

THE BASQUE CHILD REFUGEES IN THE UK

A zine dedicated to the
exploration of evacuated
child experience amidst the
dangers of the Spanish
Civil War

Students of the University of Leeds

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Carmen Kilner and Simon Martinez for all
of their amazing support this year

Illustrations by Gabriela Kemble-Diaz

To reduce child
refugees to
innocent
victims is to
rob them of
their **agency**

SOCORRO ROJO INTERNACIONAL

*La bestia fascista,
ahesina, destruye*



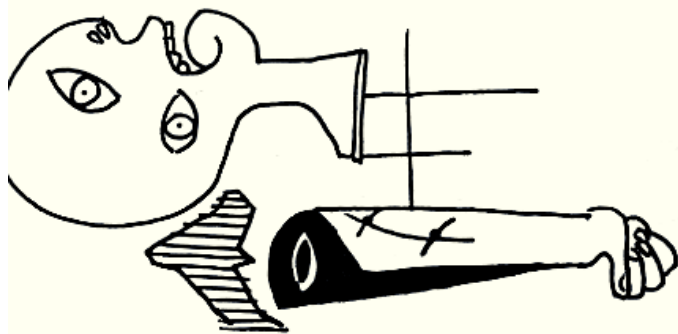
*El S.R.I.
ampara, ayuda*

GRAFICAS VALLINCUA INTERVENIO, GET-CNT



HOW THE CONFLICT ESCALATED: THE BOMBING OF GUERNICA

- In July of 1936 a military coup was launched to overthrow the Second Spanish Republic, run by a government made up of an alliance of socialist, communist and left-wing republican parties.
- General Francisco Franco helped lead the uprising, aided by fascist leaders Hitler and Mussolini, who sent powerful air and armoured units to support the rebel forces.
- The military action was initiated to oppose reforms proposed by the Republican government, which wanted to change the relationship between the Church and the state, redistribute land and develop some regional autonomy, as well as reforming the army.



- The Basque city of Bilbao, which in the Spring of 1937 was one of the main industrial centres of Spain, was now under threat of destruction.



- The desire for regional autonomy was particularly strong in the Basque Country, which led to a focus on the occupation by Franco's forces in the north of Spain. This 'War in the North' was led by General Emilio Mola.
- On the 26th of April 1937, the Basque town of Guernica, historically considered the 'spiritual capital of Basque People' was bombed, killing a significant number of civilians.



DRAWINGS INSPIRED BY PICASSO'S GUERNICA

"There was the mother with two children and the old grandmother. The planes circled about the wood for a long time and at last frightened them out of it. They took shelter in ditch. We saw the old granny cover up the little boy with her apron. The planes came low and killed them all in the ditch, except the little boy. He soon got up and began to wander across a field crying. They got him too. It was terrible, we were both crying so much we could not speