I: 42, Folder 1, Box I:55, Folder 2, Rukeyser Papers, LOC.

McCormick, editor in chief at Doubleday and Co., Inc. wrote to Rukeyser praising Tahitian poetry translations:

For the color, the light, the buoyancy of the islands are in every line and the rhythm is that of an ocean in a great surge across the Pacific interrupted momentarily by the islands. The background pulse of waves is everywhere apparent in the verse. I listened for it and heard it in your words... There is so much that is exultant about them, about love, that it gives deeper throbbing meaning to each of the poems... Wonderful.³⁵³

The reaction to her translation work demonstrates how language contains the power to become same making, to make the “far away” or “other” understood, felt, and integrated into the “self” through the interpretation of words. With Braidotti’s expanded conceptualization of language that identifies the “nomadic subject” as a polyglot linguistically—as writers such as Toni Morrison’s expanded uses of English or in genre with dance and poetry defying traditional reliance on the written word or formal politics—, Rukeyser’s work after 1936 takes on added significance in her modes of communication and cultural mobility. Resisting the fixed subjectivities reinforced in the Cold War era, the poet continuously changed her forms of expression. She not only transgressed language and writing genre, she also briefly shifted her focus toward film after returning to New York—many in relation to Spain or anti-fascism. In 1937 the “Daily Worker” expressed that the American woman was “contracted to make the adaptation of the new film from Spain, “The Defense of Madrid,”” about the Spanish Civil War. Though there is no evidence Rukeyser’s completion on the project (British

³⁵³ Letter from Ken McCormick, Box I:9 Folder 2, Correspondence, Miscellaneous, Rukeyser Papers, LOC.

director Ivor Montagu did produce a documentary *The Defence of Madrid* in November 1936), the poet had also served on a committee to produce and sponsor a play premised on Spanish workers' struggle against fascism and in November 1936 delivered a talk, "Tribute to Spain," as part of the League of American Writers.³⁵⁴ She then worked on short film, in writing and editing assistance projects, employed by the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs in the Spring of 1941 or 1942. The titles of these works include, "Stop Japan" (1936), "People of France" (1938) "A Place to Live" (1942).³⁵⁵ The fact that Rukeyser's ideas for film and documentary on Spain went unrealized may speak to the secondary or amateur status afforded to women and journalism or professionalism in the 1930s—*The Spanish Earth* (1937), documentary-styled narrative of the Popular Front's defense of Spain by Ernest Hemingway, was produced and released before the war's end. In addition to her writing, poetry, activism, translations and flirtation with film, the poet worked as a visiting lecturer at Vassar with various other academic involvements and lecture series throughout her life.

The work on translation and the continual crossing genres help illuminate Rukeyser's ongoing empathy as a "nomadic subject" and the potential effects on transnationalism. Her translation work is evidence of Homi Bhabha's "bridges" or occupation of liminal spaces that inches towards internationalism.³⁵⁶ Her works and actions also echo of Spanish philosopher María Zambrano's theory of literature and

³⁵⁴ FBI, Rukeyser, May 8, 1943, p 2-3.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

knowledge as “passionate reason.” The US poet explains that “the giant clusters of event” are helpful to “remember this other kind of knowledge and love, which has forever been a way of reaching complexes of emotion and relationship.”³⁵⁷ Truth, feeling, and wholeness, and an individual’s place in world, especially during war and trauma collided for the American woman in Spain, as she called on herself and readers “to meet the moment with our lives.”³⁵⁸ Zambrano’s philosophy can be applied to Rukeyser as an empathetic writer and, by extension I argue, a historical agent of change: her life’s work repeatedly sought to influence public sentiment towards fascist Spain, articulating a new form of protest centered on empathy and compassion instead of violence.

With rationalism prevailing, Zambrano’s *piedad*, or mercy, is the “initial feeling” or “prehistory of all positive feelings” and a history of it will be liberating. The Spanish exile reflects that feeling comes closest to a supreme authenticity or “thriving truth” because of the ability to *express* over *analyze*: “the capacity to feel creates who we are...feeling is what we are.”³⁵⁹ Zambrano argues that the modern era’s obsession with reason, with defining things clearly and distinctly, obstructs the ability for mercy. This inclination makes us unable to deal with those that are not mirror images of ourselves, hence the hostility towards race, nationality, cultural, social, and economic differences. Tolerance is exposed as a remedy but does not do the job of mercy: mercy allows us to communicate with what is different from us, whether nature or other human beings. It is

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Rukeyser, *Life of Poetry*, 8.

³⁵⁹ Morcillo, *Modern Spain Sourcebook*, 37-39.

not definable, yet it is precisely within the *yearning* to understand multiple realities and heterogeneity.³⁶⁰ Sarah J. Cyganiak further interprets Zambrano's contribution and the contribution of writers:

The word, a fundamental concept, functions as an undertaking that allows the writer in solitude to justify the actual state of being of the writer and to communicate to others. Without the word, there is no potential for active thought. The person in Zambrano's work acts as the effective force that evaluates his philosophy of living in the political and ethical realms, thus becoming an ethical agent for change... Without the combination of the word, the person, compassion and love, Zambrano demonstrates that the creative force of a new person, politically and ethically, cannot exist.³⁶¹

"Nomadic subjects," like Rukeyser and Riesenfeld, demonstrate such "yearning" to understand the "other" and challenge dichotomous systems and knowledge production. While more investigation is required to determine how the reading public interpreted the poet's writings, her perspectives reverberated with at least some of her readers. In 1975 an adoring fan of the former's sent a letter addressed to the poet agreeing with *The Life of Poetry* that they too hold great skepticism concerning the supposed split between science and art. The fan echoed the poet in calling the "two cultures" a "false dichotomy" and identifying the need for interdisciplinary work, then further connected Rukeyser's broader style to that of Elizabeth Sewell.³⁶² This connection helps to expose the former's

³⁶⁰ Ibid. See also bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1984).

³⁶¹ Sarah J. Cyganiak, "The Method of María Zambrano: an analysis and translated selection of essays centered on the concepts of the word, the person, compassion and love." Ph.D. Dissertation, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2011), v, vi.

³⁶² Letter from Martha Evans, September 22, 1975, Box I:6, Folder 1, Correspondence, Rukeyser Papers, LOC. Elizabeth Sewell was a writer, poet, and professor, *The Orphic Voice: Poetry and Natural History*, (Harper & Row, 1971) advanced the power of poetry and blurred the genres of science and poetry or the

lifelong challenges to and dismantling of binary constructions of the “other” by constantly blurring boundaries and binaries. Even before the 1950s, Zambrano’s teacher Ortega y Gasset philosophized that reality precedes the idea or modern and rational knowledge, and therefore reality must be given from *feeling*.³⁶³ While this view grows in 1950s, other early pioneers of the interrelatedness of science and art include the early twentieth-century avant-garde movements of geometric abstraction, cubism, and surrealism that draw on advances in philosophy and psychology, nature, and nonlinear forms of time and space.

Academically, the history of interdisciplinary studies owes credit to Marjorie Hope Nicholson, who earned a PhD in 1920 and who would become Dean at Smith College and a Chair at Columbia University. She pioneered research on the “influence of science on poetical images” and started the first seminar on “Science and Imagination.”³⁶⁴ Her own life and career combat the tensions of being a woman and a scholar, mirroring the binaries she intellectually dismantled. She credited historical female writers in initiating such intellectual work that blurs the premise between the imaginary and science or of the feminine domestic and masculine academic spheres.³⁶⁵

imaginative. Sewell’s influence on Rukeyser is further exhibited by the latter’s own use of the Orphic myth in her poem “The Poem as Mask,” *Orpheus*, (1960).

³⁶³ Morcillo, *Modern Spain Sourcebook*, 39.

³⁶⁴ Andrea Walton, ““Scholar,” “Lady,” “Best Man in the English Department”? Recalling the Career of Marjorie Hope Nicholson,” *History of Education Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (2000): 169-200. Accessed November 24, 2020. doi:10.2307/369535.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.* On gender discrimination in academia and particularly by a male advisor urging her toward literature, Walton notes, “Nicholson resisted his judgement vis-à-vis women and created through her scholarship and teaching on science and literary imagination an innovative and legitimate conduit into the study of philosophy,” 183.

Historian Andrea Walton argues that over Nicholson's early educational career male mentors pushed women towards degrees in literature, steering them away from philosophy, metaphysics, and other fields attributed with original knowledge production.

Despite and because of this, Nicholson went on to weave her own path within literary studies, shaped by her exclusion, yet initiating a "nascent academic discipline."³⁶⁶

Rukeyser's experience in academia and time at Columbia was surely influenced by the theories of Nicholson, which posit, "Social scientists must believe that poetry, essays, and drama are as legitimate expressions of the spirit of man as the works of John Stuart Mill, Adam Smith—or even Karl Marx."³⁶⁷

The Anti-Fascist Subverter

The United States government took no official action to support the II Republic and, in fact, imposed an embargo on arms trade with the Spanish government during the Spanish Civil War. While left-leaning Spaniards during the II Republic and Civil War suffered a political exile, most never to return home, some parallels with Rukeyser's experience and life during the Cold War are evident. This section will analyze her activism and writing after 1936 from within the U.S. but will also trace certain important links with the Spanish Socialist deputy-turned-communist, Margarita Nelken, in exile, as it can be argued both women exhibited Braidotti's nomadic subjectivity. Literal travel marked both women's lives, however, Nelken's physical exile far from her birth country magnifies the kind of

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 176.

³⁶⁷ Nicholson quoted in Walton, "'Scholar,' 'Lady,'" 197.

marginal position the US poet and activist experienced within the U.S. At the same time, their female, Jewish, and socially conscious perspectives enabled a more fluid subjectivity that ignited political and non-traditional forms of activism across a multitude of causes by both women. Certainly, this comparative exercise is not to infer that Rukeyser suffered similar traumas as the Spanish refugee experience nor is the goal to downplay the emotional distress of political exile and the physical tear from one's birthplace. It may be useful, however, to draw on similarities of both women's social and political experiences, even if in unequal levels of severity. Playing on Octavio Paz's arguments about the power of translation to build bridges, these women expose some of the Anglo-Hispanic links of radically leftist women's lives during the Pre-Cold War and Cold War periods.

It is critical to consider the political, gender, and cultural dynamics of Cold War discourses and movements when considering Rukeyser's ability to widen her perspective, which stemmed from her own multiple subjectivities. To historicize her ongoing acts of resistance requires interrogation of her identity as a Jewish woman writing in the wake of intense anti-Semitism, the European Holocaust, World War II, and the anticommunism, anti-subversive, and gendered rhetoric of the Cold War. Her poetry was a powerful demonstration of, and plea for, social and political agency and justice. As a woman, she broke with what Elaine Tyler May describes as the Cold War pressure of domesticity and family life that placed women in the home.³⁶⁸ At the same time, Jewish Americans

³⁶⁸ May, *Homeward Bound*.

involved in labor organizations attracted heightened attention as the communist “threat” grew.³⁶⁹

While the poet acknowledged and worked through her Jewishness at times—much more than Riesenfeld’s silence on her Jewish background—literary scholar Emily Robins Sharpe argues Jewish writers of the Spanish Civil War did not have to verbalize their religious identities in order for their politics to be affected by a Jewish subjectivity.³⁷⁰ The Spanish Civil War, especially for Rukeyser, became a kind of idealist monolith for transgressing boundaries and, therefore, she does not pay attention to the oppressions or rigid boundaries within Spain, including the Jewish, Muslim, or Roma marginalization.³⁷¹ Her silence about her Jewishness while in Spain may in fact attest to a desire to “fit” in the revolution in Catalonia or out of an idealist view of the Loyalist cause. Yet, her romanticization was grounded in observation and experience and a commitment to social justice and in US society these forces combined in the subjectivity of Rukeyser, not only in theoretical terms but she was continually perceived as potentially subversive: her support for Loyalist Spain and persistent transnational

³⁶⁹ For debates on Jewish political identity see Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Fatal Embrace: Jews and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Naomi Seidman, “Fag-Hags and Bu-Jews: Toward a (Jewish) Politics of Vicarious Identity,” in *Insiders/Outsider: American Jews and Multiculturalism*, ed. David Biale, Michael Galchinsky, and Susannah Heschel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 254-268; Hannah Arendt, *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age* (New York: Grove Press, 1978); and Clarence Taylor, *Reds at the Blackboard: Communism, Civil Rights, and the New York City Teachers Union* (Columbia University Press, 2011),

³⁷⁰ Emily Robins Sharpe, “Jewish Novels of the Spanish Civil War,” Chapter in *The Edinburgh Companion to Modern Jewish Fiction* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015).

³⁷¹ See Guy Rozat Dupeyron, “Identidad y alteridades: El occidente medieval y sus “otros” *Desacatos*. 4: 27-52 (2000); Patricia E. Grieve, *The Eve of Spain: Myths of Origins in the History of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Conflict* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Alexa Linhard Tabea, *Jewish Spain: A Mediterranean Memory* (Stanford University Press, 2014).

activism was deemed suspected by the FBI, marking her with an “outsider” status against the context of Cold War anti-communism.

There are continuous debates among scholars regarding the definitions of antifascism within the context of the Spanish Civil War. Historian Ariel M. Lambe points out the diverse, while still unified, sets of viewpoints and goals of antifascists in Cuba who supported the Republican cause in Spain. The term certainly included being “*against* fascism,” yet, activists tied together threats to democracy, halting authoritative governance, and transnationally resisting oppression and repression in Ethiopia, Spain, or in forging a “New Cuba” and strengthening Cuban nationalism. To be sure, the Cuban example had the unique elements of anti-imperialism towards the powerful northern neighbor, the nationalist component, and various iterations of *hispanidad* with Spain and the rest of Latin America born from a long and complex colonial relationship.³⁷² While these are critical differences, the broader context is instructive in conceptualizing Rukeyser’s, and the “nomadic subject’s,” understanding of antifascism, who, similarly, did not isolate ideals around political and social equality and justice to a single geography or chronology. Additionally, we can see how Spain served as an experience for continued or expanded activism at home or elsewhere throughout the hemisphere.

³⁷² Ariel Mae Lambe, *No Barrier Can Contain It: Cuban Antifascism and the Spanish Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 2, 15, 17; See also Hugo García, Mercedes Yusta, Xavier Tabet, and Cristina Clímaco, eds., *Rethinking Antifascism: History, Memory and Politics, 1922 to the Present* (New York: Berghahn, 2016); Michael Seidman, *Transatlantic Antifascisms: From the Spanish Civil War to the end of World War II* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Debates also abound around the political associations of foreign volunteers in Spain as “premature antifascists.” Over the last decade and with the help of memoir and oral history, historians have sought to complicate the political motivations and memberships of U.S. volunteers in Spain beyond the focus on the Communist International’s (Comintern) support of the II Republic and a Cold War dichotomy that branded Loyalist supporters as “heroic” defenders of democracy or “naïve victims of Stalinist machinations.”³⁷³ Rukeyser sided with worker’s rights and other leftist domestic and international objectives, but she attempted to reach a greater universality through her collaborations and use of feeling through poetry to transcend facts, parties, classes, or nations.

A shift in focus to nomadic subjectivity provides a different narrative of antifascism, before World War II in the U.S., decentered from masculinist politics and accusations. Much of Rukeyser’s post-1936 writings focus on what she saw as the general resistance to accept poetry and using emotional appeal in seeking truth. Perhaps this in part explains the continual suspicion around the activist poet and Republican supporter, as she linked the perpetuation of social injustice, war, and the “fear of poetry” of the Cold War period while asserting that a life with poetry and imagination could help bring about peace. “The work that a poem does is a transfer of human energy, and I think human energy may be defined as consciousness, the capacity to make change in existing

³⁷³ Kenyon Zimmer, “The Other Volunteers: American Anarchists and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939,” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 10, no. 2 (2016): 20. Accessed February 27, 2021. doi:10.14321/jstudradi.10.2.0019. See also *Invisible Heroes*, Domingo and Torrent.

conditions.”³⁷⁴ In her own understanding, the heightened consciousness expressed in her poetic writing, which was learned in Spain and through her other experiences in leftist causes, may be interpreted as agency in the making of social and political change. In her recounting of her departure from Spain, a friend asked the poet where was the place of poetry in this historical moment; Rukeyser responded, “I know some of it now, but it will take a lifetime to find it.”³⁷⁵

The US poet’s writing reflects a social and political resistance against war and fascism; even at the time of publishing *Theory of Flight* in 1935 she was identified as a “left-winger” in the foreword and by reviewers.³⁷⁶ By 1939, however, she signed the Third Congress of American Writers’ call for a “Red Decade.”³⁷⁷ The FBI and House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) watched and documented Rukeyser’s activities for years, launching their investigation in 1943 while she was copywriting for the Office of Emergency Management for alleged communist activities. The report determined organizations (mostly writers’ groups) she sponsored or had membership in were “communist front organizations.” It used as evidence that she had reportedly said the presence of communists in the country or in her affiliated organizations was not significant, but instead thought the battle was against fascism, not communism—of which she vaguely reported she knew little of. She had applied to the Office of

³⁷⁴ Rukeyser, *Life of Poetry*, xi.

³⁷⁵ Rukeyser, “Barcelona, 1936.”

³⁷⁶ FBI, Muriel Rukeyser.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Emergency Management in 1942 and it only took until April 1943 for the FBI to begin its employment investigation, including her membership to the Congress of American Writers and League of American Writers.

Authorities also questioned Rukeyser's university affiliation. She attended Columbia and informants identified the school as having "communistic leanings." Complaints included that the campus bookstore sold publications put out by the communist party. She also fell under FBI scrutiny for other affiliations, such as her membership to the John Reed Club and her 'Sponsor of Congress of American Soviet Friendship in 1942,' in which Rukeyser was a member of the Committee of Women. The committee engaged in correspondence with Soviet women in order to exchange information that would promote lasting friendship, with "a number of things written by [Rukeyser] symbolizing masses and the working class."³⁷⁸ The poet's intellectual and class sympathies triggered anti-communist suspicions during a transitional period from the 1920s "red scare" and the conventional start of the Cold War in 1945.

For many Spanish Civil War exiles it became imperative to employ survival strategies living abroad, and so engagement with domestic politics was limited. The community in Mexico City mostly turned their efforts towards finding jobs and supporting their families. Many women worked as seamstresses and did not directly engage in political or intellectual endeavors. However, due in part to the significant number of high-ranking officials, artists, and writers who fled to Mexico rather than other

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

countries, many cultural works were produced with a great attention in the first decade towards the restoration of democracy in Spain and showing gratitude to the Mexican government for its aid.³⁷⁹

While Margarita Nelken spent most of her time and efforts in Mexico City publishing art critiques to support her family as a single mother, there is ongoing evidence of her political efforts towards justice even in exile. Historian Paul Preston's biography of Nelken examines her political career during her earlier publications and party involvement in Spain and during the Civil War, yet exalting her personal suffering in losing two children, one to a fatal illness, and the other to war during her life in exile in Mexico: "the quintessential Margarita Nelken was above all a mother."³⁸⁰ Nelken's feminism of the 1920s had demanded educational programs, maternal care, sexual freedom and better working conditions. Once in Mexico, Nelken's traditional and nontraditional forms of activism took on transnational dynamics. After the trauma of war and the need to survive in exile, many Spanish women in Mexico distanced themselves

³⁷⁹ See Pilar Domínguez Prats, *Voces del exilio*, and Maria Labbato, "Spanish Civil War Exiles in Mexico City," University of North Carolina at Charlotte, (MA Thesis, 2014).

³⁸⁰ The Second Republic was established in 1931 when Nelken was approaching her 40s. She was well-known for her 1923 novel *La trampa del arenal* ("Trapped in the Sand") and treatise *La condición social de la mujer en España* in 1919 or 1922. Nelken's writings often reflected ideologies she either lived by, felt compelled for society to consider, or were part portraits of her own life path. *La trampa del arenal* featured an "independent, free-thinking woman" named Libertad. The heroine defends the option of having a child outside of marriage; Nelken herself was unapologetically a single mother. In Nelken's second book, *La condición social de la mujer en España*, she analyzes the crossroads that women workers find between the world of workers and a woman's place associated with philanthropic and religious activity that offered charity in place of rights. See Preston, *Doves*, 299-305. Preston highlights the revenge the Franco regime took on known leftists, including raiding Nelken's home and looting her belongings and artistic and written collections. Nelken fled Europe as a single mother tasked with caring for her mother, daughter, and granddaughter. Preston, *Doves of War*, 376. For most exiles, rebuilding a life was the priority and with little resources and belongings abroad, the economic necessities took precedence over political activism so fervent during the II Republic.

from the issues that had predominated their attention during the II Republic and focused on family life and making an income through sewing.³⁸¹ Of course, there were several exceptions to the domestication of women in exile; Nelken, like Rukeyser, combined activism and empathy that allowed her to side with many different experiences, constantly reworking her perspective based on her contemporary moment of conflict. Combined physical displacement from Spain (once in 1935 to Moscow) and again permanently to Mexico with the continued dislocated, persecution by the Franco regime, and outsider identity, served to provide Nelken with varied perspectives and highlights how she too embodied Braidotti's nomadism.

From when Nelken entered exile, she actively supported the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) in Mexico and formed close ties with many Mexican communists, Partido Comunista Mexicano (PCM), receiving praise and criticism from both. Preston notes that prominent figures in the party, like David Alfaro Siqueiros, turned their backs on Nelken.³⁸² While active and attracting many high profile figures like Diego Rivera with his friendship with Leon Trotsky, the different Mexican governments following the 1910 Revolution were "not-so-communist" and in some respects anti-communist.³⁸³ A critique

³⁸¹ See Domínguez Prats, *Voces del exilio*.

³⁸² Preston, *Doves*, 382.

³⁸³ In the face of conservative politics and political and economic pressures from the U.S., some charged administrations, such as under Calles, as 'reactionary' for banning the PCM in 1930. While famous murals commissioned by government contain communist nods and Cárdenas enacted more revolutionary projects, like nationalization of the oil industry, had the support of the PCE (his grassroots based, which was largely comprised of young people, women, and rural proletariat), and permitted the PCM into the political arena again, by 1940 many communist sympathizers organized in groups (like the FDI – Frente Democrática Independentiente) that claimed support for democracy and even free religious thought against growing national sentiments of anti-communism. See Joes Segal, "Between Nationalism and Communism: Diego Rivera and Mexican Muralism," in *Art and Politics: Between Purity and Propaganda*, 31-44 (Amsterdam:

of the communist demands for Mexico to further support Spanish communists against Franco, included poking fun at Nelken for idealizing the apparent happiness to be found in the Soviet Union.³⁸⁴ Being a vocal member of the party with her political messages directed towards the government, she received some blame from critics skeptical of the ties between the USSR and Spanish exiles, supposed “red” links, for bringing foreign communist activities and agitation to Mexico.³⁸⁵ Further, anti-Communists, increasing in number after 1940, linked Nelken’s Judaism to her communist affiliation over fear of foreign subversion in the country.³⁸⁶ In October 1942, Nelken was expelled from the PCE, apparently causing much sensation in the press and among leftist intellectuals in Mexico.³⁸⁷ The nomad’s critiques and challenges to dominant structures and uniformity repeatedly put Nelken at odds with official party leadership across her experiences on the Left.

Much as Rukeyser’s witnessing of the Spanish Civil War fed her support for leftist and worker’s issues in the U.S. and abroad, Spain’s war and exile broadened Nelken’s range of activism, transforming her into a transnational figure in the fight for universal and human rights. Nelken’s social and political status as an outsider in Spain

Amsterdam University Press, 2016). Accessed November 24, 2020. doi:10.2307/j.ctt1d4tzdz.5; Fallaw, *Cárdenas Compromised*, 151.

³⁸⁴ “México Actual: Lo que se ve, lo que se dice, lo que se oye,” *La Prensa*, 11/22/1939.

³⁸⁵ “Unos españolas hacen labor comunista en México,” *La Prensa*, 6/25/1941. Anti-communists often used the fact that Nelken’s son was stationed in Moscow, enlisted in the Red Army (he was eventually killed while serving), as evidence of her suspicious activities in Mexico, especially surrounding the assassination of Leon Trotsky by a Catalan Stalinist and Nelken’s relationship to his family. See Preston, *Doves of War*.

³⁸⁶ “El comunismo en México,” *La Prensa*, 8/24/1955.

³⁸⁷ “Margarita Nelken fue expulsada del partido comunista,” *La Prensa*, 11/1/1942.

followed her throughout her life, from her Jewish background to socialist and communist party identification. Nelken identified with a variety of issues, affecting working mothers, landless laborers, and persecuted European. Her exile enabled transnationalist organizing. Once in Mexico, as she sought alliances with Pan-American feminists, worker's groups, and political parties across national boundaries. Likewise, Rukeyser's commitment to continual action echoes of this tradition of active and political, even if in untraditional or unofficial capacities, women on the Left.³⁸⁸ During the 1940s and 1950s, Nelken wrote art critiques and position pieces against Nazism and fascism. In 1942 she appealed for severe reprisals against Adolf Hitler for his slaughter of European Jews directly to the President of Mexico in an open letter. In it she also called for the various democracies to make an agreement on the issue, a collective declaration by the Allied powers to take reprisals against the Führer.³⁸⁹ The resistance to conform and antagonism to centralized authority typical of the nomad, defined Nelken, who ruffled feathers in Mexico. According to Preston, Mexican Communist leadership wrote to Moscow, "There are great difficulties with Margarita Nelken." While it was believed that Nelken agreed with party politics, it was that the relationship between the "party and the exile have got worse because she does not have an adequate field of action and she feels relegated because she is not brought into the work of the leadership." Elaborating, "She attempts to awaken the

³⁸⁸ Isabel de Palencia was another highly active female writer supportive of the II Republic in exile in Mexico. While vocal in the suffrage movement during the II Republic, de Palencia focused her attention away from women's issues following the Civil War, committing her intellectual endeavors toward educating on Spain and returning democracy to Spain. See Labbato, "Spanish Civil War Exiles in Mexico City," (MA thesis, 2014), and Isabel de Palencia, *Smouldering Freedom*.

³⁸⁹ "Ex-diputada Hispana pide Represalias Contra Adolfo Hitler," *La Prensa*, 12/13/1942.

discontent of the rank-and-file comrades against certain comrades of the leadership.” In this statement from leadership, their position was to not yet release Nelken from the party, but it marked their heightened “distrust” towards her.³⁹⁰

In a parallel fashion, but from New York and California, it was Rukeyser’s documenting of the Spanish Civil War that led to U.S. officials’ distrust of her; the FBI report on the poet includes the backstory of her poem “Mediterranean” and attempted to make the correlation between her publications and possible communist affiliation. The alleged communist supporter, Elizabeth Marshall of the *New Theatre* (also considered a communistic journal), had dispatched the twenty-two year old to England, after which the poet was sent to Barcelona to cover the games after the initial assigned journalist could not.³⁹¹ The poet’s FBI file contained various other projects the poet had considered that tied her to anti-fascism and support for loyalist Spain. In 1937 the “Daily Worker” expressed that she was “contracted to make the adaptation of the new film from Spain, “The Defense of Madrid,”” about the Spanish Civil War. The American woman had also served on a committee to produce and sponsor a play premised on Spanish workers’ struggle against fascism and in November 1936 delivered a talk, “Tribute to Spain,” as part of the League of American Writers.³⁹² Perhaps indicative of Rukeyser’s more firm political positioning, in early 1936 she registered to vote but without identifying a

³⁹⁰ Preston, *Doves*, 379, 380.

³⁹¹ FBI, Muriel Rukeyser, May 31, 1943, p2.

³⁹² FBI, Muriel Rukeyser, May 8, 1943, pp. 2-3.

specific party. However, by 1942 she registered with the American Labor Party.³⁹³ Only a couple weeks later, the FBI documented the more direct communist leanings of the poet. The activities that had the federal agency on alert included writing for the *Daily Worker* and *New Theater*, “a Communist controlled publication,” and her attendance at the Conference of the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee (JAFRC) in Mexico City, in August 1943. By 1951, the JAFRC had come under the purview of Executive Order 9835, which was an extension of the 1947 Loyalty Order.³⁹⁴

The FBI’s file and inquiry of the poet caught the attention of the media and reinforces 1936 as a critical turning point in her leftist political ideology. An article in the *New York Journal American* in May 1943 announced the investigation, alleging Rukeyser’s possible communist associations.³⁹⁵ The piece was entitled “Poetess in OWI Here Probed by U.S. as Red,” written by Howard Rushmore, and described the poet as “a dark rather plump brunette.” Further, the communist-turned-anti-communist author described her work as “violently partisan writings in the *New Masses* from 1936 until recently.” This came to press shortly before her resignation from the Office of War Information (OWI). The FBI documented that she resigned from the OWI in 1943, having been engaged in a poster campaign, because her posters were repeatedly rejected

³⁹³ FBI, Muriel Rukeyser, May 5, 1943, pp. 1-7.

³⁹⁴ Other organizations Rukeyser engaged with that came under the same EO was the American Student Union, World Peace Appeal, and the Spanish Refugee Committee. She also worked with Americans for Amnesty, the Council for Universal and Unconditional Amnesty, and the United States Committee for Justice in Latin America.

³⁹⁵ FBI, Muriel Rukeyser, May 31, 1943.

due to “a policy of down with the world or through fear of these issues.”³⁹⁶ While vague, the report and Rushmore’s sensationalist publication hint at the hostility towards the poet, her anti-fascist ideologies, and transnational philosophy and activity. However, “Proletarian Anthology of American Literature” introduced a poem by Rukeyser with, “To followers of Karl Marx, the connection between poetry, politics and the Party is obvious.”³⁹⁷ While not overtly communist, the poet’s political outlook and work challenged anti-communism and could be considered an informal mode of relating art, subjectivity and radical leftist politics.

By the late 1940s, with the growing concern over Soviet espionage, the FBI was including in their report of Rukeyser in Los Angeles “possible involvement in the Comrap Case.”³⁹⁸ In April 1949, as part of the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee, the poet and activist gave a lecture, as President of “Congress of American Women,” on informing the public of need to keep Franco Spain out of the United Nations. This appears to be the peak of FBI suspicion surrounding her, as she was removed from Security Index in April 1955, with little documentation enclosed in her file until a 1963 memo with the update that there was no evidence of subversive activity after 1949.³⁹⁹ The FBI file concludes with a 1973 statement confirming the status of the file as closed. However, in 1978 she, in collaboration with Beat-Generation poet Allen Ginsberg,

³⁹⁶ FBI, Muriel Rukeyser, SF file #100-24064, December 21, 1944, p. 6.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., letter to director, “resume of case,” April 12, 1955.

collected and reviewed documents and assembled a file of the FBI's surveillance of writers to pass on such information to others.⁴⁰⁰

The U.S. anti-communist position that the moral superiority of capitalist democracy rested on freedom of ideas contrasts with histories like Rukeyser's and the House Un-American Activities Committee use of her poetry, peaceful protest, publications, and university affiliations to surveil her for years. Both the Soviet Union and the U.S. waged their war of ideas through cultural and intellectual organizations. The American Congress for Cultural Freedom's (CCF) employed cultural and political imperialism globally and had further influence in Latin America with leftist anti-communist Spanish exiles.⁴⁰¹ Patrick Iber dismantles the simplified version that intellectuals and cultural works from either the East or West were mere "fronts" for imperialist, ideological war by the superpowers. For example, such "currents" in the intellectual community predated the officially recognized Cold War initiated in 1945. A US nomadic history further achieves this goal by their location outside masculinized political parties, dodging funding by the CCF or the Soviet's World Peace Council (WPC), and contesting the Cold War public sphere of ideas through creative works.⁴⁰²

To be sure, dissent was more tolerated in the United States than in other parts where authoritarianism existed. Iber cites historians of the U.S. Cold War intellectuals, like Tony Judt, in advancing the "irresponsibility" of those on the Right or Left for calls for violence in their ideological defense of the oppressed but failing to back up with

⁴⁰⁰ Letter from Rukeyser to Richard Ellman, June 23, 1978, Box I:6, Folder 1, Rukeyser Papers, Correspondence, LOC.

⁴⁰¹ Iber, 3.

⁴⁰² Iber., 4.

action, writing or working from a safe distance.⁴⁰³ Rukeyser was no such intellectual.⁴⁰⁴ Arrested in the 1930s for covering the Scottsboro Trial and again decades later for protesting the Vietnam War, she did not merely imagine solutions; as Kennedy-Epstein notes, the poet repeatedly put her (physical) body on the line.⁴⁰⁵ More broadly, the “nomadic subject’s” constant movement and state of flux facilitates such ability to pair action with belief. However, the modern, US nomad is not without critique. It can be argued that intellectuals, including Rukeyser, still remained part of the hegemonic class structure and did not, in significant ways, defy the capitalist system.

Still, the FBI’s concern over the poet’s literary production confirms that on both sides of the Cold War divide, political and social rigidity was enforced through anti-intellectualism and peer policing. The “outsider’s” act of critiquing, what Braidotti calls, the “official cacophonies” never departed from Rukeyser, who perpetually advocated from the margins.⁴⁰⁶ Indeed, the “nomadic subject” used poetry to critique the U.S. where the project of equality and social justice came up short. The retrospective evaluation of Rukeyser’s suspicious communist activities from the 1930s and the 1943 FBI report while the U.S. and Soviet Union were still allied suggests the need for reorganization of popularly understood periods. This narrative demands for an acknowledgement of a Pre-Cold War existing alongside the Popular Front culture and continuity with the

⁴⁰³ See Tony Judt and Timothy Snyder, *Thinking the Twentieth Century* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 287.

⁴⁰⁴ Iber, 5.

⁴⁰⁵ Foreword in Muriel Rukeyser, Rowena Kennedy-Epstein, editor, *Savage Coast: A Novel by Muriel Rukeyser* (The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2013).

⁴⁰⁶ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 16.

conventionally separated periodization of the earlier “red scare” politics of the 1910s and 1920s and the later declaration of an Iron Curtain and McCarthyism after 1945.

A Trans-Humanitarian Activist

Rukeyser, though ruffling many feathers, repeatedly and publicly spoke out against worldwide social injustice since 1936, as the Spanish Civil War sparked the poet’s transnational activism. By the 1970s her politics had evolved to extremely direct and self-endangering acts, including traveling as president, appointed in early 1975, of the American Center of PEN (originally Poets, Essayists, Novelists) to South Korea to protest the imprisonment and death sentence of a South Korean poet, Kim Chi Ha in September 1975.⁴⁰⁷ She first spoke to a rally in New York for Kim Chi Ha, stirring the crowd with her poetic words; a coordinator for The Friends of Kim Chiha in the U.S. A. thanked her for the “enthusiastic participation in the Kim Chiha Night. I believe that your most poetic, stimulating, and meaningful words moved all the audience.” The coordinator requested that she or another US representative from PEN go to South Korea to directly intervene, and promised the support of Japanese poets, writers, and intellectuals.⁴⁰⁸

Rukeyser felt the need to keep her travel of personally pleading with the Korean

⁴⁰⁷ PEN Correspondence, Box I: 55 Folder 2, Rukeyser Papers, LOC. Kim Chi Ha was arrested for his writings as they were deemed to be communist. Rukeyser called him a “satirist, attacker of corruption and poverty, linking the two in his poems. He was released and then jailed again, and she charged that he had been tortured to produce a statement used in the accusations against him. PEN subsidized writing for needy writers, writers in prison, and worked to release writers around the globe for imprisonment under repression.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., letter dated August 18, 1975 from Won Co, Coordinator The Friends of Kim Chiha in the U.S.A.

government a secret until permitted entrance into South Korea. PEN's executive secretary wrote to a Japanese writer's organization on her planned trial attendance as PEN president, "Miss Rukeyser will be arriving in Seoul on September 10th and I should like to ask you to keep this matter confidential until she has been permitted to enter South Korea."⁴⁰⁹ A group of Korean students at the University of Maryland additionally wrote to the poet to invite her to speak with them in October that year; they had acknowledged the difficulty of being able to speak the truth in Korea and had heard that she "tried to restore the democracy in South Korea and to save Kim Chi Ha."⁴¹⁰

The US poet was part of the anti-war demonstration against Vietnam and came under fire from several sides. In 1972 she had already challenged the mainstream when she visited North Vietnam and protested the Vietnam War in Washington, D.C. Rukeyser was arrested in June that year for her participation in the organization "Redress" by peacefully laying down outside the Senate chambers in the U.S. Capitol Building, "to symbolize the stillness and death associated with that war." She and others were arrested, and Rukeyser was sentenced to a \$125 fine or 30 days in jail—she refused to pay the fine. She appealed to have her sentenced reduced based on her poor medical state. In her sworn deposition she defended her right to protest, invoking the principles established in Nuremberg decades earlier, "individuals are compelled to oppose illegal wars and demonstrate through their own acts their opposition, even if this means violation of local

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., letter September 5, 1975, PEN Correspondence from Executive Secretary, Kirsten Michalski.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

ordinances. These principles require open, public acts of opposition, not silent, easy submission to authority.”⁴¹¹

Rukeyser's efforts were not always unquestioned by other defenders of social justice. Prolific writer Robert Payne (as acting Vice President and Chairman of the Translation Committee) appealed to her to aid in the translations of several North Vietnamese works following a visit she would make there. He reminded her of PEN's support and advocacy for translators, “because they are the vehicles of international communication.”⁴¹² The executive secretary of PEN, however, Kirsten Michalski, wrote to Rukeyser asking if it was humane and ethical to hire a Vietnamese refugee to translate North Vietnamese writers' works when the proposed translator's husband had been killed by the North Vietnamese and forced her and her children to flee in exile.⁴¹³ As a “nomadic subject” with her commitment to “international communication,” the poet may not have been able to recognize when divisions or classifications did indeed have a real, and traumatic, impact on an individual's lived experience.

Freedom of speech and artistic production was paramount to Rukeyser, and she solicited support from PEN members in defense of free speech around the world. Still as president in early 1976, she wrote to members asking for additional funds beyond dues for “needy writers, for writers in prison and our work for their release, for those under

⁴¹¹ Deposition, Box I:57, Folder 2, Vietnam War, Rukeyser Papers, LOC. The case cited is *United States v. Muriel Rukeyser*, Criminal No. 37493-73 in The Superior Court of the District of Columbia, Criminal Division.

⁴¹² Letter to the poet from Robert Payne, October 17, 1972, Box I: 55 Folder 2, PEN Correspondence, *Ibid.*

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*

repression wherever they suffer and for work against our own clamps over free speech – in society and in ourselves.”⁴¹⁴ Additionally, in agreeing to sponsor a new proposed radio station, People’s Radio Foundation, she defended the mission: “The station you plan to establish can be a principal instrument of expression for forces which call for every expression in our times,” while an FBI report called the potential station “a forum for progressive ideas.”⁴¹⁵

In her deposition to reduce her 1972 sentence for protesting the Vietnam War, Rukeyser highlighted her poetry as opposition activism, which solicited praise and criticism. “I am a poet and in my poetry have expressed my objections to the illegal acts of my government in Vietnam and my understanding of the Nuremberg obligation which I followed on June 27.” The poet and others “peacefully” laid down in the Senate chamber of the Capitol Building as a means of direct protest, however, she attributes her long history of protest writing, rebellion against oppression, and obligation to not violate fundamental human rights under the UN’s 1948 Declaration on Universal Human Rights in response to the Nuremberg trials. She accepted her sentence with a motion that it fell under “excessive” against the charges, especially considering her health complications, which included hypertension and diabetes.⁴¹⁶ People wrote to the poet to express their sympathy and gratuity for her standing up against authoritarianism. Conversely, earlier in 1966, Vice President Humphrey wrote to Rukeyser concerning a recent meeting between

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., letter, February 18, 1976.

⁴¹⁵ FBI, Muriel Rukeyser, NY #100-102441, April 22, 1952, p. 7.

⁴¹⁶ Motion, Box I:57, Folder 2, Vietnam War, Rukeyser Papers, LOC.

the two, expressing clear disappointment with the apparently personal attacks the poet made on the politician over the war in Vietnam. The imperative she felt against authoritarianism and various manifestations of oppression that had intensified since the Spanish Civil War clearly influenced her later interactions with official policy and discourses in the U.S.

Additionally, a letter from a law friend to Rukeyser illuminates the fundamental disagreement over the poet and activist's form of protest in 1972, and on her position concerning U.S. intervention in southeast Asia, "You are a poet and I am not. Your perceptions may therefore be better and more insightful than mine. All I have to work with are the habits of reason, handled with as much discipline as I can muster up. Reason seems to make less and less difference, however."⁴¹⁷ Rukeyser never ceased to hurl herself towards defense of causes, employing physical demonstrations but more importantly, her poetry as protest. The nomad exposes the shortcomings of relying on reason alone, and her insistence on empathetic responses challenged the comfort of turning to supposed "logic." In a folder dated 1930-1936 one of her diary notes, "If woman who having been conditioned to believe herself a merely emotional creature, lives in the gratification of her senses until the force of an idea overthrows the circumstances of her existence."⁴¹⁸ She did not view emotion and reasonable responses to imposed and marginalized identities in opposition to each other, but in combination propelled one into action against oppressive categories.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., Box I: 56, Folder 1.

In the poem “Despises,” Rukeyser calls out society’s “secrecies” and the things which are to be despised: Jews, blacks, homosexuality...She recognizes all these things in the self: “Never to despise in myself what I have been taught to despise. Not to despise the other. Not to despise the *it*. To make this relation with the *it* : to know that I am it.”⁴¹⁹ Her work always allows us to see into the human condition, into memory and Zambrano’s *piedad*, into the nomad’s dissolution of falsely imposed constructions of the self and the other. Rukeyser continually “yearns” for the *interrelatedness* she feels: the “other” is “self.” She blended poetry with her political awareness: “And then we go to Washington as if it were Jerusalem; and then we present our petition, clearly, rightfully; and then some of us walk away; and then do other of us stay; and some of us lie gravely down on that cool mosaic floor, the Senate. Washington! Your bombs rain down! I mourn, I lie down, I grieve.”⁴²⁰ The US poet *did* protest at the Capitol Building. Furthermore, Rukeyser is her most political self through her poetry, large political acts are not detached from her art, imagination, and feelings.

Often the poet poured her own subjectivity or her empathy for others into her challenges of oppressive views, but she did not always articulate or express her various selves. Rukeyser did acknowledge her Jewishness, at least to some extent. Examining when she identified her Jewishness and when she did not pose larger historical questions. She gave poetry readings at Jewish Community Centers; the subject of one such reading was the place of poetry in people’s lives. A student on assignment to review a community poetry reading said that Rukeyser urged her audience to read and write poetry, that it provided answers to our problems, and that within the poetic experience the “trivial

⁴¹⁹ Rukeyser, *Breaking Open*, 5.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

connects with something universal.” She also spoke to her audience that she wished the world would become a version of the great vision she held in her soul.⁴²¹ While the American did not narrate her religious background while in Spain, in her poems or writings that reflect US society she thought it was relevant. The Spanish Civil War was viewed by its possibilities; the II Republic offered a promise but she and many foreigners with such ideals ignored the reality often. Jewishness and marginality became her way of critiquing the shortfalls of freedom liberty or the failed promises of the democratic project or equality in the United States, an exercise in critique for the nomad that required distinctions of national borders.

Still, the cases of the Jewish women under analysis in this dissertation provide a critique of the authentic and monolithic national identities and challenge official discourses that marginalized or oppressed “others.”⁴²² Living during a time of dangerous anti-Semitism in Europe, Margarita Nelken also paid particular attention to religious injustice, motivating her publication on the history of Jews in Spain in the early 1940s while in Mexico and speaking out against religious intolerance, Hitler, and Nazi-fascism. Perhaps even more than Rukeyser, Nelken’s Judaism as a Spaniard marked her as target of accusations of perpetual foreigner. Invoking the sentiments of poet Roy Campbell again, Preston relates the sexism aimed at Nelken with her ethnicity as central to

⁴²¹ Examination essay of Laura Knickerbocker, Dec 8, 1971, Box I:9, Folder 2, Correspondence, Rukeyser Papers, LOC. The instructor, McClelland, sent the poet this student’s essay and Rukeyser kept it among her archived correspondence, clearly a sign she valued such an assessment of her message.

⁴²² Isaac Deutscher’s 1958 article lays out what he called the “non-Jewish Jew,” who was the product of the Jewish historical context but with no expression of community or spiritual connection with their Jewishness. The point for Deutscher and Hannah Arendt was Jewishness as outside multiple margins of society, creating a particular kind of consciousness that viewed systems with suspicion and to challenge common accepted modes of thought.

criticisms of her. Campbell pondered, “‘Nelken’s nationality is a mystery. German? Polish? Certainly Jewish. That is the fundamental origin which defines her.’ ‘Unlike so many other presumed intellectuals, who are whores in their own imaginations more than in their real sexual adventures, she is fortunately not Spanish. She is not even a woman.’”⁴²³ Although born in Spain, Nelken would be considered by many as an outsider due to her dismantling of the domesticated and chaste Catholic female ideal.⁴²⁴

Jewish women were very much a part of this consciousness to fight for democracy on any front with Rukeyser often recognizing her subjectivity in this struggle.⁴²⁵ Later in the twentieth century, as Naomi Seidman argues, the historical context and successes American Jews had in the U.S. muted Jewish political identity around non-Jewish marginalized issues. However, in a folder of drafts, Rukeyser’s papers include a 1944 poem in “Letter to the Front,” in *Selected Poems in New Jewish Prayer Books in England and U.S.:*

To be a Jew in the twentieth century is to be offered a gift. If you refuse, wishing to be invisible, you choose death of the spirit, the stone insanity....The gift is torment. Not alone the still torture, isolation; or torture of the flesh. That may come also. But the accepting wish, the whole and fertile spirit as guarantee. For every human freedom, suffering to be free, daring to live for the impossible.⁴²⁶

⁴²³ Preston, *Doves*, 300.

⁴²⁴ See Morcillo, *True Catholic Womanhood*.

⁴²⁵ The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives includes 462 entries of Jewish volunteers, women among them, such as nurses Hilda Bell (working a mobile hospital at the Aragon front) and Ruth Rebecca Davidow (who went on to work in public health for the disadvantaged in the U.S. and Cuba and was active in the Civil Rights Movement and the Native American occupation of Alcatraz island). [Http://www.alba-valb.org/volunteers/hilda-roberts](http://www.alba-valb.org/volunteers/hilda-roberts)

⁴²⁶ “Letter to the Front” (1944) Box I:42, Folder 1, Poetry Drafts, 1940-44, Rukeyser Papers, LOC.

The poet emphasizes the need to acknowledge one's Judaism to acknowledge one's soul or inner essence. She also relates the ability to express human difference as freedom. As the American writes a war poem "to the front" for a Jewish audience and during the intense years of the Holocaust, we see another example of the Jewish question at the fore of her attention and as a torch against the context of social injustice. Margarita Nelken also wrote in response to her changing contemporary moment and what she deemed most pressing in the fight for justice.

As a Hispanic German and French Jewish woman, Nelken sympathized and advocating many causes; a trait that she demonstrated before and in exile. With the news of the treatment of European Jews during World War II, Nelken committed herself to raising awareness and pushing for cooperative action against Germany and as a proponent of religious freedom. She published an essay in 1942, just weeks prior to her open letter to the president, discussing the importance of the Allied effort against Nazi-fascism. Religiously, Nelken appealed to Mexico's recent history of secularism as a critical feature of democracy and freedom. On the conferences held in D.F. in which representatives from different creeds came together to recognize the fight against Nazi-fascism, Nelken argued it was a political act and issue, rather than one of belief. Additionally, she saw this gathering as a symbol of Mexico's integration with the Allied Powers. For Nelken, this act was immensely significant in the stand against the massacre of Jews and long history of ill treatment of the Jewish community.⁴²⁷ Judaism also shaped

⁴²⁷ "El Significado de unas Conferencias," *La Prensa*, 12/17/1942.

some of Rukeyser's publishing, she published poems in a new Reform Jewish prayer book, as listed on her curriculum vitae in 1975.⁴²⁸

The US poet's empathy for others and insistence on social justice was guided by both her religious and sex status as the "other." To an even greater extent, Margarita Nelken navigated this tension on a transnational stage within a highly Catholic, patriarchal culture. Gender and queer theory scholars such as Joan Scott and Judith Butler, writers and activists like Alice Walker, bell hooks, and Kimberlé Crenshaw, along with feminist studies produced outside of the U.S. and Europe, had long illustrated that women's concerns are not essential, unified, or universal.⁴²⁹ Yet various groups of women in the mid-twentieth century used transnationalism to assert their claims on social, political, and economic equality. Pan-American feminism of the twentieth century had fundamental roots in Latin American transnational organizing, in which women from the region actively participated in hemispheric conferences. Latin American feminist issues entered the hemispheric arena debates through turn-of-the-century conferences.⁴³⁰

Mexico City became a critical site of feminists and women's rights activists; significantly hosting international women's conferences including in 1945 and 1975. Gender historian of modern Mexico Jocelyn Olcott provides the first analysis of the 1975

⁴²⁸ CV 1975, Box I:9, Folder 2, Correspondence, Rukeyser Papers, LOC.

⁴²⁹ See Judith Butler and Joan Wallach Scott, eds. *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1984) and "Postmodern blackness," in *Yearning* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1990); Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics" *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 14 (1989): 538–554.

⁴³⁰ Conferences such as the American Scientific Conference. Women took part to address social problems such as hygiene, childcare, nutrition, and maternal welfare, see Francesca Miller, "Latin American Feminism and the Transnational Arena," In Emilie Bergmann, et al, *Women, Culture, and Politics in Latin America* (University of California Press, 1992, 2012), 11, 12.

event, pointing out that the conference in Mexico City for the United Nation's International Women's Year became the most significant event for consciousness raising and women presented a multitude of issues that crossed race, class, nationality, religion, etc. and shaped global politics. The event additionally set in motion a new wave of global, transnational humanitarian activism.⁴³¹ Earlier, and according to Francesca Miller, transnationalism and inter-American collaborations and conferences were particularly important to feminists in Latin America, who faced challenges from within their own nations over women's political rights. Feminism in Latin America pushed for national legal and civil reform on an international platform while advocating for global peace.⁴³²

As agendas aligned in many ways, it is not shocking that Nelken joined with Mexican women for an international conference on women's issues on March 8, 1945, Día Internacional de la Mujer (International Women's Day), at a moment when the political environment had changed from the more radical 1930s. The organization that represented Mexico was the Comité Coordinador Femenino Para la Defensa de la Patria (Coordinating Feminine Committee for the Defense of the Nation). Nelken, in fact, was vital to the event and authored the program's introduction. The activist called for women of all countries to unite and join forces to realize all of their abilities and strengths. She appealed to this notion as their patriotic duty to achieve a more *humanized*, civilized world. Nelken realized the shared contributions by women that crossed political, social,

⁴³¹ Jocelyn Olcott, *International Women's Year: The Greatest Consciousness-Raising Event in History* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁴³² Pan-American conferences offered limited inclusion, as white women from the U.S. usually set the agendas, however, much like Nelken, Latin American female writers created their own brand of hemispheric feminism. Stephen Park invokes the novel to uncover the "divergent visions of what women's liberation in the America's looked like." See Stephen M. Park, "Pan Americanism Revisited: Hemispheric Feminism and Ana Castillo's *The Mixquiahuala Letters*," in *The Pan American Imagination: Contested Visions of the Hemisphere in Twentieth-Century Literature* (University of Virginia Press, 2014), 162.

and geographic borders. She noted these influences in industry, resistance movements, guerrilla forces, and as part of the front—the common struggle, from on a minor to major scale, against Nazi-fascism. She argued the struggle for society’s rights is symbolic of and must lead to nations’ acknowledgement of the rights of women. Thirty years prior to International Women’s Year, Nelken and her Mexican cohort advanced the platform taken up by the UN and activists at mid-century: the framing of universal *human* rights.

Much like the feminist groups and civil rights advocates in the U.S., the role of women, and minority groups, during World War II proved their equal ability and significance to society. Against that context, it had been a heightened challenge to continue suppressing marginalized groups and Nelken appealed to this same sentiment. The women of the II Republic in Spain played active roles during the civil war, and subsequently shared in the struggle that plagued much of the Western world. The sentiment conveyed by Nelken demonstrates the common obstacles against and struggle for Mexican and Spanish women’s rights. The leftist Mexican and Spanish collaborative approach to equal rights exposes a common socialist feminism. Land and workers’ issues had been a major platform of Nelken’s that she was able to identify with in Mexico. The women who participated in the March 8th program universalized a feminist and human agenda, a continuation of Nelken’s life activism now on a transnational stage and when the Cold War created risks for radical social and political platforms. As a group, the women participating in the forum called upon the same principles as the revolution, “Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality,” to claim their commitment to the country’s traditions and defense to the same rights as men. As a Spanish woman, Nelken identified also as “a sister in blood and culture to the Mexican woman, to antifascists.”⁴³³ The essence of mid-

⁴³³ Mujeres: Seguid El Camino de la Alta Tradicion de Vuestras Patrias, “Acción Democrática Internacional” March 8, 1942. Archive Box: Camacho, 135.2/547, AGN, Mexico City, D.F., Mexico.

century Latin American humanitarianism or emphasis of women's rights as human rights was universalizing but without disrupting borders.

The nomad does attempt the dissolution of national and disciplinary boundaries, yet the task is a luxury of the first world nomad, like Rukeyser and Riesenfeld. Despite often focusing on race, class, and free political expression, the former's work was also inherently informed by her position as a woman from the United States. Rukeyser had reflected heavily on the work of poetry and identity. She argued that poetry helped explore but also challenge what she called "I'ism," confessing that in herself there was a "lack of proof of personality."⁴³⁴ Yet, Jane Cooper recounts Rukeyser's interview in 1972 in which the poet connected her identity as a woman and writing, "Anything I bring to this is because I am a woman. And this is the thing that was left out of the Elizabethan world, the element that did not exist. Maybe, maybe, maybe that is what one can bring to life."⁴³⁵ A single mother and a member of various women's committees, even a supporter of the Seoul EFWA Women's University,⁴³⁶ with publications in several feminist presses, and a long career of writing on behalf of workers' rights, Rukeyser's feminist consciousness was *trans-humanitarian*.⁴³⁷ (Figure 17)

⁴³⁴ Box I:1, Folder 2, General Correspondence, Rukeyser Papers, LOC.

⁴³⁵ Rukeyser, *Life of Poetry*, xxvii.

⁴³⁶ Box I:6, Folder 1, General Correspondence, Rukeyser Papers, LOC.

⁴³⁷ The poet's various involvement and support reached workers, those unjustly imprisoned, and cultural diversity outreach. She was invited as a civic community leader to the Harlem Agencies of the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies' (HAFPWA) 1978 benefit jazz festival, in honor of Duke Ellington and Harlem jazz. In 1974 she wrote on her concerns of immigrants who traveled into the US with epilepsy, she sent a letter to the EFA on the issue in which she felt more protections needed to be in place. Box I:6, Folder 1- General Correspondence, Rukeyser Papers, LOC.



Figure 17: Muriel Rukeyser with son, William L. Rukeyser, Photograph. A single mother, the poet, as many female artists on the Left in the 1930s and 1940s, exemplified Braidotti's concept of the "nomadic subject" as breaking with traditional gendered norms and exhibiting sexual autonomy or liberation. Box I:61 Folder 6, Photographs, Library of Congress. Courtesy of William L. Rukeyser.

While not often in official party leadership, women's activism, when applying Braidotti's theoretical concept of nomadic subjects, the life work of Muriel Rukeyser and Margarita Nelken tells a thicker historical narrative, highlighting internal and external elements of exile and empathy and multi-issue activism during the twentieth century. According to Braidotti, the nomad is the ancient non-conformist, a subjectivity which exposes the nomad to be branded as subversive. For Rukeyser, returning to the United States as a more devout anti-fascist and advocate for workers, the marginalized, and exposing the contradictions within a democratic society produced a kind of internal exile. Repeatedly, however, the FBI confirmed her references provided strongly positive recommendations about her character, of her loyalty to the U.S., and that her early

writings did not reflect a particular political philosophy other than firmly anti-fascist and anti-Nazi.⁴³⁸ Although her work had always exposed a revolutionary and pacifist spirit, her poetry, literature, and direct activism shows greater commitment to overtly political ideas that had fully developed in Spain. The marginality of the nomad is an inherently feminist perspective, as the feminist perspective can “illuminate all our other relationships. Among them are such key targets for our attitudes as conflict in the individual, the atom bomb, the Negroes, the Reds, the Jews, the “place” of science, the “place” of labor, the “place” of women, and poetry.”⁴³⁹ Rukeyser identified that fear of poetry stems from the fear of the other, of the oppressed that are repeatedly kept down by hierarchies and boundaries, a fear she endlessly worked to dismantle.

Spain Revisited

Perhaps Rukeyser’s most prominent example of the transnationalism stemmed from her experience in Spain in 1936, her 1974 *Esquire* essay, “We Came for the Games.” The essay provides the opportunity to gauge the poet’s matured perspective on the Spanish Civil War with almost forty years of reflection and was the culmination of decades of writings and activities inspired by the conflict in Spain.⁴⁴⁰ Particularly significant is the Cold War context Rukeyser criticizes, which was the conflation of communism and transnational anti-fascism and the erection of more boundaries rather than fewer. The

⁴³⁸ FBI, Muriel Rukeyser.

⁴³⁹ Rukeyser, *Life of Poetry*, 9.

⁴⁴⁰ Muriel Rukeyser, “We Came for the Games: A Memoir of the People’s Olympics, Barcelona, 1936,” *Sports, Belles, Lettres, Esquire Classic*, October 1, 1974, pp. 193. Accessed 5/20/20 <https://classic.esquire.com/article/1974/10/01/we-came-for-games>.

poet's papers at the Library of Congress dedicate a significant space to the Spanish Civil War and includes a folder dedicated to her notes, writings, newspaper clippings, pamphlets, photographs she took in Barcelona during the People's Olympiad and workers' mobilization. As a "nomadic subject," Rukeyser was adaptable, and viewed and understood the Spanish conflict through a much larger lens; time and space blurred in her attack on the different forms of oppression and fascism throughout her life. The poet produced four major essays specifically on the Spanish Civil War, all uncollected: "Barcelona, 1936" (1936), "Death in Spain: Barcelona on the Barricades" (1936), "Start of Strife in Spain Is Told By Eyewitness" (1936), and "We Came for the Games" (1974). Additionally, Kennedy-Epstein's recovered the nomad's autobiographical novel, *Savage Coast* (2013). Further, the introduction to Rukeyser's *The Life of Poetry* in 1949 was inspired by her own departure from Spain and she produced an unpublished poem "For O.B." (undated) for her love interest and volunteer fighter, Otto Boch. Additionally, many poems located in *The Collected Poems of Muriel Rukeyser* (2005) edited by Janet Kaufman, Anne Herzog are attributed to the Spanish Civil War, demonstrating the poet-activist's lifetime commitment to writing on oppression informed by the antifascist struggles in and out of Spain.

A new analysis of the essay helps to expand Kennedy-Epstein's argument that Rukeyser recontextualized her works to her present political moment, pointing out more directly the poet's responses to the Cold War's greater internationalism and international politics but a return to more rigid boundaries and national borders.⁴⁴¹ "We Came for the

⁴⁴¹ Rowena Kennedy-Epstein, "'Whose Fires Would Not Stop': Muriel Rukeyser and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1976," *Journal of Narrative Theory*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Fall 2013), p. 385.

Games” contains less of the internal narrative that correlated the external Civil War with the awakening within the young woman in *Savage Coast*, however the later piece provides a detailed and abbreviated version of her five days in Spain to cover the People’s Olympiad. Kennedy-Epstein provides a useful framework in which to interrogate the historical and political meanings within Rukeyser’s 1974 account, as Rukeyser’s work both builds on itself and on her changing political and social landscape over time. By writing “we” when recalling the experience, the essay, “We Came for the Games,” appears more dedicated to the cause and less on herself or her relationship with Otto.

Rukeyser does, however, ensure to honor Otto’s and other athletes-turned-volunteers in their commitment to fight fascism in a country not their own. She appeals to the reader’s universalizing emotions by placing the audience in a disjointed geography and temporality, signifying the experiences and traumas of war expand beyond particular spaces and times—significant considering the continued engagement in the Vietnam War and the protests against it. In this way, the essay, like her other writings on the Spanish Civil War and various other conflicts, falls within a genre of “historical poetics,” as noted by Kennedy-Epstein, who links Rukeyser’s poetic expression to her continually changing historical context: “The “latency” that she describes as being inside the historical moment becomes increasingly visible over time as it interacts with and is formed by other historical processes, not unlike the chemical process of photographic development in which the image (the meaning) slowly reveals itself.”⁴⁴² The poet universally warns

⁴⁴² Ibid., 389.

against the violence enacted by political and ideological war while celebrating those who continually volunteer to stand up to injustice everywhere.

As a polyglot, Rukeyser highlights language barriers and class difference among the assortment of foreign nationals in “We Came for the Games,” even more intentionally than the earlier versions. She tells the anecdote of being given a book, *25 Languages*, to assist in her European travels but ultimately, she discovered the superficial tool useless, failing to facilitate meaningful communication. The poet and her companions pieced together disjointed conversations, occurring in multiple languages at once like a jigsaw puzzle. The most ironic and debilitating barrier: Catalan was not even included, which inhibited understanding of the local townspeople. It is particularly useful to note how Rukeyser in the 1970s shortened her account of her five days in Spain in a way that points out the most important and universalizing aspects of her experience and observations. “We Came for the Games” first focuses on the passengers, in many ways like *Savage Coast*; however, with so many fewer pages to recount her story it is telling that the author chooses to detail the classes of train cars.

Another prominent theme in “We Came for the Games” is the way in which foreign travelers reacted to the events in Spain and readers can extract broader meanings about the international dynamics of the Spanish Civil War. An underlying force throughout the essay is the awareness and bitterness that official powers did not seek to stop fascism in Europe, but their Non-Intervention was guided by anti-communist fears. The poet explains the passengers were first separated by classes in their respective car. She had been in third-class and notes who was in first: Italian, German, South American, British, but no one obviously Spanish. When the train is held up due to the general strike,

they all move to first class. Foreign Olympic athletes start to play games outside near the station, passengers hear shots fired in distance, a professor from Madrid serves as the interlocutor between the train and town council, Catalan families head to town find accommodations, understanding it will take a while to secure the necessities.

In a sense, Rukeyser depicts the train and her experience as a microcosm of the larger contexts, especially the worker-driven revolution in Catalonia. In her indirect commentary on the international dynamics of the conflict in Spain and fascism in Europe, she consciously identified the first-class passengers as Italian, German, South American, French, and English. And when time came for the train to organize a collection for wounded soldiers, the same people abstained: “No, not the German family, not the Italian businessmen, not the Cockney shoe salesman; not the six platinum blondes, the Rodney Hudson Young Ladies, who were supposed to open tonight in Barcelona. The reader is posed to wonder if Rukeyser is hinting towards the correlation of fascist appeasement by the powerful democracies (or outright sympathy) and the presence of foreign capital in the Spanish economy. During the Spanish Civil War with Non-Intervention and following World War II with the growing recognition of dictator Francisco Franco, Western powers such as Britain and the United States neglected the antifascist and loyalist agenda in Spain. The passenger whose help counted the most turned out to be a League of Nations observer from Switzerland,” who helped edit the letter into diplomatic terms. Here, she points out the role played by a humanitarian outlook, the ability to see and relate beyond individual and national boundaries.

Rukeyser embedded both critique of macro and official policies towards Spain with foreigners’ individual reactions in the essay. She simply, yet vividly, captured the

ways in which individuals and society can become numb to violence and war, or remain self-absorbed through it. An American woman who was first paralyzed by her terror of guns in the morning was by evening, “standing with her back to them, eating chocolate. The fear is absorbed very quickly.”⁴⁴³ Rukeyser’s flashback describes looting, inadequate arms for loyalist soldiers, the dancer Nijinsky, the death of the flamenco dancer La Argentina, “whom [she] had loved to watch,” the dominant expression of feeling inconvenienced by the foreigners around her. While riding in the car taking the poet and a small group to Barcelona, she recalls “the Americans wonder about being saved by the Communist Party... American schoolteachers, who have been reading pamphlets on *The Problems of the Spanish Revolution*.”⁴⁴⁴ Decades of Cold War, intensified anti-communism provides an added layer to the misunderstandings about the political dynamics of the Spanish Left during the Civil War. With the tourists there is potential to see a common humanity offered in Spain, but the calcification of borders through international politics and the divide between communism and anti-communism, the poet responds in her understanding of international humanitarianism, being critical of nations, including the U.S.

Gender also played a role in the poet’s social commentary on foreigners’ reactions to war in Spain. With the first clamoring of general strike and fighting, describing a British male travel companion, Rukeyser reminds the essay reader in 1974 of the ways masculinity, sport, and war intersected: “Ernie, in the voice of Groucho Marx—“Of

⁴⁴³ Rukeyser, “We Came for the Games.”

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

course they know this means war!” A tiny boy in his shirt, holding his penis. Ernie—
“Vive le sport!” And the truck starts off for Barcelona.”⁴⁴⁵ Her association of masculinity
with the glamorization and conflation of war and sport, as well as Rukeyser’s attention to
US narratives, is a new addition to her accounts of the People’s Revolution in Catalonia.
On her way to Barcelona, she juxtaposes the absurd metaphor of Ernie holding his
genitalia and celebrating war as sport with the image of a Ford Motor sign and U.S.
inaction. This anecdote jarringly demonstrates what the feminine voice in historical
narratives can add to perspectives on war. Further, Rukeyser passes the Christopher
Columbus statue erected in Barcelona, perhaps reminding her contemporary reader that
such a highly recognized figure in the American historical narrative is claimed by Spain.
And as she recalls walking around the city the next couple days, “The Telefónica, run by
American business, is proud of a continued service.”⁴⁴⁶ And she did not pull punches
when she sarcastically described Britain’s reactions to fascism in Spain: “The British are
wonderful, brave, droll—they are feeling particularly humiliated, for they have had to lie
down on the tennis courts while they were shot at—*lie down on the courts!*”⁴⁴⁷

Rukeyser’s special focus on countries’ inaction resounds of the critiques of
Western democracies, the appeasement of fascism by Britain, France and the United
States. The poet argued that England’s leaders even liked Mussolini and were optimistic
about Hitler. Over the years she had learned that Spain, to the US and British, was the

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 368.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 369.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 369.

place *not* to stop fascism, but to “stop communism.”⁴⁴⁸ Her last image in “We Came for the Games” was disembarking from Spain again, and breaks to the image of Columbus again—not included in the final pages of *Savage Coast*—as she sets off with her task at hand: “You will do what you can in America.”⁴⁴⁹ Despite the poet’s request, the journal *The Nation* refused to send the eager American on official orders to Spain in 1937, stating if she found other means to get there and wrote on Spain they very much would like to see her work, but having already sent someone, they were not willing to fund additional correspondents to cover the war.⁴⁵⁰ The same Cold War anti-communism and, therefore, resistance to the global anti-fascism that stifled some of Rukeyser’s publishing on Spain also affected Nancy Macdonald’s attempts at writing a biography of the Spanish anarchist leader, Buenaventura Durruti (1896-1936). Macdonald, the founder of the Spanish Refugee Aid Committee, wrote to Rukeyser in 1978 that the publishers rejected the book project, claiming there would be “no audience.”⁴⁵¹ After decades of the Cold War, the poet poignantly reflected broader and wide-reaching anti-communist attitudes with her essay, “We Came for Games” in 1974.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 370.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid. Otto, and an organizer for the games in Barcelona advised Rukeyser that this was how she could best help the people of Spain and their fight for democracy.

⁴⁵⁰ October 22, 1937, Box I:9 Folder 2, Correspondence, Rukeyser Papers, LOC.

⁴⁵¹ Spanish Refugee Aid, Inc. letter, November 6, 1978. Box I:56 Folder 5, Ibid. Buenaventura Durruti was a primary leader in land collectivization in Aragon and the formation of the Aragon Defense Council, he was killed fighting at the front during the Spanish Civil War, see Mary Nash, *Defying Male Civilization*, 113 and Buenaventura Durruti, (1937), MS, *La Guerra Civil Española: Spanish Civil War Collection*, University of California, San Diego. *Archives Unbound* (accessed June 1, 2020). <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5106070911/GDSC?u=ucsandiego&sid=GDSC&xid=7801afd1>.

In addition to publishing for an US public on the defense of the II Republic and anti-fascism, despite the social and political risks, Rukeyser took direct action when she saw fit. Due to the Non-Intervention Pact, the United States established an embargo on arms sent to Spain. She protested this barrier to aid Spain's government acquisition of desperately needed defense supplies and weaponry during the Spanish Civil War. She delivered a speech to the American Students Union on February 24, 1939 on this very issue, a group deemed "subversive" and "un-American" in 1943 by the Special Committee of the House Committee on Appropriations.⁴⁵² Anti-embargo demonstrations had rallied other Americans to action. US women described volunteering to go to Spain following activities hosted by the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy or the embargo protests, while historian Ariel M. Lambe explains how a Cuban activist and intellectual in exile in New York City, Pablo de la Torriente Brau, was "jolted" into transnational antifascism after a Union Square rally.⁴⁵³ This is precisely the time when suspicion of Rukeyser intensified with the use of government surveillance. In Braidotti's conceptualization, the "nomadic subject" desires spaces of silence in which she can create new modes of thinking. The nomad, as exhibited by the poet-activist, despises mainstream communication and challenges dominant discourses because it places too much centrality to "common sense," and excessive pressure and "noise" or "pollution" to

⁴⁵² FBI, Muriel Rukeyser, NY #100-102441, April 22, 1952, p. 6.

⁴⁵³ *Into the Fire*, Newman; Lambe, *No Barrier Can Contain It*, 1.

find the access to the “city gates” of meaning. “Between the official cacophonies,” the nomad is the perpetual outsider.⁴⁵⁴

While Muriel Rukeyser solicited praise during her lifetime for her bold, poetic style, her work on the Spanish Civil War was largely ignored before Rowena Kennedy-Epstein revived this aspect of the poet’s work.

The fact that Rukeyser’s texts on Spain have never been considered together before, some of them “lost” in archives, others long out of print, left unpublished, or silent in poetry collections, is indicative of her precarious position in the American literary canon and the marginalization of a generation of radical writers, particularly women, silenced by Cold War politics and policies.⁴⁵⁵

This absence and the rejection of her autobiographical novel substantiates the need to recuperate such radical, feminine voices. *Savage Coast* was “too formally experimental, sexually explicit, and politically radical” for publisher, Pascal Covici-Friede, in 1937; the long poem—but much abbreviated analysis of her experience and the Civil War—“Mediterranean,” he would agree to though.⁴⁵⁶ The government and formal publishing industry approached the support for the II Republic with suspicion and at times, hostility during the Cold War.

There are both parallels and departures in the Cold War climate of domesticity from Rukeyser’s America to women living under Franco’s Spain. In Spain, while there had been progress from the turn of the century in women’s access to higher education,

⁴⁵⁴ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 16.

⁴⁵⁵ Kennedy-Epstein, “Whose Fires Would Not Stop,” 387.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

women were discouraged from practicing their careers.⁴⁵⁷ The gender program of the II Republic to correct women's inequities came to a halt with the Nationalist victory, including the disappearance of *Mujeres Libres* in 1939. During the autocratic years of the Franco regime, Aurora Morcillo argued that there was a masculinization of academia and concerted state and religious effort in the "nationalization of Spanish women," in which women were expected to be the *casada perfecta* (perfect housewife) of the nineteenth century, mothers and wives. In the post-Civil War period, women's public roles became an extension of the domestic ideal through the Social Service and joining the Women's Section of the Falange.⁴⁵⁸ As Rukeyser realized by the time she published "We Came for the Games," the U.S. government and their Western allies saw Spain as the place in Europe to stop communism, not to stop fascism; as the Franco years progressed, cooperation among the countries grew. The fascist forces in Spain promoted different training for women than for men and a female redemption from the chaos of the II Republic, the Civil War, and their natural evil nature "through suffering: suffering for God, the fatherland, their husbands, and their children."⁴⁵⁹ While Rukeyser's work in the United States at times blurred into the gendered-sanctioned space of philanthropy, her overall efforts can be seen more as activism in opposition to the anti-communism that underpinned Cold War ideals.

⁴⁵⁷ Morcillo, *True Catholic*, 16.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid, 16-25. The Sección Femenina was the only official Francoist women's organization, led by daughter of pre-II Republic dictator, Miguel Primo de Rivera, Pilar Primo de Rivera, and who also helped found the Falange Española with her brother, Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 40.

Rukeyser did not only intellectually support the Spanish Republican cause through writing and publishing, she sponsored Spaniards in exile for years, sending monetary aid to “adoptees.” The poet’s papers at the Library of Congress carefully archive her memberships relating to the Civil War and exiles. She corresponded with the Refugee Aid Committee often, including sending donations, working to have information about the organization published, and personally archiving the short biographies and testimonies collected by the aid society from Spanish exiles in France through 1978.⁴⁶⁰ Spanish Civil War exiles in France made requests to the Spanish Refugee Aid Committee for items such as funds, clothing, and sewing machines. Demetrio was one such refugee living in Bayonne. He was a bachelor who had lost an arm in the Civil War and went on to work twenty years in a saw-mill in France while surviving on the equivalent of \$33 a month. Jose M. explained they lived an almost ascetic life, and Fernando L. argued it was “better to live off charity than to than to be a traitor to a million dead.”⁴⁶¹ Still in 1971 the Spanish Refugee Aid, Inc. reported about 60,000 Spanish exiles living in France, by choice or with threat of incarceration if returned to Spain, and in need of aid. Several high profile, left-leaning writers and intellectuals sponsored the committee, including Hannah Arendt, Mrs. Sonia George Orwell, Dorothy Day, and Noam Chomsky, and artists supported the enduring cause as well—Alexander Calder donated his lithographs to be sold with proceeds paying for food packages for elder exiles in France.⁴⁶²

⁴⁶⁰ FBI, Muriel Rukeyser, San Francisco, #100-24064, December 21, 1944, p. 6.

⁴⁶¹ Letter signed Dwight Macdonald, November 15, 1971, Box I: 56, Folder 4, Rukeyser Papers, LOC.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

Just as she resisted conforming to a genre, Rukeyser critiqued the policy of Non-Intervention and donated monthly to help aid Spanish Civil War exiles. The committee, now with Nancy Macdonald serving as Director, sent a letter of request to Rukeyser if she would increase her contributions from \$51 to \$57 per quarter in 1973. The poet and donor hand wrote on the correspondence, “set by me at \$75.”⁴⁶³ Her continued affiliations with Spain signaled that for decades after her brief witnessing of the Spanish Civil War, she felt a profound conviction as the conflict resonated across boundaries, issues, and time.

She remained abreast of the depressing situation in Spain during the early Franco years, as Rukeyser kept the preparation report for the conference of Women’s International Democratic Federation, *International Conference in the Defence of Children*, held in Berlin in August 1951. It addressed the current situation of children living in Franco Spain. The conference acknowledged that Spanish women were fighting for democratic change to save their children. The committee reported that children “are direct victims of the war policy of the Franco Government in the service of the Yankees,” with a national budget of only 4.5% for public education and the majority, seventy-five percent, of the state budget allotted for “war and suppression.” The report also outlined dire conditions of low wages, increased cost of living, hunger and disease like tuberculosis plaguing children, and mental disorders, and with some being abandoned, and a system imposed of terror and brutality in Spain.⁴⁶⁴ They painted a picture of

⁴⁶³ Ibid., letter dated March 12, 1973, signed Sonja Leobold, Adoptions.

⁴⁶⁴ Women’s International Democratic Federation, *International Conference in the Defence of Children*, August 9, 1951, Box I: 56, Folder 4, Rukeyser Papers, LOC. For a discussion of the conditions in Spain under Francisco Franco, see Aurora G. Morcillo, *True Catholic Womanhood Gender Ideology in Franco’s*

barefoot, under clothed children roaming streets, having to scavenge for food themselves, “ransacking the garbage,” and at the mercy of charitable organizations and donations. The Falangist propaganda posters and materials with the slogan “Arriba España” contrasted with the committee’s plea that “the Franco regime is the mortal enemy of the Spanish children. Franco means starvation, illiteracy, slavery, and war.”⁴⁶⁵ Rukeyser is indeed the perpetual outsider and after her return from Spain, continually challenged official positions such as the toleration and relationship with Franco.

For decades Rukeyser continued to stay informed and involved regarding the conditions in Spain, she was still a member of the Committee for a Democratic Spain in 1970, receiving an update on the organization’s regularly “Spain Today.” The Committee for a Democratic Spain expressed concerned over the continued presence of US troops in Spain providing training on the suppression of insurrection and their 1951 communication requested its members to write letters to their senators to protest renewed negotiations of the 50 million dollars in military aid to the internal affairs of the Franco government in return for bases.⁴⁶⁶ There is no record of whether or not she heeded such request, however, she remained on top of affairs and issues, while military and economic agreements were finalized between the U.S. and Spain with the 1953 Pact of Madrid.⁴⁶⁷

Spain (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000); Helen Graham, *Interrogating Francoism: History and Dictatorship in Twentieth-Century Spain* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2016); Wayne H. Bowen, *Truman, Franco’s Spain, and the Cold War* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2017).

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., *International Conference in the Defence of Children*.

⁴⁶⁶ Committee for a Democratic Spain, organization letter asking members to write their representatives to protest continued presence of U.S. troops in Spain, March 1970, Box I: 56, Folder 4, Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Morcillo, *True Catholic Womanhood*, 47.

In a more subtle way, Rukeyser continued her advocacy for a fascist-free Spain, against the official policies, during the Cold War. Amidst Cold War sentiments, the poet's vocal support for the fallen II Republic marked the poet as potentially "red" and her lifelong outspokenness against the injustices born of anti-communism placed her under the watchful eye of the FBI, and even under arrest for her defiance of official Cold War policy. The FBI conducted a formal investigation into the poet's activities. Her constant seeking of political liberty repeatedly put her at odds with U.S. authorities during the intensified mid-century, anti-communist discourse.

Over the course of the Cold War period, "nomadic subjects" such as Muriel Rukeyser and Margarita Nelken found themselves marginalized or under suspicion at home or abroad. It was against "the context of unavoidable modernization," that Franco's Spain saw a shift in the 1950s from autarchy to the free market and consumerism that required a new conceptualization of the virtuous and traditional Spanish woman. Aurora Morcillo asserts, "The image of woman-as-consumer (and woman-as-commodity) is regarded as a central character in modern family life, representing the intersection of capitalism and gender."⁴⁶⁸ As "National-Catholicism provided an impeccable anticommunist façade," the "international rehabilitation" of Francoist Spain was made possible by the pervasive ideologies in Western, democratic nations during the Cold War that equated capitalism with freedom, the "American Dream," and the nuclear family with a traditional gendered order.⁴⁶⁹ Morcillo additionally points out that as Spain and the

⁴⁶⁸ Morcillo, *True Catholic Womanhood*, 47.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

U.S. resumed the exchange of ambassadors in the early 1950s, collaboration required Americans to view Franco's totalitarianism as a less malign form than Hitler's or Stalin's. Morcillo quotes Carlton J. H. Hayes, a former U.S. ambassador to Spain: "Collaboration with Spain requires, of course, an overcoming of democratic scruples about General Franco's government, which is undoubtedly a *kind of dictatorship—a military and anti-communist dictatorship*."⁴⁷⁰

Both single mothers, with various associations fighting against social injustice of the oppressed, Rukeyser and Nelken were outsiders in their respective places. While official parties tried to force Nelken to silence, her identity as a Jewish, Spanish woman on the Left sat uncomfortably with observers in Spain and even in post-revolutionary Mexico. The US poet-activist, while never politically exiled from her country of birth, experienced a kind of internal marginalization as her activism and writing associated her with a more global, radical Left and communist suspicions amidst the conformity of the Cold War. Spain occupied a unique space for these women's lives and identities while exposing critical contradictions in the policies of the 'land of the free.' While for U.S. officials Spanish trade along with Franco's anti-communism and assault on what he determined "red" excused human rights violations, dictatorship, and fascist origins, Rukeyser, and other leftist supporters of the II Republic in exile continued to vocalize for a democratic Spain.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid, 49. Quoted from Hayes, *The United States and Spain*, 181, emphasis by Aurora Morcillo.

Conclusion

Muriel Rukeyser archived a copy of a report dated April 18, 1975 compiled by a group of North Americans in Spain, “Letter from Spain no. 4.” This document explained the increasing visibility of the opposition to the Franco regime in Spain.⁴⁷¹ Strikes, namely a “Jornada de Lucha” (day of battle) scheduled for May 1st, shut down universities, and general unrest was noted among workers, students, professors, teachers, performers, and even clergy, merchants, doctors, government employees, housewives, and army officers. Finally, some of the major support for the Nationalists’ 1936 coup joined the opposition towards the goal of restoring democracy to Spain. The strongest catalyst for such unified discontent may have been economic interests—the trend towards entering Spain into the European and global markets—however, gradual and widespread disappointment meant that the government had a diminishing base and would resort to increased repression. Attempts at maintaining absolute control included fines and prison sentences for illegal assembly, workers commission (underground union) membership, and possession of unsanctioned political materials. While this economic slump and iron fist now isolated more groups than ever, with jails full and Amnesty International recently adopting 400 prisoners, in six months the dictator would be dead after more than three decades of suppressing political liberties.⁴⁷² Democracy would come to Spain not through internal revolt or exiles’ efforts from afar, but the painful passage of time. What would have been of particular interest to Rukeyser in 1975 as she sat as PEN’s president, was the campaign

⁴⁷¹ Letter, April 18, 1975, Box I: 56, Folder 4 “Spain,” Rukeyser Papers, LOC.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

against the press by the Franco government.⁴⁷³ With reports detailing torture against students and workers leaking from Spain, anti-communist repression and Cold War violence and skirmishes persisting, she fastened her commitment to, and expression of, democracy and justice.

The US poet wrote on race and workers' issues before being sent to cover the People's Olympiad in 1936; however, that year demonstrates an intensified commitment to social and political issues with a firm and unapologetic stand on the Left. As a "nomadic subject," Rukeyser committed her life to challenging dominant discourses towards breaking down barriers, transgressing many creative and political identities. She had been under FBI surveillance for over forty years, arrested for protesting war and imprisonment of free-thinkers. Her identity as an American Jewish woman coming of age during the 1930s and witness to the beginnings of the Spanish Civil War and Barcelona's workers' revolution placed her within the generation of leftist writers, anti-war and resistance poets, as a writer-activist. After her initial manuscript, Rukeyser returned to *Savage Coast* to write an afterword sometime after 1972. A "lifetime" after the Civil War, she reflects on Americans' inaction and the creation of a "buffer" zone in Spain. "Joseph Kennedy's argument to Roosevelt was one we would come to know—that Spain was the place to "stop communism."⁴⁷⁴ She recalls hearing the tragic stories of exiles crossing the Pyrenees and "talk of a buffer zone to be created, and [she] thought: it will

⁴⁷³ Ibid. 1,200 Spanish intellectuals signed a petition to Premier Arias Navarro protesting harsh actions against the press, use of military courts, and delays in trials.

⁴⁷⁴ Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, 296.

be a paradigm of all boundaries. Let me tell the story of the beginning and this first ending of the war.”⁴⁷⁵

Margarita Nelken crossed literal borders in her experience of multiple exiles and political isolation, perhaps helping to forge a commitment to more universal human rights and justice. Like the US poet, this Spanish politician and art critic challenged dominant structures and discourses through direct and indirect forms of political and social activism. As in nomadic fashion, both women on the Anglo-Hispanic divide saw the struggle in Spain as central to anti-fascism and freedom more broadly. Rukeyser drew a continuum of the fight against fascism, from Hitler’s refusal to recognize Jesse Owens hundred-meter race just two weeks after the disbanded People’s Olympiad, to the black athletes making their protest in Mexico City, Vietnam, and the killed Jewish athletes in Munich. “The acts of this century, events which said in tragic charity that our lives would not be shredded, not as athletes nor women nor as poets, not as travelers, tourists, refugees.”⁴⁷⁶

The perpetual movement of the US nomad contrasts with the forced political exile following the Spanish Civil War, an exile Janet Riesenfeld knew well but from a privileged position. As seen through the example of Rukeyser, the “nomadic subject” risks consuming the “other” within the “self,” as trans-humanitarianism holds both potential for alliances and the shortcoming of erasing the particular needs of an oppressed group. As the nomadic subject lives in motion, neither here nor there but in suspension,

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 297.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 298.

Rukeyser continually sided with the suspended “other”: the female, Black Americans, anti-fascists in and out of Spain, Jews, and writers persecuted under anti-communism. While the Cold War environment placed more, not fewer, borders and rigidity on nomads, we must also consider the ways the poet, as an American woman, romanticized the Spanish Civil War and, at times, the poet’s universalist writing and activism dissolved the “other.” Yet, her empathy drove a lifelong commitment to action, actions that continually helped those in need and was influenced by her Spanish Civil War experience. In 1978 Nancy Macdonald of the Spanish Refugee Aid, Inc. personally inquired with the poet on the absence of several months of donations for her adoptee, Demetrio, and whether the organization should find another sponsor. The nomadic Rukeyser apologized—she had been traveling to England, Sweden, and California—but assured the Director: “Of course I want to go on with him, forever, if I can.”⁴⁷⁷ (Figure 18)



Figure 18: Muriel Rukeyser, Photograph. Later in her life in 1972 the poet was arrested for protesting the Vietnam War. This was a culmination of a life of protest poetry, anti-fascist writing, and social justice activism. Box I:61 Folder 6, Photographs, Library of Congress. Courtesy of William L. Rukeyser.

⁴⁷⁷ Correspondence dated October 5 and October 25, 1978 with Nancy Macdonald, Box I: 56, Folder 4, Rukeyser Papers, LOC.

CHAPTER FOUR:

“Una Gringuita en México”: Janet Riesenfeld and Film Production in Exile

Janet Riesenfeld
Janet Gaye Dunning
Raquel Rojas
Raquel Alcoriza
Janet Alcoriza.

Janet Riesenfeld immediately captured my interest when I stumbled upon *Dancer in Madrid* in my university library, and my attention grew as I followed her experiences among Spanish Civil War exiles in Mexico, particularly in her marriage to Luis Alcoriza (1918-1992) —who collaborated on several films with the prolific Spanish Surrealist film director and exile, Luis Buñuel (1900-1983). When I sat down with the head archivist at the Centro de Documentación at the Cineteca Nacional, I knew she was a historical figure warranting much more investigation. During a research trip to Mexico, I had been directed to try my luck at the Cineteca, as my archival searches were not producing much. When I requested the *expediente* they held on the US dancer, one of the librarians brought me an extremely thin folder. I had been hopeful for some treasure chest but was honestly not totally surprised. As I started to read the few obituaries that comprised the file, the librarian came back and said the director of the Centro Documentación was calling me back to his office. He first seemed surprised that there was an investigator inquiring about this largely unrecognized woman, but he was also disappointed that the folder contained so little, as he recalled for me his own memories of watching the *extranjera* on screen with much affection. He also shared how much he enjoyed the

cinematic titles that she helped write, as edgy, humorous, and provocative films in their treatment of women, gender, and sex. We talked for an hour as he called on assistants to comb their records for any relevant works. His interest and personal feeling that Janet Riesenfeld, known in Mexico as both Raquel Rojas (actress) and Janet Alcoriza (screenwriter), was an important artist in Mexican cinema supported my hunch, that she is a significant, yet overlooked, figure in the broader exiles' cultural productions in Mexico.

Indeed, the dancer constructed many selves, all of which help to explain a different part of her life and the social, political, and cultural worlds she navigated. She left Spain at the end of 1936, and although the war would wage on for over two more years, her early escape did not close the Spanish chapter of her life. Rather, it opened her longest adventure: her life in Mexico surrounded by Spanish Republican exiles, marriage in 1945 to exiled actor and screenwriter, Luis Alcoriza, and her prolific film career during the period known as the Golden Age of Mexican cinema.⁴⁷⁸ This chapter narrates the first attempt at a biography of the US screenwriter in Mexico, primarily by analyzing her professional work and productions, in order to demonstrate her integral place within the exile community and prolific film career. Riesenfeld's life in Mexico is only mentioned briefly in biographies and film critiques of Luis Buñuel and Luis Alcoriza, two friends

⁴⁷⁸ A golden age of Mexican cinema began alongside World War II with the decrease in foreign cultural imports, and persisted through the 1960s with state-funded production. See Collin Gunckel, "Now We Have Mexican Cinema?: Navigating Transnational Mexicanidad in a Moment of Crisis," in *Mexico on Main Street: Transnational Film Culture in Los Angeles before World War II* (Rutgers University Press, 2015). See also Robert Irwin and Maricruz Ricalde, *Global Mexican Cinema: Its Golden Age (Cultural Histories of Cinema)* (London: British Film Institute, 2013). Riesenfeld's marriage to Luis Alcoriza is document in Civil Registration Marriages, Federal District, Mexico. Document access through Ancestry.com.

who collaborated often. Although she had a hand in at least eighty Mexican films with her Spanish husband, her name is generally forgotten. While the American woman danced, acted, and wrote as “Raquel Rojas,” and upon marriage to Luis Alcoriza is often referred to with his surname, I continue to call her Janet Riesenfeld, as this name links her to her past as well as her experiences from before and after the Spanish Civil War—following the war she would never again spend significant time in the United States. Her move to Mexico among other European and Spanish exiles would be lifelong and marked her as a post-war European exile, even if self-imposed; while most Americans avoided the massive dislocations of the mid-twentieth century, the dancer elected a transient life. As one of the Alcorizas’ (as they were often called) screenplay title suggests, *Una Gringuita en México*, Riesenfeld again successfully crossed Anglo-Hispanic boundaries; however, unlike the activist Muriel Rukeyser’s embodiment of the “nomadic subject,” the work of the dancer, interpreter, and screenwriter did not subsume the “other” within the “self.”

Rukeyser used her nomadic outlook and experience in the Spanish Civil War to speak out against oppressions at home in the U.S., while the dancer’s survivalist strategies of the postwar era adapted herself to new places, cultural exchanges, and professional roles abroad. While this chapter analyzes Riesenfeld’s life and career in Mexico, it also weaves together her experience of a nomad’s self-imposed exile to shed some light on European and Spanish exiled women in the intelligentsia. For many women of the Spanish Civil War, a more stable post-war life in Mexico supported flourishing careers that at times were at odds with the gender norms of their host country, as well as the more general Cold War ideals of domesticity. In several ways the exile community in

Mexico also shifted towards more traditional gender roles. The increasingly international politics of the Cold War paralleled rigid gender ideals in popular culture. However, the experience of trauma, Mexican cultural values, and the broader Cold War ideological emphasis on separate gender spheres complicates the narrative of women's lives in exile who had supported and been active in the socially progressive II Republic and loyalist Civil War effort in Spain. Mexican and Spanish institutions in Mexico were male dominated, especially on the leadership level, despite many Republican Spanish women publishing prolifically and appointed or elected to formal political positions in Spain before the Civil War. Although she was not a political exile, Riesenfeld's trajectory illuminates key elements of the European exile experience in Mexico and she embodied the survivalist qualities of a community displaced. Many foreign women saw the liberating potentials of the 1920s and 1930s contract in the 1940s, and the dancer-turned-screenwriter navigated categories in unique ways. With growing Cold War rigidity, along political and gender lines, the dancer was more survivalist in the nomad's looking for a transnational world in a growing international world. The American's role as the "interpreter" manifested in new ways in Mexico; unlike Rukeyser who often articulated her subjectivity in her work and activism, Riesenfeld's own identity is muted and obscure but without an attempt at imitation of the "other."

In helping to write screenplays that explored gendered, cultural constructs of national identity for Mexican cinema, the dancer bridged Anglo-Hispanic divides through her close position to the Republican exile community and parodistic interpretations of cultural "authenticity." Therefore, while drawing on the historiography of exile in Mexico more generally, this chapter also pays particular attention to intellectual women's

experiences, linking the artistic expressions with the lived social context. To do so, it weaves Riesenfeld's nomadic journey after the Spanish Civil War together with some of the experiences of Spanish women on the Left who produced intellectual and cultural works in Mexico but were among the minority of exiled women to do so. Most often, when women engaged in artistic, intellectual, or political public realms, the themes of gender penetrated their works or they are overshadowed, even silenced, by male-dominated structures and cultural values. The experience of the post-Spanish Civil War exile community in Mexico City is nuanced, as the group was indeed heterogenous in how they sought more freedom or opportunity during World War II and the Cold War in the Americas. In fact, some women within the European leftist circles settled firmly into more traditional roles, and their lives and relationships illuminate some of the backpeddling of a traditionally macho culture following the defeat of the II Republic. Originally from France, Jeanne Rucar Buñuel was married to Luis Buñuel and her memoir, reflecting on a lifetime as wife and living in Mexico, attests to the ways in which some women were silenced in the Cold War period in a masculine society. Her experience is contrasted to the US dancer's: the two wives of Spanish exiled filmmakers were friends yet reflected the social and cultural landscape in Mexico and among Spanish exiles differently.

Finally, through a critical film analysis this chapter illustrates the dancer's central place within the production of the Golden Age of Mexican cinema. I argue that the films she worked on with Alcoriza attempted to dismantle gendered social and cultural structures dominant during the Cold War. Therefore, this chapter draws on archival research of the exile community in Mexico from the Archivo General de la Nación

(AGN), the Ateneo de Español de México for the activities of exiles in their intellectual, cultural, and political lives, and a history of film located in UNAM's Filmoteca and the Cineteca Nacional. The analysis focuses on the films Riensenfeld acted in and wrote, while considering the new Mexican cinema and newspaper coverage of the life and work of the Alcorizas. Her success within Mexican cultural landscape was largely due to her nomadism, this multiple and layered feminist identity rooted in empathy for otherness.

Previously, this dissertation connected Riensenfeld to Braidotti's use of both the body and cartography as a nomadic means of empathic knowledge understanding and ultimately action and activism.⁴⁷⁹ Moving from dancer and choreographer into a career in screenwriting allowed Riensenfeld to trespass genres and national boundaries in her fluid movement through genres and national contexts. She carved successful creative spaces in the U.S., Spain, and Mexico, partly through a fluid and mysterious re-fashioning of her identity and origins; although she was born in the U.S. some accounts produced in Mexico refer to her as a European exile, having been nationalized Spanish, while in other accounts she is identified as Austrian. She is the Cold War "subverter," as she never defined herself; she dissolves herself in her interpretations, whether in dance or film. Further, Riensenfeld as well as others, continued to omit her Jewish identity in Mexico. The silences, as well as articulations, of the nomadic dancer's layered identity frame her captivating life after 1936.

⁴⁷⁹ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 16, 17.

“¡Me voy a México!”

The dancer’s elected move to Mexico following her time in Spain serves as a counterpoint to the trauma of the Spanish Civil War and escape by exiles from an uncertain destiny in France to hope for better circumstances across the Atlantic. Recalling the Spanish anarchist and journalist’s, Silvia Mistral (1914-2004), *Éxodo: diario de una refugiada española*, many exiles in France faced horrible conditions. From her voyage on the *Ipanema* and publishing her diary in the Mexican newspaper, *Hoy*, Mistral remembered receiving the news that she would make the passage to Mexico and felt elated.⁴⁸⁰ She wrote that upon hearing the news she exclaimed aloud her joy to be going to Mexico; “¡Me voy a México, me voy a México!”⁴⁸¹ Her diary entries reflected the same hope of a new home in Mexico shared by other writers. Like Mistral, for thousands of other Europeans the situation in France had become desperate and they sought the aid of international forces for passage to Mexico by 1940. In an interview in the 1940s, the Surrealist artist and Spanish exile Remedios Varo (1908-1963) described herself in Mexico, “I am more from Mexico than from any other place...It is in Mexico that I felt welcomed and secure. I do not like to travel at all. It is an experience that I do not like to repeat.”⁴⁸²

For Spanish exiles, their stay in Mexico was first considered temporary until General Francisco Franco could be overthrown and democracy restored to Spain. For

⁴⁸⁰ Silvia Mistral, *Éxodo: diario de una refugiada española*, Edición a cargo de José Colmeiro (Barcelona: Icaria Antrazyt, Mujeres, Voces Y Protestas, 2009), 135.

⁴⁸¹ Mistral, *Éxodus*, 135.

⁴⁸² Remedios Varo, quoted in Janet Kaplan, *Unexpected Journeys*, 113.

such reasons, outside of professional, academic, and economic capacities, much of the political organizing by refugees circled around anti-fascist activities, yet most would never return permanently to Spain. Their experience and life, like Varo's, is therefore a critical narrative of twentieth-century Mexican and European history, and for such reason, well analyzed by historians. Historians like Patricia Fagen have studied the groups of Spanish exiles as holding a particular and unique position as "others" in Mexico City, sharing a language, a history, and similar culture, customs, and political ideology. For writer and exile Isabel de Palencia, the shared language and culture made the move to Mexico particularly appealing to the higher percent of Spanish intellectual exiles.⁴⁸³ De Palencia described her first impressions of Mexico as reminiscent of her beloved hometown of Málaga. She felt overjoyed that she could continue to celebrate cultural and religious traditions almost the same as she had in Spain. She was relieved and excited to be in Mexico, while asserting the expectation, out of gratitude, that Spaniards' work in exile should defend the interests of Mexico.⁴⁸⁴ While many Spanish exiles drew on the bonds and similarities with their new host country, for the nomadic Riesenfeld, she was continuously crossing cultural and linguistic boundaries, first in Spain and then in Mexico.

It is in this early context of transition and gratitude by the expatriated Europeans, that Janet Riesenfeld arrived to Mexico in the late 1930s and started a career in cinema as

⁴⁸³ Patricia Fagen, *Exiles and Citizens*, 46, 47. De Palencia was a foreign minister for the II Republic in Sweden, and delegate for The Association of Spanish Women, that she was vice-chairman, at the Congress of the International Suffrage Alliance.

⁴⁸⁴ Isabela de Palencia, *I Must Have Liberty* (New York: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1940), 1-11.

an outsider. Jürgen Buchenau has argued that during heightened xenophobia in Mexico, the perspectives of foreigners offer different insight about Mexican society that helps to give credit to their status as the “other” by adding value to their distanced subjectivity.⁴⁸⁵ As intellectual women transitioned to a life in exile, their works will show some of the shifts in Spanish women’s personal and professional lives in Mexico. It is against the backdrop of stalled incorporation of women into post-revolutionary Mexican politics and towards the end of President Lázaro Cárdenas’ (1934-1940) liberal reform-driven presidential term that the Civil War refugees arrived in Mexico, who had admired the 1910 revolutionary agenda in Mexico for progressive social and political reform.⁴⁸⁶ However, while women’s suffrage was granted in 1931 under the II Republic, Mexican women could not vote in federal presidential elections until 1957. Therefore, foreign women’s perspective and position within society provides some insight into the social and cultural conditions of postwar Mexico.

⁴⁸⁵ Jürgen Buchenau, *Mexico Otherwise: Modern Mexico in the Eyes of Foreign Observers* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 4.

⁴⁸⁶ *Diario del Sinaia, Crónica de una emigración: la de los Republicanos españoles en 1939*, May 26, 1939, Ateneo Español de México, Mexico City, D.F., Mexico, *Exilio, II República en el exilio*, 25.312; Writers of the journal aboard the *Sinaia* identify emotional solidarity among the 1,800 passengers arising from their pain and suffering, while a common vision towards a brighter future in Mexico. The *Sinaia* daily also explains and announces that while on board, passengers were able to attend a series of seminars on Mexican topics such as history, geography, social problems, economics, and politics. The language of the *Sinaia* diary describing these activities and treatises on such subjects shows a unified sentiment that Mexico will be the exiles’ shelter, as well as a belief that they will represent the true Spain through their activities in refuge in Mexico. The Mexican Revolution of 1910 ended the three decade-long dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. While there were multiple revolutionary factions with their retrospective objects, a constitutional program of democracy, social justice, and expansion of workers’ rights, and inclusion of the mestizo into national identity lay at the center. See Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution. V. 1, V. 2*. (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1990) and John Womack, *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Random House US, 2011).

Focusing on the “outsider’s” view is a productive historical exercise, and the experience of women and exile is, therefore, doubly illuminating when looking at Mexican society. Women give us a heightened foreigner’s perspective. As Mexican historian Jürgen Buchenau explains the value of the outsider account to national histories: “These sources present the reader with an international view of Mexican history; an important endeavor in the age of the “global village” in which we live.”⁴⁸⁷ More broadly, Edward Said’s theory of exile is applicable to the Spanish case in Latin America, as he shows us that the exile is in a “median state;” there exists a constant reminder to the refugee of what he or she has lost, causing him or her to be torn between the two places. “Your home is not in fact so far away,” he writes, and “the normal traffic of everyday contemporary life keeps you in constant but tantalizing and unfulfilled touch with the old place.”⁴⁸⁸ Similar to Homi Bhabha’s conceptualization of the postcolonial subject occupying a liminal space, resulting in more fluid subjectivity, Said’s twentieth-century exile gains a broadened perspective, creating new forms of knowledge that violate strictly binary ways of thinking. Precisely the loss of home and foreignness permits the exiled intellectual to develop original and new visions. Further, as Reneé Silverman argues, women suffered a “double exile” of both politics and gender: the lost position of exiles is particularly relevant for female expatriates, where they not only experience

⁴⁸⁷ Buchenau, *Mexico Otherwise*, 2.

⁴⁸⁸ Edward W. Said, “Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals” *Grand Street*, No. 47 (Autumn, 1993), 112-124.

marginalization from the dislocation into a foreign host society, but also as the subordinate group in a patriarchal society.⁴⁸⁹

The progressive population of Spanish exiles arriving to Mexico was overall diverse but contained a high percentage of politically conscious, socially and politically left-leaning intellectuals.⁴⁹⁰ While most intellectuals or political activists were male, women comprised a large portion of the exodus from Spain. Of the total amount of “cabezas de familia” (heads of household) arriving in Mexico, 85% were male. However, females made up 41.2% of the total exile population in the new host country. According to Pilar Domínguez Prats, 59% of female exiles coming to Mexico reported being married, 14.5% single, and 26.5% either separated or widowed. Prats notes the political affiliations of females in Mexico, assessing that more than 50% did not identify with any party.⁴⁹¹ These figures are telling when compared to the male demographics in Mexico, where many of the Republicans were politically active and held high academic positions in Mexico. The industrious professional and cultural activities of Spanish exiles in Mexico has been well documented by historians. Numerous scholarly journals and academic institutions, such as the *Colegio de México*, were founded by Spanish intellectuals who escaped Spain. The exiles’ plethora of writings and activities point to

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid. See also René Silverman, "A Double Exile: Politics, Gender, and the Popular in Maruja Mallo's Art," *American Comparative Literature Conference*, Utrecht, Netherlands, July 2017, for a further discussion on the “double exile” of political and gender marginalization in exile in Latin America.

⁴⁹⁰ Clara E. Lida, José Antonio Matesanz, Beatriz Morán Gortari, *La Casa de España en México*, México, D.F.: Colegio de México, 1988; Clara E. Lida, José Antonio Matesanz, *El Colegio de México: una hazana cultural, 1940-1962*, México: D.F.: Colegio de México, 1990.

⁴⁹¹ Pilar Domínguez Prats, *Voces del exilio: Mujeres españolas en México, 1939-1950* (Madrid, 1994), 23, 100-111.

their continual commitment to cultural scholarship, enlightenment, social justice, and progress and evince an expectation that Mexico would lead the way in progress among the democratic, Western nations.⁴⁹² Regardless of the specific arguments concerning the perceptions of favorability of Spanish exiles in Mexico, the early works on Spanish Republican exiles in Mexico inherently focus on males' experiences and perspectives, because the intellectual exile community was largely overrepresented by men. Therefore, these institutional and political histories fail to incorporate issues of gender or female perspectives on exile and Mexico.⁴⁹³

During the 1990s historians and gender scholars started to revive women's experiences and contributions to the Spanish exile communities in Mexico, and Latin America more generally. Pilar Domínguez Prats' pioneering, foundational text, *Voces del exilio*, pays the greatest attention to ordinary women, using oral testimonies, conducted by the author some fifty years after the Spaniards arrived to Mexico, and broadly analyzes the experiences of exiles from different classes and professions to document

⁴⁹² Fagen, *Exiles and Citizens*; Thomas Powell, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981); Lois Elwyn Smith, *Mexico and the Spanish Republicans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955). Pilar Domínguez Prats' revises the history by publishing works on female exiles in Mexico. Spanish women before and during the civil war voiced a high degree of gender equality, yet Prats' broad research on female Spanish exiles in Mexico suggests that there was a regression of the social revolution among the Spaniards in exile and that traditional gender roles continued in Mexico. See Pilar Domínguez Prats, *Voces del exilio: Mujeres españolas en México, 1939-1950* (Madrid, 1994) and "Silvia Mistral, Constanza de la Mora y Dolores Martí: Relatos y memorias del exilio de 1939," *Revista de Indias*, vol. LXXII, num. 256 (2012): 799-824. That work is taken up by Valeriya Fedonkina Fritz as she sets women's experiences in the context of a more conservative, Cold War atmosphere. See Valeriya Fedonkina Fritz, *The Family, Hybridity, and the Atlantic: Spanish Women's Narrative of Exile* (Dissertation Abstracts International, 2016). See also María José Martínez-Gutiérrez, "Escritoras españolas en el exilio. México, 1939-1995," Ph.D. diss., (University of California, San Diego, 1995).

⁴⁹³ With Powell, we do see a break with the conception that Mexico openly embraced the opportunity to aid their fellow Hispanics or that the welcoming of the exiles was overall beneficial to Mexican culture and economy.

their life in Mexico. Prats' study only marginally relates female exiles' experiences to the significant historical context of the time by being more descriptive rather than explanatory or employing any theoretical tools within her work. While not traditionally and overtly "political," Remedios Varo and other exiles demonstrated critical engagement on a variety of structures and modes of thought. For example, Varo's artwork engages themes of gender inversion and suspicion of the overly rational. Still, Varo did at times directly engage in the political context of her time, as she took a job with the British antifascist propaganda office during 1942-43, making "dioramas and small stage sets to illustrate Allied war victories."⁴⁹⁴ She also had an interest in Pre-Columbian artifacts, collecting and restoring, and of course her Republican identification and intimacy with poet and partner, Benjamin Péret and others, forced her escape from Europe. For II Republic politician, Margarita Nelken, 1945 marked a key year to organize around women's issues, human rights, and anti-fascism at the International Women's Day Conference in Mexico City.⁴⁹⁵ In this way, we might be able to rethink women's political and cultural contributions in exile.

Research on women in exile illuminates greater ways that left-leaning Spaniards and foreigners contributed to the cultural production in their host country, negotiated new identities, and how Mexico served as fertile ground to forge successful careers, while maintaining their fight and hope for a democratic Spain. Notably, scholars argue that Surrealists Remedios Varo, Leonora Carrington, and Kati Horna, forged "surreal

⁴⁹⁴ Kaplan, *Unexpected Journeys*, 97.

⁴⁹⁵ *Mujeres: Seguid El Camino de la Alta Tradición de Vuestrias Patrias*, "Acción Democrática Internacional" March 8, 1942, Camacho, 135.2/547, AGN, Mexico City, D.F., Mexico.

friendships” in Mexico that enabled them to produce their most famous artistic works and have more active careers than would have been the case in Europe.⁴⁹⁶ These “Surreal Friends,” argue Stefan Van Raay, Joanna Moorhead, and Teresa Arcq, nurtured their professional maturity, despite, and perhaps because of, the domestic nature of their lives after fleeing war and violence. They “us[ed] images of cooking as a metaphor for hermetic pursuits, they established an association between women’s traditional roles and magical acts of transformation.”⁴⁹⁷ Mexico provided an ideal backdrop for such productions, with the support of the Cárdenas administration as well as the surreal nature of Mexican landscape, culture, and history.⁴⁹⁸

For Spanish exiles, Mexico, with its deep roots in cultural and ethnic hybridity, provided the best chance for a comfortable transition, and regardless of popular xenophobic sentiments and Spaniards’ status as refugees, the Cárdenas administration enthusiastically opened its arms to the Civil War refugees when they had limited options for solace.⁴⁹⁹ While not acting as explicit political agents—President Cárdenas welcomed

⁴⁹⁶ Stefan Van Raay, Joanna Moorhead, Teresa Arcq, *Surreal Friends, Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo, and Kati Horna* (Lund Humphries and Pallant House Gallery, 2010).

⁴⁹⁷ See Janet Kaplan, *Unexpected Journeys*.

⁴⁹⁸ Van Raay, Moorhead, Arcq, *Surreal Friends*, 103, 112. The authors argue that the three friends in exile in Mexico created a close-knit circle of creativity that enabled the maturing of their professional and artistic works. Their host country was also an ideal place to explore surrealism, as even the father of the movement, André Breton, discussed the inherent surreal aspects of Mexico history and culture. As years go on, one can see more powerful images of women are at the center, having control over the universe, witches sabbaths, and the female metamorphosis into animals. While there was very limited Mexican iconography in the women’s works, they “had more to do with Mexico’s cultural and historical circumstances, which were marked by a mixture of ancestral traditions of shamanism, and the spiritualist, occultist and hermetic traditions that had been introduced to Mexico since the nineteenth century.” Even according to Octavio Paz, Latin American modern art was highly influenced by occult traditions.

⁴⁹⁹ Argentina, which historically attracted most Spanish immigrants in the Americas, became less appealing as a growing fear of foreigners grew. Jose C. Moya, notes the conservative shift to the right with the military coup d’état in 1930 and that the “influence of Spanish Falangism increased in Argentine nationalist

the exiles in part to encourage the production of scholarly and cultural works in Mexico, however, the Mexican government instituted stipulations, arising from Mexican constitutional laws that Spaniards were not to engage in domestic politics—the refugees committed significant time to an understanding of contemporary Mexico and its history.⁵⁰⁰ Their place of exile offered a productive space to work with a relative opportunity for potential assimilation. But where assimilation suggests complete integration and acculturation, this context of Republican exiles in Mexico provided opportunities for integration into the receiving society without abandoning other non-Mexican identities and commitments. Braidotti further suggests the “nomadic subject” does not reject being a part of a community but is “capable of recreating your home everywhere.”⁵⁰¹ Indeed, for most Spanish exiles, Spain and restoring democracy remained a central part of their intellectual and cultural endeavors despite forging intimate professional and familial relations in Mexico. As a different kind of “nomadic subject,” Riesenfeld proved her capacity to navigate multiple national identities throughout her life. She became successful in the world of Mexican cinema as a woman

circles,” highlighting the importance of a welcoming Mexico to the Spanish left-leaning refugees. See Jose C. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 1.

⁵⁰⁰ Economic opportunity, as it had during the colonial and post-colonial waves of immigration, additionally attracted fleeing Spaniards to make the move to the Americas. For exiles, Mexico did not limit entrance based on immigration quotas as such in the United States, accepted the liberal group when fears of communism spread through the hemisphere, provided a smoother cultural transition, and facilitated job placement and economic aid. This is significant considering the turbulent revolutionary period in Mexico. See Jürgen Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles and the Mexican Revolution* (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 71. The arrival of left-leaning exiles increased anxieties among the masses, and, according to historian Patricia Fagen, numerous articles appeared in newspapers reassuring readers that the new Spaniards were not to disrupt Mexican political life. See also Isabel de Palencia, *Smouldering Freedom*.

⁵⁰¹ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 16.

from the U.S. who imported Spanish culture while at the same time disrupting cultural fixities and gender normativity. Therefore, a gendered analysis of Republican exiles' lives and work in Mexico enables a deeper understanding of their complex position in the Americas.

Women in exile engaged in a limited, yet influential, process of social critique through their cultural productions while contributing greatly to the diverse cultural landscape of Mexico.⁵⁰² Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz asserted in 1940 that Latin America, its people and culture was a product of “transculturation” and hybrid identities, recognizing the *mezcla* of European, indigenous, and African elements present since colonization and to combat the U.S.-produced term, “acculturation.”⁵⁰³ As many scholars recognize, Remedios Varo saw the apogee of her Surrealist painting career flourish in Mexico, finding the themes and support system in exile to be productive. Riesenfeld's life, acting, and hand in over eighty screenplays also attest to her ability to capitalize on, thrive in, and further produce anew this notion of cultural hybridity in Mexican cinematic life. The narratives, which will be further analyzed, showcase a complex understanding

⁵⁰² To gain knowledge of Mexico during the expedition across the Atlantic, Spanish Republicans circulated treatises on *Cardenismo*, and dedicated a section of the *Diario del Sinaia* to Cárdenas' educational reform and rhetoric on class-consciousness. No longer was the country seen as an ex-colony, but a “sister republic,” in which the exiles both needed and imagined themselves as cultural and intellectual contributors. Exiles identified with the ideals of the 1910 Mexican Revolution and saw their own experiences, struggles, and aspirations through Mexican politics and culture—largely an ideological vision of Mexico, rather than actual knowledge of their destination. See *Diario del Sinaia*, May 26-30, 1939, AGN, Mexico City, D.F., Mexico; See also Cate-Arries, “Conquering Myths,” 226.

⁵⁰³ Catherine Davies, “Fernando Ortiz's Transculturation: The Postcolonial Intellectual and the Politics of Cultural Representation,” In *Postcolonial Perspectives on Latin American and Lusophone Cultures*, edited by Fiddian Robin (Liverpool University Press, 2000), 141-168.

of Hispanic and Anglo-American cultural integration and parody at assumed authentic national identities.

Exploring the experiences of the US dancer allows to expand the exile literature to include Anglo-Jewish women's experience within the leftist camps surrounding the Spanish Civil War and with particular focus on Riesenfeld's continuation as a "nomadic subject" among Civil War exiles in Mexico. She entered screenwriting at the precise moment when a particular national cinema was being forged in Mexico. Therefore, while the exiles were not overtly engaged in Mexican politics, historians argue they made significant impacts on Mexican intellectual, artistic, and cultural life. Indeed, their creative works might be interpreted as social critique and shaping the cultural landscape in Mexico. Continually dodging fastened categories of identity, whether as Jewish, from the U.S., or other, the dancer dissolved herself within the exile community in Mexico. While hispanism has a universalizing tendency, especially in the ways Muriel Rukeyser related to Spain and the Spanish Civil War, Riesenfeld played with images of national character in her and her husband's screenplays for Mexican cinema, more critically acknowledging but complicating notions of Hispanic cultures and authenticity.

From Janet Riesenfeld to Raquel Alcoriza

The scarce biography written about the dancer comes mostly in the form of obituaries. In them, some described her initial dancing and acting roles in Mexico as "bailarina exótica y vampiresa," and it is likely she arrived to Mexico for the second and

permanent time around 1937 or early 1938.⁵⁰⁴ According to her memoir, *Dancer in Madrid*, when she evacuated Madrid at the end of 1936, she returned to the United States where she published her memoir in 1938. But according to a Cineteca Nacional biography of Riesenfeld, her first debut in Mexican film was in *Un luz en mi camino* (directed by José Bohr), in which she, known then as “Raquel Rojas,” danced and acted as a ballerina. Mexican producer Pedro Zapianín, first met the dancer at a cabaret called *El patio*, where she performed flamenco in traditional Andalusian style and was on a night circuit of entertainment in *El Grillón*, an entertainment district. He casted her as a dancer and launched her career on the movie screen. Alberto Gout (1907-1966), a famous Mexican screenwriter, producer, and director, singled out the American for the female lead in the film *Café Concordia* (1939).⁵⁰⁵ She would again play a flamenco dancer, but this time as a US movie star in the feature *Cuando viajan las estrellas* (1942).⁵⁰⁶

In *Cuando viajan las estrellas*, directed by Gout, Riesenfeld is acknowledged simply as “Raquel.” She made a critical contribution to the film in her recruitment of acclaimed Mexican choreographer Antonio Díaz Conde after they worked on *Café Concordia* together, as she played a US star and actress, Olivia Onil, who lands a new role as a flamenco dancer.⁵⁰⁷ In the film’s plot the character of a Spanish dance instructor in Mexico City is contracted to teach the celebrity, but due to his snobbish reservations he

⁵⁰⁴ Rocio Ramirez Hernandez, “Fallecio Janet Alcoriza,” *Novedades*, 26 November, 1998, p. 7. *Cineteca Nacional*, Mexico City, D.F., Mexico.

⁵⁰⁵ Eduardo de la Vega Alfaro, *Alberto Gout (1907-1966)*, Serie Monografía 3, (*Cineteca Nacional*, 1988), 16.

⁵⁰⁶ Alberto Gout, *Cuando viajan las estrellas*, *Films Mundiales*, Mexico, 1942.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

demonstrates a disbelief in the ability to “teach” the art and requires the starlet to come to Mexico for her lessons and to learn in the typical Seville style. While she shows off superb US dance technique, Olivia unimpressively attempts the basic flamenco *plantas* and *tacones*, and *golpes*, her arms only weakly raised above her in an ineffectual *quiebro* (posture); Riesenfeld, in her role as Olivia, portrayed an awkwardness and deficit of natural “passion” to properly perform flamenco. The Maestro’s solution is to have her attend a “typical Spanish” weekend festival, with bullfighting and a charming *torero*, and fiesta in a Spanish home. Meanwhile, Olivia meets a Mexican ranchero and although they annoy each other during their first encounter, a romance ensues, and she blows off the fiesta to accompany him to his hacienda. Olivia becomes enchanted with this “authentic” and macho side of Mexico. Olivia is finally able to nail the dance routine when the Maestro insists she use the dance to “tell” her ranchero her feelings for him. In the ranchero’s presence, Olivia performs a passionate and skilled flamenco dance. The US woman’s love for a Mexican ranchero fuels her ability to recreate a presumed natural and Spanish skill.

In these films, the “nomadic” Riesenfeld demonstrates adequate acting skills and a camera presence as a beautiful, elegant, but endearing foreigner. Her acting is subtle, yet awkward; however, that melts away during the dance scenes. In these fictitious roles and, apparently, in reality, the foreigner is able to bypass the requirement of having “sangre gitana” to pass for a flamenco performer through her ability to love, or to be passionate. In the role of dancer, she enlivens with character, strength, humor, passion and sexuality. Her years of practice and skill in the art of flamenco is apparent and surely overshadows her acting ability. The American’s ability to cross genres of dancing,

writing, and acting, as well as be hired to represent Spanish folk dance styles to Mexican audiences, exemplifies her nomadic subjectivity. She is the empathetic figure effectively attempts to cross borders and submerge herself in the culture of the “other.” Riesenfeld and Mexican film producers collaborated to further develop her multiple identities.

While her skill as an actress is overshadowed by her mastering of dance, Riesenfeld nevertheless had apparently turned down roles in the United States, presumably insisting on living her life outside the U.S. and preferably in Mexico.⁵⁰⁸ An article in New York’s *Morning Herald* in 1943 praises her as the “first North American actress to make a film career in Latin America.”⁵⁰⁹ Included with the article are photographs of Riesenfeld dancing in flamenco attire and a description of her as a “brilliant” flamenco dancer, a graceful actor, and fluent Spanish speaker.

Raquel makes her debut before her fellow New Yorkers in a picture which symbolizes the friendship between her native and her adopted countries, for the picture is the first Mexican, pro-Ally, anti-Fascist film production...the growing Mexican film industry considers Raquel one of its most valuable assets.⁵¹⁰

Such characterizations of the dancer-turned-actress attest to her transnational embodiment. She helped to fill a space for collaboration and transculturation during a period of increasing international politics and war. The *Morning Herald* reporter quoted the Mexican movie picture’s annual report (1942-1943), bolstering their own praise of the American woman:

⁵⁰⁸ De la Vega Alfaro, *Alberto Gout*, 16, 17.

⁵⁰⁹ Dorothy Adelson, “Yankee-Born Actress Mexican Screen Star: Manhattan Miss In Film Triumphs South of Border,” *Morning Herald*, New York, June 29, 1943, p. 7.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*

In delicate, fragile, beautiful Raquel Rojas, our film industry has acquired a complete revelation. Raquel embodies the ideal of our directors who needs a fine and highly sensitive interpreter. Raquel Rojas, a North American but with a strong feeling for the things of Spanish-speaking peoples, has traveled throughout the world, is a newspaperwoman, author and a marvelous dancer. In short: she is one of the first ladies of our motion pictures.⁵¹¹

Although she had been offered contracts in Mexico and the United States, Riesenfeld tired of acting, and maybe saw greater opportunity or passion for writing, turned her efforts in that direction in Mexico. While it seems she had the potential for a growing career in the U.S., the dancer-turned-actress and writer positioned herself as a “nomadic subject” once more with her move across Anglo-Hispanic borders, independently establishing herself in a new country. We may also view Riesenfeld as a unique participant in the cultural diplomacy of the Good Neighbor Policy between Mexico and their northern neighbor. The policy shaped changing and persisting narratives of Mexican national identity via cultural production, particularly with film. Seth Fein points to the iconic *charro* roles played by national hero Pedro Infante to demonstrate that during the World War II and postwar increased political and economic dependency on the U.S., revolutionary-era, masculinized *lo mexicano* became an important image in film as a means to critique the northern imperial giant.⁵¹² In this way, Fein argues nationalism and transnationalism mutually enact each other and were “inextricably linked within the dialectic of U.S.-Mexican relations since the beginning of

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² Seth Fein, “Myths of Cultural Imperialism and Nationalism in Golden Age Mexican Cinema” in *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*, Gilbert Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, Eric Zolov, editors (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

the 1940s.”⁵¹³ Riesenfeld sought opportunity in Mexican cinema, working in collaboration with her husband Luis Alcoriza and with national production companies and Mexican and Spanish directors to produce parodic but complex images of gender and both the Anglo and Hispanic foreigner in Mexico. Many stories center on independent women and challenge traditional gender roles yet conclude with the importance of family and mutually respectful relationships. Film was a popular genre that helped shape audiences’ interpretations of post-war international relations.⁵¹⁴ The American, in her acting of the Anglo foreigner or her help in writing screenplays about Spanish dancers and Mexican cultural stereotypes, contributed towards this transnational process of national constructions during the Cold War.

The trope of the foreign dancer and Mexican ranchero and Riesenfeld’s role in Gout’s film becomes more significant in Mexican film history considering the growth of the subgenre of Andalusian and Mexican musical folk fusions during the 1940s-60s. Emilio José Gallardo Saborido analyzes this phenomenon of co-productions and construction of *hispanismo* between Spain and Latin America through romantic love stories and folk music. These stemmed from images produced during the II Republic and beginning with films like *Jalisco canta en Sevilla* in 1948; however, we can see a lineage with Alberto Gout’s *Cuando viajan las estrellas*.⁵¹⁵ Of the estimated 25,000 to 40,000

⁵¹³ Ibid., 160.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ Emilio José Gallardo Saborido, *Gitana tenías que ser: las Andalucías imaginadas por las coproducciones fílmicas España-Latinoamérica*, Centro de Estudios Andaluces, Consejería de la Presidencia, Junta de Andalucía, 2010.

Spanish Civil War exiles in Mexico, more than half were intellectuals, teachers, or professionals.⁵¹⁶ This group of Spaniards worked industriously in Mexico within various intellectual and cultural fields, who themselves saw their renewed relationship with Spain's former colony in a romanticized way. The historiography of the Spanish Civil War exiles in Mexico recognizes the cultural and intellectual negotiations of *hispanismo* present in this new context. Therefore, it may also be important to consider these processes beyond scholarly contributions and within the Golden Age of Mexican cinema that the US dancer was a part of.

There are various layers of Hispanism at play when considering the foreign attention and involvement in the Spanish Civil War as well as the Civil War exile in Mexico. Edward Said's orientalism offers a departure for critiquing the "othering" of Spain within the European context. The theorist and philosopher argued that academics helped create the imperialistic divide between the West, or "us," and the inherently different East, or "them."⁵¹⁷ But while Sebastiaan Faber posits that British and US Hispanists during the Spanish Civil War held more positive views and affection towards Spain and the Spanish people than did the scholars of the Orient under Said's reflections, Spain was both considered the European "other" and Spaniards in exile carried similar hegemonic, Hispanist attitudes to Mexico.⁵¹⁸ After the war, Francie Cate-Arries theorizes

⁵¹⁶ Clara Lida, "Una inmigración privilegiada," (2003), 226.

⁵¹⁷ For a renewed discussion on Said's Orientalism, see Keya Ganguly, "Roundtable: Revisiting Edward Said's Orientalism," *History of the Present* 5, no. 1 (2015): 65-82.

⁵¹⁸ Sebastiaan Faber, *Anglo-American Hispanists and the Spanish Civil War: Hispanophilia, Commitment, and Discipline* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 24, 25.

that there existed a second, cultural “conquest” between the exiles and Mexican society, which was enabled by their shared history and language. Faber elaborates on the notion that the exiles viewed the II Republic as representation of true Spanish culture and how this attitude become apparent in later years through the prisms of the Popular Front party platform, Cold War politics, and Pan-Hispanism with the Americas.⁵¹⁹ Riesenfeld demonstrated this kind of hispanophilia from her break from ballet to learn flamenco, intensifying with her experience in Madrid during the Civil War. Her life in Mexico was a kind of voluntary exile, and while she contributed to the “othering” through her recreations of Spanish folk culture inside of Mexico, Riesenfeld also recreated herself many times over in her roles and career out of affection and the nomad’s empathy but further analysis of the films based on hers and Alcoriza’s screenplays demonstrate they did not seek to essentialize culture and she loses her own identity as she does not seek to become the “other.”

La hora de la verdad may have been Riesenfeld’s first screenplay that US filmmaker Norman Foster adapted to film. It tells the story of a Mexican bullfighter and his rise to fame and fall due to a traumatic love affair.⁵²⁰ After Foster adapted her story in 1944, Riesenfeld firmly moved into her career as a screenwriter. The work was praised as

⁵¹⁹ Sebastiaan Faber, *Exile and Hegemony: Spanish Intellectuals in Mexico* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002); Francie Cate-Arries, “Conquering Myths: The Construction of “Mexico” in the Spanish Republican Imaginary of Exile” *Hispanic Review*, Vol. 68, No. 3. Summer, 2000; Mario Ojeda Revah, *Mexico and the Spanish Civil War: Domestic Politics and the Republican Cause*, (London: Sussex Academic Press, 2015). This second large wave of scholarship on the Spanish Civil War exiles in Mexico combines the previous social histories like Lida’s and Fagen’s with more cultural approaches, paying attention to the hegemonic exchanges of writers and intellectuals.

⁵²⁰ The film is briefly mentioned in Fernández, Jorge. “Luis Alcoriza O La Mexicanización Del Exiliado Cinematográfico Republicano/Luis Alcoriza Or The Mexican Nationalization Of The Republican Cinematography Exile,” *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma* 28 (2016): 283–305.

“Un film de ambiente taurino que a partir de todas las convenciones y prototipos del caso conseguía una verdad inusitada, sin ningún prurito de desmitificación o transgresión del melodrama, sino asumiéndolo. Es posiblemente una de las mejores películas hechas sobre el mundo de los toros.”⁵²¹ Also in 1945 *Cinema Reporter* announced “Argumento de Raquel Rojas” and her “tres aspectos artísticos,” as now she moved into writing. The new film to follow *La hora de verdad* was titled *Las rosas del recuerdo*, with Alcoriza only mentioned secondary to Riesenfeld.⁵²² By 1947 *La hora de verdad* had a showing in New York with great public success; particularly, *Cinema Reporter* pointed out the success with female audiences of male lead Ricardo Montalbán.⁵²³

Indeed, Riesenfeld was integral to the launching of her husband’s filmmaking career. Their collaboration in screenwriting, and the clear personal imprints she made on Mexican cinema attests to women’s contributions to cultural value of the exile community in Mexico. Detailing Luis Alcoriza’s journey to the forefront of Mexican cinema illuminates the critical role played by Riesenfeld. Luis Alcoriza, born in Badajoz in 1921, arrived in Mexico in 1940 as part of the Spanish Civil War exile. Performing at theater Regis, he became involved with the Blanch sisters’ theater *Ideal*. Alcoriza came from a family of performers, but at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War they took their *Campania Alcoriza* to Tangier, Morocco. They briefly went back to Spain but after their

⁵²¹ Ibid., 11.

⁵²² “Argumento de Raquel Rosas,” *Cinema Reporter*, Issue 303 (346)1945, pg. 30-31. *Centro Documentación*, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), Mexico City, D.F., Mexico.

⁵²³ ““La hora de verdad” en Nueva York,” *Cinema Reporter*, Issue 472 (1947), p. 45. *Centro Documentación*, UNAM, Mexico.

zone fell to nationalists they left again for North Africa and secured passage to Americas in 1938. Traveling through Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, and Guatemala, they finally settled in Mexico in 1940. Alcoriza's biographer, Tomás Pérez Turrent, claims that the least radical family and company member was still at least militantly atheist but they had to perform all kinds of shows to survive and so performed religious productions and flamenco varieties.⁵²⁴

The significant and long lasting personal and professional relationship between Riesenfeld and Alcoriza started with their meeting in New York. According to Jeanne Rucar Buñuel, in her memoir *Memorias de una mujer sin piano*, the two fell in love once in Mexico as both were acting and Riesenfeld ("Jeannette" to the memoirist) had begun her career in screenwriting. The two married in 1945, the same year *La hora de la verdad* was finished, and it was Riesenfeld's collaboration with Norman Foster that resulted in the newlywed's eventual meeting of Luis Buñuel. Writing the screenplay together for *La gran calavera* (1949), directed by Luis Buñuel, seemed to cement the career of the "Alcorizas," as they were often called.

August M. Torres explores the legacy of Luis Buñuel's film presence in Mexico and the filmmakers who apprenticed with him. Luis Alcoriza was among the main artistic partners of Buñuel and in *Buñuel y sus discípulos* (2005) the chapter for the former provides a brief mention of the influence and contributions of Riesenfeld to her husband's work.⁵²⁵ In one of Riesenfeld's obituaries, the journalist writes that while millions

⁵²⁴ Tomás Pérez Turrent, *Luis Alcoriza*. Huelva, Spain: Semana de cine Iberoamericano, 1977, 9.

⁵²⁵ August M. Torres, *Buñuel y sus discípulos*, Madrid, España: Huerga & Fierro Editores, 2005.

watched and enjoyed her films, they did not know her name.⁵²⁶ In several publications on Luis Alcoriza, she is afforded recognition that the two worked as a pair in their screenwriting, yet, she occupies the position of assistant and afterthought. In fact, it was Riesenfeld that first introduced her husband to US director, Norman Foster. Tomás Pérez Turrent, filmmaker and film historian, provides the most thorough biography of Alcoriza with interviews by the Spanish screenwriter. Turrent carved some space for Riesenfeld; in writing his biography of Luis Alcoriza, he describes Riesenfeld as: “su bella presencia y su extraño acento (la mujer extranjera, la vampiresa, la actriz gringa que se enamoraba del macho mexicano, la torva espía nazi, la fogosa flamenco).”⁵²⁷ Turrent’s goal, however, is to note this important meeting in forging Alcoriza’s career and after that meeting Alcoriza started his screenwriting apprenticeship with Foster. Norman had been riding the variety theatre circuit in Mexico City and with Luis Alcoriza as his novice, Turrent argues this completed and enhanced Alcoriza’s journey into filmmaking, which was first marked by his meeting with Riesenfeld. *El ahijado de la muerte* (*Godson of Death*) (1946) was the first collaboration between Foster (as director, along with Jorge Negrete and Rita Conde) and both Janet and Luis. Turrent describes the two key developments, before meeting Luis Buñuel, in Alcoriza’s career as, “el de Janet Riesenfeld, actriz y bailarina de flamenco de origen austríaco que actuaba con el nombre

⁵²⁶ *El Sol de México*, November 19, 1998, “Janet, Siempre fue la compañera fiel de Luis,” Centro de Documentación, Cineteca Nacional, Mexico, D.F.

⁵²⁷ Tomás Pérez Turrent, *Luis Alcoriza*. Huelva, Spain: Semana de cine Iberoamericano, 1977, 9.

de Raquel Rojas y posteriormente el del guionista y realizador norteamericano Norman Foster.”⁵²⁸

In 1946, describing Riesenfeld as, “La inteligente actriz y ballarina, austríaca, nacionalizada española,” *Cinema Reporter* announced that she had been involved in a plane crash during a trip to Los Angeles to visit her mother, but escaped serious injury.⁵²⁹ The piece includes reference to her marriage to Alcoriza “por arte y amor,” and noting the outpouring of flowers, the good care by her husband, all while wishing her well. This is the only known assertion that Riesenfeld was nationalized as a Spaniard; while it could be an assumption made through her marriage to Alcoriza, or Riesenfeld’s own declaration, she is nonetheless situated publicly within the European, perhaps Spanish, exile community in Mexico. Muriel Rukeyser’s identity as Jewish, American, and a woman conspicuously infused her politics and creative works. In doing so it can be argued the poet-activist muted or attempted to unify the “other” with the “self” to the point of *sameness*. However, the dancer merely interpreted cultural symbols with a lack of self-definition or the nomad’s temptation to culturally conquer, even if affectionately.

It is important to consider Riesenfeld’s background as US-born and Jewish and the broader context of feminism in the Americas in the first half of the twentieth century. Part of her nomadism was the inconsistency in how she was portrayed and the silence around her own positioning of herself along these identities. Her ability to travel, move

⁵²⁸ Turrent, *Luis Alcoriza*, 11.

⁵²⁹ “Raquel Rojas,” *Cinema Reporter*, Issue 416 (1946), p. 14, 15. *Centro de Documentación*, UNAM, Mexico, D.F..

abroad, and her position in Latin American society would have offered a degree of privilege. Similarly, historian Stephen Park notes Virginia Wolf's "internationalism" "came from a position of privilege," while Chicana feminist author Ana Castillo's "countryless woman" was Woolf's "inversion."⁵³⁰ But the themes in Castillo's novels address the double oppression from patriarchy and anglocentric feminism that excluded critical elements of womanhood in Latin America, in which global factory and migratory work and labor and family obligations tie women of color's global experiences together and expose the oppressions embedded within the context of such "countryless women."⁵³¹ Park further argues Castillo's methodology of the use of novel for ethnographic writing challenges traditional history with her "mixed-genre writing" that challenges disciplinary boundaries and helps with the problems of exclusion encountered in the archive.⁵³² Such intellectual endeavors illuminate the requirement that "oppositional epistemes begin with the premise that challenging the dominant discourse and reimagining one's relationship to the nation are part of the same project."⁵³³ Despite coming from a Jewish background, in which her father may have experienced the anti-Semitism in Europe, the dancer's own ability to be silent on certain aspects of her identity

⁵³⁰ Stephen M. Park, "Pan Americanism Revisited: Hemispheric Feminism and Ana Castillo's *The Mixquiahuala Letters*," in *The Pan American Imagination: Contested Visions of the Hemisphere in Twentieth-Century Literature* (University of Virginia Press, 2014), 161.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, 172, 173.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 174.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, 161.

represents in Mexico US dominant culture and the privilege that accompanies white and Anglo European women rebuffing the nation and national identity.

Still, Riesenfeld carved a place of belonging in Mexico, even if a contentious or problematic one. According to Jeanne Rucar Buñuel, Janet's mother relocated permanently to live with the Alcorizas in Mexico following the death of Janet's father. Her somewhat mysterious identity was not only in the discrepancies around her birthplace as either in Austria or the U.S. and her uses of various names that shroud the dancer and screenwriter's life in mystery. Additionally, Jeanne Rucar Buñuel joked that Riesenfeld would never confess her true age, as she suspected the American was older than Luis Alcoriza and that this might have led to gossip within their circle.⁵³⁴ The Buñuels became great friends with the Alcorizas, whom Rucar observed always maintained a happy and strong relationship throughout the rest of their lives.⁵³⁵ After a brief retreat from film during some time in 1946, perhaps a break due to a plane accident in which there were no life-threatening injuries, Riesenfeld and Luis Alcoriza were reported to be returning to film that same year after receiving several propositions to write from Mexican producers.⁵³⁶ Together, Riesenfeld and Alcoriza produced much of Mexican film coming out between the years of 1946-60, when otherwise historians

⁵³⁴ In fact, the twice divorced Riesenfeld was four years Luis's senior.

⁵³⁵ Jeanne Rucar Buñuel, *Memorias de una mujer sin piano* (México, DF: Alianza Editorial Mexicana, 1990), 84, 132, 133.

⁵³⁶ "Raquel Rojas," *Cinema Reporter*, Issue 416 (1946), p. 14, 15, and "Regresaron Alcoriza y Raquel Rojas," *Cinema Reporter*, Issue 429, (1946) p. 7. Centro de Documentación, UNAM, Mexico, D.F.

assumed there was a lull in film.⁵³⁷ Between 1950 and 1951, their most prolific years, the Alcorizas created six to seven scripts a year.⁵³⁸

Not only was Riesenfeld's cinema career extraordinary for the Cold War era in Mexico, when we investigate the life of one of the most famous Surrealists and exiled Spaniards in Mexico, Luis Buñuel, we might see Riesenfeld and her relationship with Alcoriza as challenging dominant gender ideologies. The Buñuels hosted parties with the Alcorizas, they were introduced to the famous Surrealist through Norman Foster, and other artists and intellectuals in attendance. Jeanne Buñuel describes the way Luis Alcoriza tailed behind the Surrealist Buñuel, forging a kind of father-son relationship.⁵³⁹ For Jeanne Rucar Buñuel, Riesenfeld served as a kind of female role model, though one that was untraditional and not to be reproduced in front of Luis Buñuel. Riesenfeld not only introduced Luis Alcoriza to great literature by frequently gifting him books by renowned authors but also helped Rucar discover her love for book cover design when her children were older.⁵⁴⁰ The US dancer also had a bolder personality. Luis Buñuel did not like foul language in the house or around the kids, and apparently Riesenfeld had a foul mouth: "era mal hablada." When Jeanne Rucar Buñuel did let a vulgarity escape, her

⁵³⁷ Fernández, "Luis Alcoriza," 287.

⁵³⁸ Turrent, *Luis Alcoriza*, 12.

⁵³⁹ Rucar, *Mujer sin piano*, 145.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 132, 133, 218.

husband would say ‘you don’t use those words, Janet does but you don’t’: “no te queda bien, es vulgar.”⁵⁴¹

Indeed, Rucar demonstrates a counterpoint to the dancer and another trajectory for foreign women in Mexico with an exile community. Perhaps most telling of the differences between these wives of Spanish filmmakers is demonstrated through Riesenfeld’s gift of a piano to Rucar. Luis Buñuel’s housewife enjoyed having French friends over as they sang *La Marsellesa*, and every day she sat to play with music rising through the building lobby and filling the house.⁵⁴² However, when someone offered to trade the piano for bottles of champagne, Luis Buñuel accepted. In her memoir, Jeanne Rucar Buñuel admitted she first thought it was a joke, but the next morning someone came to move the large instrument. She was furious and felt it was hers and he had no right, but Rucar confessed she remained silent. Later, her husband was apparently remorseful and gifted her a sewing machine, while giving her money to buy fabric. Rucar provided this anecdote to highlight she sometimes felt it was a pity to not have “character.” Similar to the argument by Whitney Chadwick, there was a trend among the famous European Surrealists to silence women.⁵⁴³ Compounded by patriarchal gender ideologies, Jeanne was silenced by her husband who subscribed to traditional macho culture with the sewing machine reinforcing the domesticity of women in exile and in the Cold War period.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 208.

⁵⁴² Ibid., 163, 164.

⁵⁴³ Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames Hudson, 1991).

While the Alcorizas had a partnership that resulted in the collaboration on most of Luis Alcoriza's screenplays and the equal recognition of that collaboration in the film credits, for the Buñuels marriage and women's role was much different. Luis Buñuel never spoke politics to his wife, but Jeanne Rucar Buñuel said he seemed to be "antitodo": anti-everything; antifascist, anti-Nazi, anti-monarchy, anti-republican. Jeanne Rucar Buñuel said she never voted and was not even sure about her passport being French or Mexican for some time, but ultimately, like most other exiles, obtaining Mexican citizenship.⁵⁴⁴ In providing context and the foreword to Jeanne's memoir, Marisol Martín del Campo writes, "Jeanne fue su niña-mujer, la protegió y la amó."⁵⁴⁵ The Alcorizas never had children and the Buñuels had two kids from their 50 year marriage (1925-1983). Writing the introduction to the translated memoir, Marisol Martín Del Campo concludes, "Gracias a una mujer como Jeanne, Buñuel pudo ser BUÑUEL."⁵⁴⁶ Jeanne Rucar Buñuel would have likely been a painter, sculpture, or pianist if she had had the independence, but she loved him greatly and saw obedience as part of that love.⁵⁴⁷ Considering the Cold War gender ideologies and the culture of machismo of the Surrealists, the Buñuel's' relationship is not shocking. Contrasted with the Alcoriza's arguably egalitarian partnership, Riesenfeld surfaces as a unique woman and wife for her time but not without limitations. While Jeanne in her being silenced and

⁵⁴⁴ Rucar, *Mujer sin piano*, 136, 169, 170.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 14, 15.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Luis Buñuel highlight the extreme of the macho culture of male Surrealists and reversion to traditional gender roles in the Cold War exile, the Alcorizas show the more complex ways women could maneuver within more rigid professional and personal guidelines.

The correlations between these foreign women in Mexico was forged by the two Spanish husbands' tight working and social relationship, for Luis Buñuel and Luis Alcoriza collaborated on at least ten films together, including the acclaimed, *Los olvidados*.⁵⁴⁸ During the process of writing for the 1950 film (with Max Aub), Alcoriza documented life in the barrios on the margins of Mexico City; this documentary-styled film portrays a harsh and miserable life for the poor, urban youth. At the time it was not well received in Mexico, but nonetheless, propelled the two Spanish exiles to household names in Mexican cinema.⁵⁴⁹ Riesenfeld did not collaborate with her husband on most of Buñuel's most significant films. But Buñuel did adapt her and Alcoriza's story or screenplay, *El ahijado de la muerte* (1946) and *El gran calavera* (1949). Several authors, and notably Whitney Chadwick, have noted that within the Surrealist circle women took secondary positions, often as the muses, or found their power outside the inner circle. Key to the role of women in the movement was using the image of *woman* in the creative process, as a *femme-enfant*, child-like, uncorrupted by logic or reason, naïve, closer to intuition.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁸ Jorge Fernández, "Luis Alcoriza o La Mexicanización Del Exiliado Cinematográfico Republicano/Luis Alcoriza Or The Mexican Nationalization Of The Republican Cinematography Exile," *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma* 28 (2016): 283–305.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ See Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, (London: Thames Hudson, 1991) and Kaplan, *Unexpected Journeys*, 56. Varo herself confessed she took the position as listener in her

While Luis Buñuel limited his wife's activities outside of the home and family, Jeanne Rucar Buñuel would, however, go to the studio to watch the filming, but clarified that she would never open her mouth, highlighting the macho attitudes among the surrealists. It was Luis Alcoriza that suggested if Rucar like cinema she should act in one of his films, so she did, but her acting was minimal. Riesenfeld and Jeanne appeared as extras, as foreign tourists in a couple films, for example in Alcoriza's *Tlayucan* (1961). Rucar recalled being on set for *Los olvidados*, she and her children would walk the streets, and we might imagine that Riesenfeld frequented the set as well in support of her husband. In obituaries and interviews, while little professional attention is focused on Riesenfeld, she is described as kind and good-hearted towards the people around her and a pleasure to have been around during filming and otherwise.

Rucar provides some insight into the nature of Luis Buñuel's close male friendships or intellectual obsessions, including Lorca and Dalí. She said that while Buñuel was certainly not gay, his intimate intellectual conversations were with his male friends; they were his intellectual life. She describes, "fue su machismo: Luis fue un

twenties in Europe: To Kaplan, "Varo may have adopted this fabrication for survival among the Surrealists, who put a very high value on youthful beauty and innocence in women." Surrealism inherently questioned boundaries between fantasy and reality, and was an international movement of nonconformers. The movement's Spanish center was housed at the *Residencia de Estudiantes* in Madrid, but this was a male residence. The *Residencia* put international students together, and addressed (formed in 1910) the bringing of Spain out of the nineteenth-century stagnation, link with other modern movements, and intellectual growth. Motto: "to live without minds in Europe and our hearts in Spain." These minds included José Ortega y Gasset, H. G. Wells, Igor Stravinsky residents; and later brought together works of Buñuel, Lorca, Dalí. Alberti had said of the Surrealist Movement in Madrid, "The thing was in the air," as in 1928 Luis Buñuel and Dalí's collaboration, *Un Chien Andalou*. was screened. See Kaplan, 29-30. For Surrealism, see André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), Francisco Aranda, *El Surrealismo español*, (Barcelona: Editorial Lumen, 1981), Maurice Naeau, *The History of Surrealism* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000, 1989).

macho celoso. Su mujer debía ser una especie de niña-mujer sin madurar.” But she also asks “¿A quién no le gusta ser protegida por el hombre al que ama?”⁵⁵¹ Although we can see customs of machismo limiting Rucar’s experience and subjectivity to primarily her family, she knew how much Buñuel loved her and said she was certainly the woman of his life. By publishing her memoir after his death, Rucar illuminates the intimate world of one of the most famous Surrealists and Mexican filmmakers, in addition to providing rare and valuable insight into the kind of woman Riesenfeld was. Although Rucar Buñuel does not name the screenwriter among her best friends, she stayed in touch with Riesenfeld into both women’s old age, commenting that the now Cuernavaca resident lives with a bad back and poor health.⁵⁵²

The former dancer’s participation in Mexican film industry went well beyond wife, friend of famous exiles, and behind the scenes writing. In 1945 Mexican and expatriate cinematographers of El Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Producción Cinematográfica de la República Mexicana presented an ultimatum to the CTM (Confederación de Trabajadores de México).⁵⁵³ The cinematographers argued that the CTM violated a signed agreement concerning wages for theater workers; in an article of the various artists collectively represented, Riesenfeld is pictured sitting next to Luis Alcoriza and other film and theater artists. Further, sometime after its founding in 1978 to defend the rights of writers in literature, cinema, theater, radio, and television, her and

⁵⁵¹ Rucar, *Mujer sin piano*, 196.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 231, 235.

⁵⁵³ “Ultimatum de los cinematografistas a la Central Obrera C.T.M.” *Cinema Reporter*, Issue 356 (1945), pp.24, 25. *Centro de Documentación*, UNAM, Mexico, D.F.

Alcoriza were members of La Sociedad General de Escritores de México (SOGEM).⁵⁵⁴ According to Turrent's interviews with Alcoriza, censorship became an important issue to the renowned screenwriter and director: due to her membership and the endearing professional partnership between the Alcorizas, one can assume an issue Riesenfeld also supported.⁵⁵⁵ In addition to memberships and advocating against censorship and funding cuts, Luis Alcoriza won awards in cinema in his own right separate from Buñuel, including at the Berlin and at Cannes Festivals.⁵⁵⁶ Lastly, together with *Journal, Nuevo Cine*, Buñuel, and Carlos Fuentes, Alcoriza set up the first Mexican experimental film festival in 1965.⁵⁵⁷ However, it would still be several decades before Riesenfeld was formally recognized for her work and influence on Mexican cinema.

Beyond issues affecting cinema workers and while not a traditional political actor, and with some ambiguity to formally recognize her for her cultural contributions during her lifetime, Riesenfeld entered many realms of social consciousness. In 1948 the US screenwriter was named president of the Club Wallace in Mexico City to organize support among US expatriates for Progressive Party presidential candidate Henry A. Wallace; the club initially had the support of about fifty members.⁵⁵⁸ According to Karl

⁵⁵⁴ Murío Janet Alcoriza, En Cuernavaca, November 19, 1998, p. 7. La Sociedad General de Escritores de México, <http://www.elem.mx/institucion/datos/286>.

⁵⁵⁵ Turrent, *Luis Alcoriza*, 91-96.

⁵⁵⁶ Isabel Arredondo, "‘I Am a Mother First’: Mexican Women Filmmakers of the 1980s and 1990s and the Representation of Motherhood," (*ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2009), 131.

⁵⁵⁷ Strayer, "Ruins and Riots," 125.

⁵⁵⁸ Author unknown, "En México se formó un Club Wallace," D.F., México: *La Prensa*, March 7, 1948.

M. Schmidt, the campaign had the support of the far Left, as Wallace supported reconciliation and humanitarian aid to the Soviet Union and China, full employment and equal pay for equal work, and a reduced military industrial complex.⁵⁵⁹ As the dancer witnessed firsthand the effects of war on civilians in Madrid and her leadership of the Wallace Club in Mexico City attests to her support for progressive and far Left issues and policies. Support for the Popular Front in Spain was part of many volunteers and sympathizers' broader involvement in leftist politics, including Muriel Rukeyser. While for the poet Spain augmented an already burgeoning political identity, for the dancer, Spain represented a complete political birth. While her participation with Club Wallace echoes of this political consciousness, she is unlike the poet and activism in her overall survivalist tendencies to invert from within, demonstrating her nomadic empathy through losing or muting her identity in her creative works.

Riesenfeld in her various roles, as wife, professional screenwriter, and political subject clearly challenged traditional and dominant ideologies about gender roles in art and life. The experiences of women in exile Mexico in the 1950s and early 1960s is typically confined within the boundaries of their "feminine qualities" as there was a return to traditional gender roles rooted in postwar survival and familial responsibility.⁵⁶⁰ While foreign women had little direct engagement with Mexican political spheres, one

⁵⁵⁹ Karl M. Schmidt, *Henry A. Wallace: Quixotic Crusade 1948* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1960). See also The Wallace Centers of Iowa, <https://wallace.org/who-are-the-wallaces/henry-a-wallace/>.

⁵⁶⁰ Pilar Domínguez Prats, *Voces de exilio*, 100-111.

way to expand women's roles in exile, however, is to expose the creative challenges to social customs through art and cultural works.

(In)visibility in Mexican Film

Since Europe halted exports during World War II, including that of cultural production, the period favored the expansion of Mexican cinema and provided a space for exiles to participate in shaping a Golden Age of Mexican cinema. The 1920s and 1930s saw a decline in Spanish speaking Hollywood productions, and by the late 1930s efforts were underway to bolster the national industry in Mexico. The Spanish and other European exiles arrived in Mexico at a time when the industry was looking for collaborators.⁵⁶¹ Kirsten Strayer and Marcia Landy argue that the film industry in Mexico was different from other cultural institutions in that it is was much more open to foreigners. While Luis Buñuel and Luis Alcoriza obtained Mexican citizenship, in general, there was a sentiment that socially, the European expats did not fully assimilate during the first decade or two into Mexican circles.⁵⁶² However, when looking at the history of cinema, we see this band of foreigners working extensively with Mexican filmmakers. As born and raised in the U.S., Riesenfeld was a part of this group. Further,

⁵⁶¹ Colin Gunckel, "Fashionable Charros And Chinas Poblanas: Mexican Cinema And The Dilemma Of The Comedia Ranchera," in *Mexico on Main Street: Transnational Film Culture in Los Angeles before World War II* (Rutgers University Press, 2015), 122.

⁵⁶² See Fagen, *Exiles and Citizens* and Kaplan, *Unexpected Journeys*.

there was ongoing influence of their work with films like *Los olvidados* that greatly informed Mexican filmmakers two generations later.⁵⁶³

In this context, the film industry “continued to focus squarely on issues of cultural nationalism and representational authenticity in a way that resonated with yet departed from earlier criticisms leveled at Hollywood.”⁵⁶⁴ Debates included a nationalistic inclination while also existed an economic imperative for foreign markets; the integration of folklore with romantic and uplifting melodramas provided such outlets and became a popular genre by the 1940s.⁵⁶⁵ Such films blended the more classical *comedia ranchera* with ‘cosmopolitanism,’ they combined popular iconography of the urban cowboy in romantic melodramas with foreigners. Mexicans’ Spanish-speaking cousins could offer the image of the Andalusian bandit and flamenco performer, fitting well with such a project.⁵⁶⁶ Further, charro-gitana storylines popularly blended “melodramas rancheros, musicales populares y adaptaciones literarias o históricos” and dealt with Spanish cultural themes. While Luis Buñuel acted as an exception in his more serious social critiques,⁵⁶⁷ the Alcorizas’ independent works provide a complex look at the transnational collaborations that revived Mexican cinema when the classical genre was in crisis.⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶³ Strayer, “Ruins and Riots,” 71.

⁵⁶⁴ Gunckle, “Fashionable Charros,” 124.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Turrent, *Alcoriza*, 10, 11.

⁵⁶⁷ Fernández, “Luis Alcoriza,” 284.

⁵⁶⁸ See Colin Gunckel, “Now We Have Mexican Cinema?: Navigating Transnational Mexicanidad in a Moment of Crisis,” in *Mexico on Main Street: Transnational Film Culture in Los Angeles before World War II* (Rutgers University Press, 2015).

Riesenfeld's participation, as the perpetual foreigner, exhibits the Anglo fantasy as she is transformed into the flamenco femme-fatal. The repeated parodic approach, however, demonstrates the Alcorizas' critique of absolute "othering" and assumptions of authenticity.

The shift in Mexican cinema from the classical 1940s to the 1970s vanguard coincided with, and was also bolstered by, the expansion of Spanish Civil War exiles' careers and their integration into cultural and intellectual life of Mexico. Due to the stipulation Cárdenas put on exiles not entering into politics, most of these transnational producers integrated little direct commentary on Mexican political or social issues. While scholars reject the possibility of a completely unbiased work, in describing the contributions of Alcoriza, Fernández argues his foreignness allowed a degree of objectivity about Mexican society.⁵⁶⁹ While all identities and experiences contribute to one's own biases and subjectivities, it is surely Alcoriza's and Riesenfeld's unique perspectives that enriched their stories and screenplays. Even more so, Riesenfeld's status from the U.S. adds additional insight of the foreigner and feminist "nomadic subject."⁵⁷⁰

The Alcorizas provided the *argumento* or storyline for Julian Soler's 1951 *Una Gringuita en México*, which precisely parodies the foreigner, and their gaze, in Mexico. Barbara (Barbarita) lives in California and has always fantasized about visiting the southern neighbor. She holds a romantic and ethnocentric view of the people and culture,

⁵⁶⁹ Fernández, "Luis Alcoriza," 291.

⁵⁷⁰ I do not use the term "feminist" in any assumption that Riesenfeld was a feminist or identified with such a label, but I will have developed the nomadic subjectivity within a feminist lens in my introduction.

especially the idea that Mexican men walk the streets as *toreros*, *charros*, and *banditos*—an exoticization of Mexican hyper-masculinity. When she finally visits, hoping to find love with a *caballero*, she is disappointed by the modern and likeness to the United States or any city for that matter. The film includes scenes where she is mocked for attending a bullfight in the Spanish mantilla, expecting to find everyone else in similar costumes. And despite her insistence on attending such an event, she faints at first sight of the first violent blow against *el toro*. By the end of the film her love interest can no longer tolerate her stereotyping and a big fight ensues. In yet another disappointment at the “typical Mexican fiesta” the *gringuita* realizes how naive and foolish she has been.⁵⁷¹

Riesenfeld’s writing, herself as a foreigner among Spanish-speaking people, on this screenplay provides an edgy parody in her humorous ability to poke fun at the *gringa* in Mexico while critiquing the “othering” of Latin Americans by the northern imperialists. For Homi Bhabha, “‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.”⁵⁷² In the argument that there exists no “fixed tablet of tradition,” the representation of cultural difference, and sameness, becomes a continual process of formation; a process in Mexican cinema that Riesenfeld and her husband engaged with in their parody of cultural archetypes.

⁵⁷¹ Julian Soler, director, *Una gringuita en México*, 1951.

⁵⁷² Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 1, 2.

As screenwriters, Riesenfeld and Alcoriza continued with popular Mexican film genres, yet added their unique twists, humor, and parody. *Gitana tenías que ser* (1953), written by the Alcorizas, directed by Rafael Baledón, and starring Carmen Sevilla and Pedro Infante, two of the most quintessential film and music icons of Spanish and Mexican folk traditions at mid-century, draws on this popular sub-genre while ironically exposing its holes. *Gitana tenías que ser* (“You had to be a gypsy”) opens with Carmen Sevilla playing the part of Pastora de los Reyes, dancing flamenco in Spain, signing “España mía.” She is drenched in the traditional trappings of Sevillano flamenco: the bata de cola, the tall peineta, a large cross on her neck, with vibrant colors of red and sounds of the Andalusian guitar whirling. The film then cuts to the Mexican producers who are in fact watching Pastora on film. This technique of repeating cutting to see the ‘behind the scenes’ production of popular folk images and songs plays to the parody employed by Janet and Luis. In a similar exposure to the limits of these folk images, Infante is first shown as the Mexican charro, singing Mariachi and dressed in the performance cowboy garb. Infante’s character, Pablo, ditches the charro look in ‘real life,” instead we mostly see him in an urban, modern suit.⁵⁷³ Film scholar Gallardo Saborido additionally focuses his analysis of the overall plot that involves film producers’ artificial romantic pairing of these two beloved celebrities as a publicity stunt. While the two genuinely fall in love by the end of the film, it is apparent the filmmakers’ intention of demythification and mocking popular stereotypes that aim to establish a hegemonic order of homogeneity; the film scholar further posits that this challenge and parodic sense was embedded in Janet

⁵⁷³ Rafael Baledón, director, *Gitana tenías que ser*, 1953.

and Luis' script.⁵⁷⁴ The study of the films problematizes a singular narrative of pro-Franco and official usages of the Andalusian cultural identity and the gitano(a)/flamenco and other traits engulfed in the national narrative.⁵⁷⁵ The Alcoriza's screenplays ring of the nomadic subject's inclination towards transient identities, whether challenging cultural caricatures or in traditional gender norms.

The repetitive play with gender roles is apparent in several of the screenplays by the Alcorizas. In 1949 the Alcorizas wrote *La liga de las muchachas*, a provocative comedy about a group of women who become fed up with demanding and controlling boyfriends and husbands and are lured to live together in a society free of men.⁵⁷⁶ Their mascot is an Atalanta-like Greek goddess and their "league of liberty" song asserts their "libertad." The men discover their partners' compound and devise a plan to infiltrate in disguise. Luis Alcoriza acts the part of one partner that is particularly macho and continues a behavior of violence to get his way. In the end the house mother, Remedias, has profited from these young women and the love-starved women greet their men with open-arms. It is not without some negotiation, however. The men have learned their lesson and all agree to be more mutually loving partners. The partner of Alcoriza's character is the one woman who rejects his brand of masculinity and instead opts for the

⁵⁷⁴ Emilio José Gallardo Saborido, *Gitana tenías que ser: las Andalucías imaginadas por las coproducciones fílmicas España-Latinoamérica*, Centro de Estudios Andaluces (Consejería de la Presidencia, Junta de Andalucía, 2010), 52, 72.

⁵⁷⁵ See Jo Labanyi, "Negotiating modernity through the past: Spanish costume film of the early Franco period," in *Recalcitrant Modernities: Spain, Difference, and the Construction of European Modernism*, *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* (13.2-3. 2007), Labanyi writes on the stereotypes produced in film and cultural works in Spain under Franco.

⁵⁷⁶ Fernando Cortés, director, *La liga de las muchachas*, 1949.

role of adoptive single mother, as the home had another unexpected guest: an abandoned toddler who she gushes over. The film boasts reviews such as, “una de las películas más caras de su época,” and “sigue la escuela del humor español.”⁵⁷⁷ In the end, even the independent goddess, thought to be a statue but enlivened by the events, leaves the mansion compound saying that living with women alone is no way to live.

The same year debuted the screenplay for *Un cuerpo de mujer* directed by Tito Davison.⁵⁷⁸ The story revolves around an art student’s attempts to solve a mystery about a painting he finds that is of a woman’s nude backside, who gazes into a mirror. The viewer’s only chance to glimpse her face is through the mirror she stares at; however, someone has torn that part of the painting and so she is faceless. We learn that the student’s art teacher, Raúl had a girlfriend from a small working-class town on the coast, Rosa. She has learned to use her beauty and sexuality to win men’s favor for her economic advantage. But, the two fall in love and run off, escaping the wrath of men who feel she “owes” them sex, to Mexico City. The lovers can never overcome their class difference and Rosa is entrenched in her independent and hustling way of life to become a typical housewife. In one comic scene she is babysitting a toddler and in order to go about her daily shopping, has tied the child to his seat to ensure his “safety” in her absence. Although Raúl vows to love and marry her, her inability to conform to a typical relationship propels him, in his heartbreak, to tear the work he painted of her nude body,

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁸ Tito Davison, director, *Un Cuerpo de Mujer*, 1949.

“eres solo un cuerpo de mujer,” denying her of a face and soul. The nomadic subject’s liberated sexuality comes into focus with Rosa’s character.

This was an edgy film for the period. A woman void of a soul presents a complex female role that cannot be tied down to a man. Despite after the guilt of seeing the distress in the men who fell for her, she finds stability, love, and peace through her role as a single mother: at the very end of the film we discover that unknowingly to the curious art student, the Rosa in the story is his own mother. This script ultimately thwarts gender prescriptions in Rosa’s independence from her potential male partners but while honoring motherhood in an untraditional way. Riesenfeld is specifically credited as a writer of this film, demonstrating a good degree of involvement with shaping this gender-bending story. Riesenfeld’s childless marriage to the younger Alcoriza, her second matrimonial union, is itself a demonstration of the nomad’s thwarting of Cold War sexual mores.

Another screenplay that both challenges hegemonic gender relations while strategically reproducing others, was for the film *La isla de la mujeres* (1953).⁵⁷⁹ The film stars the beloved entertainer Tin-Tán (Germán Valdés), who goes from shoeshine boy to worshipped god of a primitive island where the women dominate their husbands. The husbands are the oppressed ones in this matriarchal dystopia, auctioned off to women and forced to care for the children as well as attend solely to the domestic duties and cater to their abusive wives’ every need. Through his wit, Tin-Tán’s character becomes a leader and stirs rebellion among the men, teaching them how to be “machos.” In comic relief, the scene illuminates the struggle to define what is “macho,” but ultimately, it is

⁵⁷⁹ Rafael Baledón, director, *La isla de la mujeres*, 1953.

not taking care of children or doing laundry, and tequila helps the men go from passive weak subjects to strong and assertive men. The last scene shows an invasion by enemy warriors and Tin-Tán's encouragement among his new subjects not to fight. The film concludes with a restoration of harmony and balance, as the enemy warriors and the island's women fall in love; what the matriarchs needed were real men to equalize the relationships, make them conform to more feminine roles through genuine romance. It is not clear if the audience is expected to fully recognize this irony. However, one cannot miss the parody of inverted gender roles and exploration into competing forms of masculinity.

Not only did Riesenfeld and Alcoriza write scripts for films that explore constructions of femininity, but they also portray characters struggling with ideals of masculinity. Pedro Infante, a year before his untimely death, plays Cruci in *El inocente* (1955), a mechanic who is sent to the aid of Mane (played by Silvia Pinal). She had just run out on her boyfriend and his family on New Year's Eve due to his incessant need to be coddled by his mother.⁵⁸⁰ Due to her inability to be left alone once he escorts her to her family's vacant home, the two strangers spend the night together. They celebrated New Year's Eve with bottles of champagne and get so inebriated that they hardly remembered the night before, as Mane's parents find her in bed with Cruci after they had drunkenly passed out. Because Mane cannot remember the night before, of the truly *innocent* laughing, singing, and dancing, they all assume she has shamefully slept with Cruci and in order to avoid a scandal, bribe Cruci to marry her, only to ensure the two

⁵⁸⁰ Rogelio A. Gonzalez, director, *El inocente*, 1955.

will divorce months later. While Mane and Cruci pretend to be happy newlyweds for outsiders, they in fact start to develop secret feelings for each other, yet Mane is more resistant to acknowledge this and displays an outward hate for Cruci.

In one telling scene of *El inocente*, Cruci finally has enough of Mane's rich family demanding him around and going along with their farce. He will only grant them their wish for a divorce if she comes to his tiny apartment for one night to fulfill her marital duty. When she arrives the typically outspoken and confident Mane cowers at the thought of having to submit to Cruci. He shows her where the cleaning and cooking tools are, of course having to direct her on what these things are and how to use them, and when it's time for bed she grudgingly offers herself to him. But all Cruci wants is to give her a kiss on the forehead and tells her she is free. Surprised, Mane leaves and this gentle act allows her to realize her love for her "husband." In the final scene she reenacts their first meeting, forcing her car to breakdown on the highway in order to meet Cruci there. When she confesses her love to his partner, while Cruci is hiding in the mechanic truck, Cruci makes himself known. But in order to forgive her he must hear her confess that she would love to be a "mechanic's wife."

El Gángster (1965) directed by Alcoriza and co-written with Riesenfeld, was called a "farce without significance" by one reviewer.⁵⁸¹ This critique, while recognizing the film's humor, comes after Alcoriza worked on such significant social commentaries with Buñuel, such as *El gran calavera* (1949), *Los olvidados* (1950), *Él* (1953), *El ángel exterminador* (1962), and his own two of a three part series, *Tlayucan* (1961) and

⁵⁸¹ Augusto M. Torres, *Buñuel y sus discípulos* (Interviews), (Madrid: Herga y Fierro, 2005), 36.

Tiburones (1962), considered “campesino satire” and “indigenous drama.”⁵⁸² The reviewer, included in Torres’ film biography, accuses *El Gángster* of having no moral judgement, social critique, but exists only for its burlesque humor. The film is full of satire, poking fun on a U.S. influenced thug and his cronies who decide to go “legitimate” when his brother’s widowed wife and children are left fatherless. The reformed gangster attempts to be an upright father figure but receives backlash from a defiant family. In the end he must resort to his extralegal ways to save the family and in doing so, finally receives the respect from his niece and nephew and earns the love of his sister-in-law. He finds himself capable of being “the good father” and partner his brother was through being his own brand of patriarch. Here we see a form of defiance of prescribed gender ideology through self-defined masculinity.

While certainly not the documentary style or deep social critique of Alcoriza’s past films, the collaboration on *El Gángster* is witty and an entertaining film. However, it is Alcoriza who occupies the center of critique or praise in any review included in the historiography or in Alcoriza’s own interviews. Torres describes the male filmmaker as an integral part of Mexican national cinema:

Alcoriza es el último director valioso del antiguo cine mexicano, característica que lo distingue radicalmente de los nuevos valores surgidos del reciente certamen de cine experimental. Alcoriza ha ingresado al cine nacional desde adentro, tratando de emerger a la superficie levantando la pesada capa de errores y deformaciones que la cubre. Así, sus obras poseen unos límites, una coordenadas...⁵⁸³

⁵⁸² Kirsten Strayer and Marcia Landy, “Ruins and Riots: Transnational Currents in Mexican Cinema,” (*ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2009).

⁵⁸³ Augusto M. Torres, *Buñuel y sus discípulos* (Interviews), (Madrid: Herga y Fierro, 2005), 36.

As a transnational figure in Mexican cinema, Luis Alcoriza's later work is seen as more explicit "critique of the entrenched national iconography of the Golden Age," while critically disrupting notions of stable narrative of national identity through gender.⁵⁸⁴ In particular, it was, *Mecánica nacional* (1972) that broke with tenuous celebration of authentic national images and added further prominence to Alcoriza's career.⁵⁸⁵ His films were hailed as "the most acute criticism of national cinema and those that most actively thwart that cinema's notion of progress and decline."⁵⁸⁶ Between 1948 when the Alcoriza's had their first script adapted to film and 1960 with Luis realizing his own film, 56 scripts contained his name, and most of those were collaborations with Janet. "La mayoría de las veces el trabajo es en colaboración con Janet Alcoriza y va desde el simple argumento de unas cuantas páginas hasta el guión completo."⁵⁸⁷ The scripts varied from a simple storyline of a few pages to an entire script with Janet's input, even when her name did not appear in the credits. Despite her omnipresence, history has predominantly singled out and recalled Luis alone.

Riesenfeld herself repeated assumptions about male productivity. When pushed about her partnership with Luis and her own contributions, she modestly replied, "que las

⁵⁸⁴ Strayer, "Ruins and Riots," 122.

⁵⁸⁵ The film centers around a mechanic and his taking his family to a car race with a series of dramatic events unfolding. Ortiz and Gabriel argue Alcoriza mis-casted the film on purpose to reconfigure societal stereotypes, as a critique of the values of the urban lower middle classes; casting characters antithetical to the popular image, despite the period of the 1960s-70s as the rise of the "New Mexican Cinema" under the presidency of Luis Echevarría (1970-76) and government funding to industry and nationalization of some companies. See Christopher Ortiz, and Gabriel, Teshome, "The Representation of Sexuality in Contemporary Mexican Cinema: 1970-1990" (*ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 1995), 4, 5, 137.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁵⁸⁷ Turrent, *Luis Alcoriza*, 12.

ideas originales de los argumentos no son mías.” In an interview she asserted that her husband planned the scripts but Riesenfeld herself did put in a considerable amount of work. “Yo me limito a ‘criticar’ lo que hace Luis. Soy más que colaboradora, crítica de él.”⁵⁸⁸ We certainly see a mutually generative process between the husband and wife despite the official and hegemonic narrative that augments his fame and the minimized reflection of herself.

Studying the women of the European Left in Mexico exposes an interesting dynamic of gender and cultural productions, making it vital to historicize their work and experience. While Mexican feminism would not radicalize until later in the twentieth century, Spanish women had won the right to vote, along with other progressive reforms of the 1931 Constitution. The 1917 Constitution was one of the most progressive of its time, however, it and the Mexican revolutionary leaders failed to grant women equal participation in Mexican politics.⁵⁸⁹ Regardless of the official exclusion of female citizenship rights, the Mexican Revolution was the pinnacle of social justice for the lower and working classes and for Spanish Republicans, who felt Mexico embodied the same ideals as the Republic II.⁵⁹⁰ While in official accounts the women of the exilic intellectual

⁵⁸⁸ Author unknown, UNAM, Mexico, D.F. Escritores.cinemexicano.unam.mx/biografias/A/Alcoriza_janet/biografia.html. The website cites *Novelas de la pantalla*, Año V. No. 249 (5 de enero de 1946), p. 6.

⁵⁸⁹ Although Cárdenas pushed many social reforms and was successful in placing the vote for women’s suffrage in front of the national congress, factors prohibited the realization of this right and gender equality was still an ongoing struggle at the end of the “progressive” 1930s.

⁵⁹⁰ In the exiles’ eyes, Spain and Mexico had shared a similar revolutionary commitment. A key difference that existed between the republics was their stance regarding female political participation. The revolution did not create a lasting space for women to engage in the public sphere. However politically liberal the revolutionary Mexican government had been in the 1930s, Cárdenas put on hold his socially progressive policies towards women’s issues at the end of his administration. For discussions of the limits of the Mexican revolutionary project, see Jürgen Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles and the Mexican Revolution* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010); Ben Fallaw, *Cárdenas Compromised: The Failure of Reform*

and cultural movement were treated minimally and always first as positions of wife, Alice Gambrell applies transatlantic intellectual and artistic connections to pre-World War II Mexico. She cites Aldous Huxley's take on women intellectuals in the modern, cultural discourses, in that they were, "fantasized as conduits of inaccessible experience, they served, in fact, as conduits between male-governed cultural formations."⁵⁹¹

The twentieth century saw widespread turmoil and disruption and it is within this context that we must widen the scope of acts deemed "political."⁵⁹² Not overtly "political," within the realm of formal politics, many of the works and life of exiles demonstrate a critical judgement of a variety of structures and modes of thought. The importance of the nomadic conceptual tool is that it expands the historical subject's perspective beyond the masculine gaze and patriarchal logic; such as examples of Riesenfeld's films that subvert gender norms or phallogocentric models. Women's cultural productions, like art, have a particular capability to counter the privilege traditionally

in Postrevolutionary Yucatán (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 1; For a nuanced view of women's revolutionary roles, see Jocelyn Olcott, Mary K. Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano, *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico* (Duke Backfile. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). This pattern of avoiding female suffrage persisted well through the 1940s under Avila Camacho. While Camacho's stance on the exiles' situation was very similar to that of Cárdenas, his 1940 inauguration speech is telling of the change in social policy he would advocate. He began, "Soy creyente," or "I am a believer," Camacho's own conservative ideologies may have contributed to the delay in action for greater women's political rights. In this statement, Camacho meant to appeal to the religious majority of the population. According to the editors of an anthology of Mexican culture during Mexico's "Golden Age," Camacho was affirming his Catholicism. There was a swing away from the more radical tenets of the Revolution under Cárdenas, influence of the Right into national politics. See Verna Millan, *Mexico Reborn*, 258, 265. Social pressures present in Mexico might have ultimately obstructed passage of women's right to vote.

⁵⁹¹ Alice Gambrell, *Women Intellectuals, Modernism, and Difference: Transatlantic Culture, 1919-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 78-83.

⁵⁹² Helena Lewis' "political surrealism" argues that art and politics became inseparable in the early twentieth century, specifically a shift under Andre Breton's Surrealist leadership and revolutionary conviction. Helena Lewis, *The Politics of Surrealism* (Paragon House, 1988).

afforded to the rational, created by binary systems of thought, and what is traditionally contained within the archive.⁵⁹³ While the women of *La liga de mujeres* do not completely break with Cold War ideals of domesticity, the story is not a simple one; it is the experiment with complete independence and subsequent demand for mutually respectful love that triumphs, which then results in the possibility of egalitarian relationships.

Riesenfeld embodies the nomadic subject in her work and in her crossing of genres, borders, and national identities over her lifetime. It is apparent from an integration of biography and film analysis that she inserted life experiences into her writing. In addition, her subjectivity forged how she was placed in roles early on. Further, Riesenfeld was skilled in integrating themes most important to Mexican audiences and wrote screenplays like *El inocente* and *La vida no vale nada* that starred such Mexican cultural icons as Pedro Infante. To be sure, there is apparent difficulty in finding Riesenfeld's voice beyond her scripts, yet one must consider the macho culture and the Cold War attitudes framing the years of exile in Mexico. Riesenfeld comes out, then, as anything but traditional. Rather than insignificant helper, however, we can imagine their collaboration as mutually generative and in consideration of her life experience it is all too tempting to imagine the creative role she had in these scripts. Finally, just before her death in 1998, Riesenfeld was to be honored with an "Ariel" award for her contributions to Mexican cinema; she did not live to receive the award but obituaries posit that the

⁵⁹³ In France in 1941, art considered "revolutionary propaganda" was seized, and Varo with her surreal friends produced a piece entitled "The Last Romantic has been Buggered by Marshall Pétain." While created in play, the tone and the work's treatment by officials was more serious and it is not insignificant that the piece entered in Varo's collection. See Kaplan, *Unexpected Journeys*.

Ariel was posthumously dedicated to the prolific screenwriter.⁵⁹⁴ Such limits of Riesenfeld's film career coincide with the limits of other Spanish women in exile in Mexico, the confined space that women occupy and the total freedom from patriarchal and class hierarchies that is inaccessible by dominated groups.

Most exiles of the Spanish Civil War would live out their lives in Mexico, cemeteries in Latin America and Europe scattered with the gravestones of Spaniards who never returned home. Riesenfeld passed away in Cuernavaca in 1998 after battling cancer for several years. She and Luis Alcoriza left no children or heirs, casting their final resting place and fate of their estate in mystery. More research is needed to discover the whereabouts of their belongings following Riesenfeld's death, yet one obituary speculated that Riesenfeld wished for her and Luis' cremations (which would require SOGEM to release his back to her custody) to be sprinkled around their favorite plant. Even at the end of her remarkable life and full and successful career in cinema, the US dancer from the U.S. with dance career beginnings in Madrid against the backdrop of war rejected any grand recognition with a marked gravesite for Luis and her, instead modestly opting for quiet, solitude, and anonymity.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹⁴ Rocio Ramírez Hernandez, "Murió Janet Alcoriza," *Novedades* (November 26, 1998) p. 7, *Expedientes Personalidades* E-05821, Centro de Documentación, Cineteca Nacional, Mexico City, D.F.

⁵⁹⁵ Unknown Author, "Janet, siempre fue la compañera fiel de Luis," *El Sol de México* (November, 19, 1998), E-05821, *Expedientes Personalidades*, Centro de Documentación, Cineteca Nacional, México, D.F.

Conclusion

Spanish exiles of different classes addressed the Mexican government, and Cárdenas in particular, expressing gratitude and admiration toward their host for its enduring and unwavering support of the Republican effort during and after the Civil War.⁵⁹⁶ In addition to emphasizing shared political and social values, Spaniards appealed to the common culture and history that they shared with Mexico, helping to construct continued notions of *hispanismo*.⁵⁹⁷ In 1945, the *Association of Professional Militia Loyal to the Spanish Republic* commemorated the II Republic and Mexico's continued support under President Camacho at the Palacio de Bellas Artes. In their program, the association identified that Spain and Mexico fought against the same historical enemy—the oppressive, old regime powers in Mexico were the same forces the Spanish Republic opposed.⁵⁹⁸ The same year as Nelken's position of equality and human rights at the International Women's Day conference in Mexico, an assembly of Spanish women commenced in the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City and expressed, in different terms, the same gratitude. They thanked their host country for the "intelligent and authentically liberal and humane policy, followed by you. Here in Mexico, we have been able to reconstruct our homes, here our children have been born, here we have encountered a second lovingly Patria."⁵⁹⁹ The ability to provide safe homes for their

⁵⁹⁶ Cárdenas, 546.6/212, AGN, Mexico, D.F. A letter written to Cárdenas in 1939, for example, gives thanks to his administration for Mexico's refusal to recognize Franco as the legitimate ruler of Spain.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid, 546.6/212. Fagen, *Exiles and Citizens*, 148-150.

⁵⁹⁸ Camacho, 135.21/48, AGN.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

family was central to the exiles' appreciation in refuge. The event both reinforces traditional gender roles and shows active participation in the public sphere by exiled women. This female voice does not echo the activities or writings by the various feminist groups demanding equal political rights, land access, racial equality, etc.; however, it evidences women's active role in shaping the exiles' discourse regarding their experience in Mexico City.

Similar to Riesenfeld, women and men from the Spanish Civil War forged new lives in Mexico. While through Jeanne Rucar Buñuel we can see example of the macho culture stifling women's sense of autonomy or professional ambitions in Mexico, Isabel de Palencia and Margarita Nelken continued active writing and political lives.

Additionally, Spain and Europe were torn apart and mending their wounds of war, and Mexico afforded artists like Remedios Varo the ability to dedicate her efforts to painting and her art was exhibited many times.⁶⁰⁰ Varo's sentiment towards finding a permanent home and stability in Mexico and De Palencia's relief and excitement to be in Mexico, while asserting the expectation that their work in exile should defend the interests of Mexico, is repeated by other Spanish refugees.⁶⁰¹ Prior to Varo's death, not yet fifty-five

⁶⁰⁰ Kaplan, *Unexpected Journeys*, 129, 130; While Kaplan asserts that her spouse, Walter Gruen, freed her economically, it was Leorna Carrington who freed Varo emotionally; being on the same spiritual quest, they built a verbal and visual language together.

⁶⁰¹ On a practical level, the Spanish Republicans also petitioned the administration with requests for financial aid, granting of citizenship for family members remaining in Europe, employment, and to politically recognize Spanish groups in Mexico still fighting against fascism in Spain. Spanish writers in *Boletín*, a monthly journal in Mexico that published for and about the arrival of Spanish exiles, described what the Republic had stood for, which mirrors many of the principles advocated by the Mexican revolutionary government. They list that democracy in Spain emancipated the intellectual and working classes, as well as ending absurd privileges. In Mexico, the Spanish exiles felt they could continue this progressive ideal and were very much excited about it. *Boletín*, No. 3 (8/31/39), Cárdenas, 546.6/212, AGN, Mexico City, D.F.

years old, the famous Mexican poet Octavio Paz hailed Varo's work and friend and fellow exile, Margarita Nelken, called Varo "one of the greatest artists of modern Mexico and -without exaggeration - of contemporary painting."⁶⁰² As an adopted Spanish Civil War exile, Riesenfeld recreated the experience of displacement through her own perpetual identification with the "other" and embodiment of the empathetic nomad. This US-born woman, another successful woman in exile in Mexico, effectively incorporated the hybridity of Anglo-Hispanic cultures into her stories in her, and Alcoriza's, production of new mixtures and complex, hybrid identities in popular Mexican film.

Riesenfeld most accurately highlights the nomadic and unarchived subject. Her story is not documented in official repositories; instead, it is largely discovered, as many other women's, in her own creative works. Following Riesenfeld's physical and metaphorical movements across national borders and genres of memoir, dance, and film produce an interdisciplinary and trans-Atlantic history of the Spanish Civil War and exile located outside of official archives.

Not least of all, breaking old styles and reflecting changing attitudes, Janet Riesenfeld joined the ranks of newly liberated women of the 1930s Left. Not only did she set off to foreign countries, during times of political turmoil, but the "nomadic subject" carved her own identity, a career in dance and film, as a writer, and socially untraditional

⁶⁰² Margarita Nelken, in Kaplan, *Unexpected Journeys*, 227. Margarita Nelken, "Se fue Remedios Varo..." *Excelsior* (Mexico City), October 10, 1963, p. 1. Numerous critics praised Varo's work in Mexico; See also Octavio Paz, Roger Caillois, and Juliana González, *Remedios Varo* (Mexico City: Ediciones ERA), 1966.

in her separation from her first husband to seek love and passion in Spain, found trauma and a cause, and then following her career and heart to Mexico. She broke through the Mexican film industry as a foreigner and as a woman. The extent to which her career might have advanced without marrying Luis Alcoriza must remain speculation, but the US actress was pivotal in forging the career of the Alcorizas and made significant contributions to the development of their films. When we contrast Riesenfeld's life against her tradition-abiding friend Jeanne Rucar Buñuel, also married to a prominent Spanish Surrealist in Mexico, we see the space Riesenfeld created in her more egalitarian relationship with Alcoriza. More than her challenges to typical Cold War gender ideologies, Janet "Raquel Rojas" Riesenfeld Alcoriza's nomadic embodiment manifested itself in multiple and dynamic identities that cemented her success in various worlds, most notably Mexican national cinema.

CONCLUSION

Nomadism, Empathy, and Activism in Historical Writing

While Janet Riesenfeld danced flamenco to support the II Republic, becoming the “survivalist” in Mexico, Muriel Rukeyser connected the defense of democracy in Spain to combating oppression from within the United States, and transnationally, throughout her life. In the “activist’s” autobiographical novel, *Savage Coast*, “Helen’s” last day in Barcelona is spent surrounded by the passionate, international unity showed by the athletes who traveled to the People’s Olympiad and the volunteers who flocked to Catalonia to fight fascism at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936. Much like the poet’s own memory of her days in Spain, she captured the appreciation of locals for the transnational support of the Spanish “people’s cause,” enthusiastically welcoming of the foreign aid and calling visitors into action. Indeed, unity with the scheduled antifascist protest games in the summer of 1936 became symbolic of antifascist unity of Popular Front politics and defense of the II Republic in beginning days of the Civil War. The final paragraphs of *Savage Coast* repeat a speech given by a Catalan representative for the People’s Olympiad: “Many of you come from countries suffering the same oppression we have suffered. Your countrymen will have another example of victory. The people of Spain have many gifts. This struggle is their gift to all countries.”⁶⁰³

⁶⁰³ Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, 268.

Amidst a sea of fists, “Helen” takes heed of these gifts of the revolution and the call to action, a call which Rukeyser carried throughout her life and work.

Thousands of foreigners volunteered in the Loyalist cause and continued to stand against fascism after the II Republic’s defeat; however, US women under analysis did not follow traditional political parties and their activism or support took more creative means, namely through art or dance, memoir, and poetry. Rukeyser was transnational humanitarian throughout the Cold War, as she was able to view the Popular Front and the conflict in Spain as a more universal cause. Her 1974 “We Came for the Games” reflected on the defeat of the 1939 II Republic and the broader antifascist movement decades later. She engaged in various other forms of protest, whether writing for the release of accused communist writers at home and abroad or laying down in the U.S. Capitol to protest the Vietnam War. Riesenfeld, the international survivalist, journeyed to Spain for love and dance yet returned home to immediately publish a memoir, hoping to stir Americans to aid democracy and the Spanish people. Ultimately, she found a flourishing film career in Mexico among Republican exiles. The Spanish Civil War offered these nomadic women a political awakening; they grasped to the Popular Front’s promise for breaking down divisions, including national boundaries and nationalism, class or religious differences, and traditional gender roles. Their vision transcended factions and borders and they largely stood outside political affiliations while they continued to creatively contest the public sphere of ideas during the Cold War.

Exemplifying feminist theory through biography and cultural studies clarifies how these nomadic women of the Spanish Civil War crossed national and political boundaries

in their commitment to social justice and identity with multiple issues. While there are still limitations to the reporting and perspectives of Rukeyser and Riesenfeld, they offer an alternative narrative to the highly politicized one of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and “premature antifascists,” as they existed outside direct associations of Cold War political antagonism. This dissertation’s nomadic methodology follows the “nomadic subject,” generating productive questions concerning conventional and static periodization and nationally bounded events. However, these women’s broader antifascism did not escape “subversive” suspicions, as we see with Rukeyser. Women’s histories, and the nomad’s, largely lay beyond the traditional archive, demonstrating an empathy that exposes greater emotional and human aspects of the conflict and cut across categories, space, and time.

The growing anti-communist and international order of the Cold War years reverted the potential many foreign intellectuals and writers saw in Spain in the 1930s. While the II Republic’s Loyalists considered Spain as the place to stop fascism in Europe, the leading Western democracies followed Non-Intervention. With the Soviet Union’s involvement in the Spanish Left, Rukeyser and many others understood the U.S.’s obstinance to help the II Republic as a tactic for stopping the spread of communism, superseding any desire to halt European fascism. The Cold War became the “paradigm” of borders with a fixity of boundaries in a world of increased global politics. Concluding *Savage Coast*, Rukeyser envisioned the “buffer zone” that would be created with the II Republic’s defeat and ensuring exile: “a paradigm of all boundaries.”⁶⁰⁴ The poet and dancer sought to transgress more boundaries as the international order became

⁶⁰⁴ Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, 297.

more fixed. Riesenfeld navigated different Anglo-Hispanic spaces through interpretative and artistic skills, she entered film and moved to Mexico among Spanish exiles while Rukeyser used poetry to protest injustices in the U.S., South Korea, and Vietnam. Reviving US women's writings and activities around these conflicts and their connections to antifascism amidst anti-communism begins to expand periodization and geopolitical lines while identifying a Pre-Cold War. For the poet-activist, Spain became the "first ending of the war."⁶⁰⁵ As for many, the ideological battle of the Spanish Civil War would be ongoing.

Connecting US women's experiences to those of European women both expands the antifascist struggle beyond Spain and into an Atlantic scope while providing fruitful counterpoints. Margarita Nelken's political and social critiques belong to the 1930s and 1940s protest writing and was unapologetic in resisting gendered submission, subtleness, or delicate, or modest common characterizations of women's writing for much of the twentieth century. Her writings and activism problematize notions of gender, nationalism, borders, and exile; for her and the "nomadic subject," writing became a means of activism and identity formation. Through activism and empathy, Nelken sided with many different experiences, constantly reworking her perspective based on her contemporary moment of conflict. She demonstrated a transnational and multi-issue consciousness even in exile in Mexico. As a Spanish and German Jewish woman in a Hispanic culture, this single mother disrupted, like Rukeyser, much of the established and acceptable orders.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

She was often at the center of political disagreement and social backlash, ostracized from the Socialist Party in Spain and later the Spanish Communist Party in Mexico while often being attacked or belittled for her sex and religion, revealing the tensions intellectual, and nomadic, women experienced on the Left. This subjectivity and her experience in war and exile broadened Nelken's range of activism, transforming her to a transnational figure in the fight for universal and human rights as evidence in her calls for women's rights as human rights and antifascist, transnational women's solidarity on International Women's Day in 1945.

For Muriel Rukeyser poetry held the power of truth and was the best way to combat oppression, which extended years beyond the Spanish Civil War. She confessed to the "academic sadness she knew before, reaching, inarticulate," which grew after she understood the conflict, events, and passions in Spain.⁶⁰⁶ After the Civil War, Rukeyser more directly protested oppressive policies in the U.S. and outlined her philosophy of poetry:

Everywhere we are told that our human resources are all *to be used*, that our civilization itself means the uses of everything it has--the inventions, the histories, every scrap of fact. But there is one *kind* of knowledge--infinitely precious, time-resistant more than monuments, here to be passed between the generations in any way it may be: never to be used. And that is poetry.⁶⁰⁷

The "nomadic subject's" position outside fixed categories, whether the traditionally masculinized political or national, fuels an empathetic response to the condition of the "other." Until her death in 1980, Rukeyser offered this alternative through her personal

⁶⁰⁶ Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, 265.

⁶⁰⁷ Rukeyser, *The Life of Poetry*, 7.

narrative of the Spanish Civil War, protest poetry, direct action in defending victims of anti-communism around the globe, and sponsorship of Republican exiles. What she called society's "fear of poetry" and her outspoken support of the II Republic contributed towards the FBI's surveillance of her possible communist affiliations beginning in 1943. Years before the so-called Iron Curtain, concerns and motivations of the earlier "red scare" ran through the official position in the U.S. concerning Spain in the 1930s and the monitoring of leftist figures before 1945. Poetry and a history of emotions permits a more comprehensive narrative, expansion of the accepted Cold War periodization and national contexts and marking her historical agency.

While the poet supported workers' causes early on, Riesenfeld went to Spain uninformed of politics but in pursuit of love and to dance flamenco. Her memoir, *Dancer in Madrid*, recounts six months of enlightenment about the Spanish people, culture, and the political situation that led to civil war in 1936. Having to flee the war, as soon as she returned to the U.S., she began writing and published her experience in the hopes of moving US citizens to action to support the II Republic. Not long after, she began a career in film, moved permanently to Mexico City, and married a Spanish Civil War exile, Luis Alcoriza. Her life among exiles and her own internationalist survival strategy both challenged ideals of Cold War domesticity, as well as help highlight the complex place of women balancing professions, family, and the trauma of exile. It has been documented that much of the Spanish exile community in Mexico returned from the egalitarian gender experimentation during the II Republic towards a more traditional life focused on work, family, and survival after fleeing Europe.⁶⁰⁸ The friendship between

⁶⁰⁸ See Pilar Domínguez Prats, *Voces del exilio: Mujeres españolas en México, 1939-1950* (Madrid, 1994).

Luis Buñuel's wife, Frenchwoman Jeanne Buñuel Rucar, and the US dancer-turned-screenwriter, highlights important differences and similarities among non-Spanish women within this community. Contrary to the "nomadic subject," Rucar's memoir shows she appeased her famous Surrealist husband's macho expectations that she dedicate herself to the home and children, limiting the degree of voice and autonomy she had within the family. Rucar contrasted herself to Riesenfeld often: when the dancer spoke up and swore, Rucar remained silent; when the American played a vital role in launching her husband's collaborative career with Buñuel and appeared on over eighty screenplays with Alcoriza, Rucar recalled her passion for playing the piano stifled by Buñuel with the instrument's replacement by a sewing machine.

The many "selves" and the transient nature of the "nomadic subject" help position the historical value of Rukeyser's and Riesenfeld's lives and works.⁶⁰⁹ The poet and dancer demonstrated the nomad's sexual autonomy by engaging in unconventional romantic relationships for the early to mid-twentieth century, both defying ideals of the nuclear family—intentional or not. They had the ability to become the polyglot or mapping oneself onto various cultural landscapes, communicating in various languages, blurring genres in their works, using the art of poetry and dance as an antifascist political tool in Spain and beyond. As translator and interpreter, and as transnational and international figures they illuminate alternative perspectives and possibilities in their forms of subverting established orders. In their responses to the internationalism of the Cold War, Rukeyser responded in her understanding of international humanitarianism

⁶⁰⁹ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

with protest writing and direct activism subverting from within the United States, while Riesenfeld inverted barriers between the “other” and “self” from within, repeatedly obscuring her own identity as “translator,” actress, and screenwriter within Hispanic cultures.

A feminist history of the nomad recognizes historically imposed categories yet remains critical of such formation processes to challenge those hegemonic hierarchies. For Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the nomad is in a continual state of “becoming” and Rosi Braidotti replaces metaphysical fixity of being with the nomad’s continuous living with a “philosophy of ‘as if’.”⁶¹⁰ This “trespasser” lives in a state of being ‘as if’ something else, recreating herself, opening the spaces for empathy, and collaboration. Riesenfeld certainly recreated herself many times and blended into different cultures; from a flamenco dancer in Spain to an actress and screenwriter in the Golden Age of Mexican cinema, she became politicized during her witness to civil war and its ensuing exile. Rather than looking at concrete points, the nomad searches for the spaces between, the areas of multiple connections, and changing conditions that contribute towards one’s subjectivity.⁶¹¹ Applying the nomadic theory to historical specificity further articulates María Zambrano’s poetic reason, challenging the dichotomous split between masculinized reason and feminized passion or subjectivity. Through their empathy, Rukeyser and Riesenfeld demonstrated an emotional knowledge that was absent in many foreigners’ accounts of the conflict in Spain.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., 5 and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Nomadology: The War Machine* (New York: Semiotexte, 1986).

⁶¹¹ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 98.

Like the exile and nomad, Rukeyser created space for subjectivity and more original thought through her unattachment to official parties yet continual siding with oppressed people: African American boys unjustly tried in Scottsboro, bridge workers in Virginia suffering health conditions, democracy in Spain under assault, imprisoned writers by anti-communist persecution, and Republican exiles in France living in miserable conditions decades after the Spanish Civil War.⁶¹² The postmodern mode of being “prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities,” but opens up to “cultural hybridity that entertains differences without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.”⁶¹³ Unlike Homi Bhabha’s postcolonial subject, the US nomadic woman, through her privileged position, runs the risk of glossing over difference and dissolving the “other” into the “self.”

The women under this analysis did not completely distance themselves from the hegemonic structure of society’s dominant classes. In many ways they benefitted from the capitalist system, enjoying privileged positions at home or abroad. Perhaps not completely unrelated, Riesenfeld forged a successful career in Mexican cinema through decades when there was “unbalanced of power” of the U.S. in Latin America with its various imperialist strategies.⁶¹⁴ Patrick Iber deconstructs the Cultural Cold War from simply a “clash of empires,” with the nomadic subjectivity demonstrating how

⁶¹² See Edward W. Said, “Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals,” *Grand Street*, No. 47 (Autumn, 1993), 112-124.

⁶¹³ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994) and *Nation and Narration* (Routledge, 1990), 4.

⁶¹⁴ Patrick Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 8, 9.

nonprofessional or unaffiliated women contributed towards this process.⁶¹⁵ Further, Rukeyser's empathy for Spain became a solvent for difference and the "other." However, examples arise of subverting borders and notions of authenticity in complex ways, such as the screenplays by the Alcorizas (notably *El gangster*) that parodied the northern imperialist and earlier cultural programs of the Good Neighbor Policy.

Indeed, transnational and international figures, Rukeyser and Riesenfeld began from a position of privilege in their experiences abroad as middle-class, white North Americans. Further, the poet and dancer did not always voice their identity as Jewish (a freedom not afforded to millions in Europe). The histories of Spain and Mexico are arguably no less anti-Semitic than the United States, but there was a kind of romanticism and idealism held by many on the Left that the defense of democracy in Spain had promise for a more just society beyond its borders.⁶¹⁶ Contrary to the trans-humanitarian poet, as the international citizen Riesenfeld played the interpretive role in Spain and in Mexico. She is the nomad who loses herself and identity in the pursuit of cultural

⁶¹⁵ Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom*, 21.

⁶¹⁶ From the 1492 expulsion of Jews and Moors, forced conversions by the Inquisition, and the institutionalization of the myth of a monolithic Catholic Spain penetrated the project of conquest in the Americas with the persecution of crypto-Jews in New Spain until Mexica independence. In the twentieth century many groups of foreigners fled during the 1910 Mexican Revolution, but Jewish immigration rose in during the 1920s with increased quotas in the U.S., Mexico offered shelter for displaced populations. A decrease ensued with the worldwide economic depression of the 1930s, along with increased xenophobic sentiments and anti-Semitism especially with regards to labor. For discussions of the Inquisition, *conversos*, and anti-Semitism in Mexico, see María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de sangre, religion, and gender in colonial Mexico* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press 2008); John F. Chuchiak, IV, *The Inquisition in New Spain, 1536-1820: A Documentary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 2012); Adina Cimmet, *Ashkenazi Jews in Mexico* (Albany, New York: 1997); Pergola Della, Sergio and Lerner, Susana, *La Población Judía de México: Perfil demográfico, Social y Cultural* (México: 1995); Alice Gojman Backal (ed.), *Generaciones Judías en México. Kehila Ashkenazi (1922–1992)*. (México: 1999); Krause, Corinne, *The Jews in Mexico: A History with Special Emphasis on the Period From 1857 to 1930* (Pittsburgh: 1970); Harriet Lesser, *A History of the Jewish Community in Mexico City 1912–1970* (New York: 1972); Shep Lenchek, "Jews in Mexico: A Struggle for Survival, Part I" MexConnect: 2000, Accessed January 21, 2021 <https://www.mexconnect.com/articles/677-jews-in-mexico-a-struggle-for-survival-part-one/>

exchange and empathy. Both women suppressed knowledge of the complicated racial and religious history particularly of the peninsula in their *Hispanophilia*, a process which denies the full acknowledgement of the “other.” In this vein, empathy acted as a solvent for differences in Spain. Rukeyser and Riesenfeld held an idealistic, hopeful view of Spain. The privilege of the U.S. “nomadic subject” helped erase from their focus the historical and contemporary “othering” within Spain: the Jew, Moor, the Roma community, and the contemporary North African immigrant. Their empathy for the “other,” a kind of affectionate mythification, and romanticism for the potential unity of Popular Front politics in Spain ran the risk of erasing tangible disparities.

However, the political subjectivity is important to consider. Studies of volunteers in the International Brigades and other foreign units in Spain found there to be a disproportionate representation of Jewish volunteers.⁶¹⁷ A history of diaspora and the conceptualizations of Jewish political identity put forth by Isaac Deutscher, Hannah Arendt, and Naomi Seidman help explain how Jewish activists often hold a particular kind of consciousness that views systems with suspicion and fuel defense of various oppressed groups. Rukeyser acknowledged her identity and Jewish persecution to critique the U.S. for failing to fulfill its democratic promise, but she avoided the topic and her own position as a Jewish woman in Spain when writing about her experience in Barcelona. Despite coming under critique as suspicion as a Jewish woman with leftist politics during heightened anti-communism, she was witness to the larger global context marked by violent racism, displacement, exile, and the Holocaust at mid-century. As she wrote about being Jewish in the twentieth century, hiding one’s Jewishness was a “death of the spirit,” but embracing “the whole and fertile spirit” meant “every human freedom,

⁶¹⁷ Raanan Rein, “Tikkun Olam and Transnational Solidarity: Jewish Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War” *Contemporary Judaism and Politics*, N. 2 Vol. X (2016).

suffering to be free, daring to live for the impossible.”⁶¹⁸ The contradictions in Rukeyser and Riesenfeld’s Jewish subjectivity instruct that the “nomadic subject” is neither a hero nor anti-hero.

Researching and narrating the stories of “nomadic subjects” poses new questions about the ways that scholars can write about their historical subjects and incorporate ways of historical thinking to present issues. We may consider not only how contemporary observers on the Left view the II Republic and Spanish Civil War as representing unfulfilled ideals and promises of Western democracy, but also consider the obstacles that stood, and stand, in the way of a borderless antifascist program. With Bhabha’s “demography of the new internationalism,” the postmodern condition “lies in the awareness that the epistemological ‘limits’ of ethnocentric ideas are also the enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident, histories and voices—women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities.”⁶¹⁹ Ultimately, the nomad has no single state or party, permitting the integration of practical activism and expanded consciousness that “cuts across boundaries of race, class gender and sexual practice.”⁶²⁰ Writing inclusive histories are critical for understanding our present and finding meaningful avenues towards change; we need more alternative models and methods for historical analysis located outside masculine political histories. The study and writing of history, and *how* scholars do history, is a form of activism.

The “nomadic subject’s” penchant for *yearning*, in bell hook’s conceptualization, fosters “a common affective and political sensibility” can create empathetic cooperation,

⁶¹⁸ Box I:42, Folder 1, Poetry Drafts, 1940-44, Rukeyser Papers, LOC.

⁶¹⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 4, 5.

⁶²⁰ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 1, 2.

coalition, and solidarity.⁶²¹ Inherently a kind of activist, a *nomadic* history may help achieve this aim. Political actors make claims of unified belonging to an issue: “we women,” “we workers,” “we citizens;” in other words, their political identities, and those making such claims are political actors.⁶²² By historicizing women’s works after the Spanish Civil War, we can trace examples of multi-issue activism across time and with various institutions, further identifying creative, every day, and non-traditional acts as political activism: making “claims bearing on someone else’s interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties.”⁶²³ The nomadic sensibility attempts to recognize more fully the category of “humanity.”

Just a year before her death in 1979, Muriel Rukeyser began writing semi-fictional narratives about “shopping-bag ladies,” inspired by *The New York Times* piece of an elderly lady who spent two months at Presbyterian Hospital before being identified after having been struck by a car. The poet’s papers at the Library of Congress include this news article with the name of the director of the Human Resources Administration’s office of psychiatry circled and sketches of shopping bag ladies: “the legion of homeless, independent, often eccentric women who live on the city’s streets.”⁶²⁴ Rukeyser wrote a short dialogue about such a “shopping-bag lady” that was killed, giving a voice to such women without homes. The themes she addressed also critiqued impersonal bureaucracy

⁶²¹ Ibid., 2.

⁶²² Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Boulder, London: Paradigm Publishers, 2007), 11, 12.

⁶²³ Ibid., 4.

⁶²⁴ John Kifner, “Hospital at Last Identified Its ‘Shopping-Bag Lady,’” *The New York Times*, January 10, 1979, Box I: 56, Folder 3, Muriel Rukeyser Papers, LOC.

and the filing of various types of paperwork that obscure one's existence when located outside of typical categories and identities. Instead, Rukeyser envisioned wiping those rigid formalities away and providing free food and unconditional support to those in need. She was essentially attempting to restore the humanity of all the unidentified souls or "bag ladies."⁶²⁵ (Figure 19)



Figure 19: "Bag Lady" Sketch, Muriel Rukeyser. One of several "bag lady" sketches by Rukeyser. The poet acknowledged how society erased the identities of women without homes and through her creative writing sought to provide them a voice and humanity. Muriel Rukeyser Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division. Courtesy of William L. Rukeyser.

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

Today, there is just as great an imperative to employ art and poetry in the building of bridges across communities and nations. In January 2021, disputes over a feminist mural in Spain made international news, revealing Spain's ongoing "culture wars": including debates over the Historical Memory Law and the rights of Franco's victims, his legacy, and the masculine and Catholic customs and traditions of the country.⁶²⁶ The artwork, decorating a neighborhood sports complex in Madrid, showcases revolutionary, transnational women such as Emma Goldman, Angela Davis, Lucía Sánchez Saornil (one of the founders of *Mujeres Libres*), Kanno Sugako, Rigoberta Menchú, Frida Kahlo, Rosa Parks, Valentina Tereshkova, Comandanta Ramona, and several others. Foreign and Spanish women sit side-by-side in their quest for justice. Alongside the women's portraits reads, "capacidades no dependen de tu género."⁶²⁷ Transnational recognition and solidarity appears critical to gender and sex equality and combating traditionally masculinist nationalist narratives.

Some political commentaries express that, yet again, the far-Right (particularly under the masculinist party Vox) is using feminism to advance its conservative, and gendered, project after calling for the mural's replacement due to its overly "political message."⁶²⁸ They argue that woven into the opposition to the mural is a general

⁶²⁶ Sebastiaan Faber, *Memory Battles of the Spanish Civil War: History, Fiction, Photography* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2018).

⁶²⁷ Sam Jones, "Mural in Madrid that celebrates women pitched in Spain's culture wars," *The Guardian* (January 25, 2021). The work was the project of Unlogic collective and artist, Jorge Nuño. Translation: "Your ability does not depend on your gender."

⁶²⁸ Nuria Alabao, "La historia de un mural feminista en la capital de las guerras culturales," *Contexto y Acción* (January 28, 2021).

resistance to Carmena liberal trends and racist and anti-immigrant fears.⁶²⁹ Saved by the thousands of petition signatories and street protests, the city council rescinded its decision to remove the artwork. Images proliferated on social media of marching protesters with purple hats and sashes reading “Igualdad” and “Diversidad,” with some displaying the LGBT+ rainbow. As the protestors expanded their concerns beyond women’s or sex issues, a feminist position often includes broader ideas about equality. Further, this debate reminds us that the resistance to the transgression of fixed categories and definitions of belonging remains fierce. It is ongoing testament to the political power of art and international efforts towards enacting social justice for a *humanity* beyond borders. The history of “nomadic subjects” instructs that continual recognition, past and present, of the efforts to dismantle categories, gender, national, political, or other, is as pressing today as ever.

⁶²⁹ Ibid.

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SELECT MEXICAN FILMOGRAPHY

Riesefeld as Actress:

Café concordia (1939)

Un luz en mi camino (1939, as dancer)

Cuando viajan las estrellas (1942)

Soy puro mexicano (1942)

Tormenta en la cumbre (1989)

Writing Collaborations, Janet (Riesefeld) and Luis Alcoriza:

La hora de la verdad (1945)

El ahijado de la muerte (1946)

Una extraña mujer (1947)

Nocturno de amor (1948)
Enrédate y verás (1948)
Flor de caña (1948)

Negra consentida (1949)
Un cuerpo de mujer (1949)
El gran calavera (1949)
Los amores de una viuda (1949)

Huellas del pasado (1950)
Si me viera don Porfirio (1950)
Mala hembra (1950)
Hipólito, el de Santa (1950)
La liga de las muchachas (1950)
Tú, solo tú (1950)

Anillo de compromiso (1951)
Canasta uruguaya (1951)
Los enredos de una gallega (1951)
La hija del engaño (1951)
El siete machos (1951)
Una gringuita en México (1951)
Si usted no puede, yo sí (1951)

Las interesadas (1952)
Se le pasó la mano (1952)
La miel se fue de la luna (1952)

Gitana tenías que ser (1953)
No te ofendas, Beatriz (1953)
La isla de las mujeres (1953)

La visita que no tocó el timbre (1954)

La vida no vale nada (1955)

El inocente (1956)

Morir de pie (1957)

Siempre estaré contigo (1959)
El hambre nuestra de cada día (1959)

¡Me gustan valentones! (1959)

Bala de Plata en el pueblo maldito (1960)

Bala de Plata (1960)

El jinete negro (1961)

La furia el ring (1961)

El Bronco Reynosa (1961)

El buena suerte (1961)

Paloma brava (1961)

El gángster (1965)

Perdóname mi vida (1965)

Tirando a gol (1966)

Cómo pescar marido (1967)

Me quiero casar (1967)

Romeo contra Julieta (1968)

Lío de faldas (1969)

Un amante anda suelto (1969)

Paula (1969)

Como perros y gatos (1969)

Departamento de soltero (1971)

El niño y el tiburón (1978)

Lo que importa es vivir (1987)

VITA

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PRESENTATIONS

“Nomadic and Historical Illuminations of the Art of Remedios Varo: A Feminist Embodiment of Braidotti’s “Nomadic Subject” and Female Subjectivity in Exile” *Association for Spanish & Portuguese Historical Studies*, Barcelona, Spain, 2019

“Bridging the Cultural Gap: The Spanish Civil War and the Works of Janet Riesenfeld and Muriel Rukeyser” *American Comparative Literature Association*, University of Utrecht, Netherlands, 2017

“Sephardim and Exile: A Women’s Perspective in Miami, FL, 1959-1982” *Department of History Graduate Student Association*, FIU, 2017

“From the Spanish Front to Bucareli Street, Mexico City: Shifting Identities among Civil War Exiles” *Southeastern Council of Latin American Studies*, Charleston, SC, 2015

“Changing Tides in Intellectual Exile: The Case of the Spanish Civil War Refugees in Mexico City” *Southeastern Council of Latin American Studies*, New Orleans, LA, 2014

“Refuge in Exile: Intellectual Women of the Spanish Civil War in Mexico City” *Graduate History Association Research Forum*, UNCC, Charlotte, NC, 2014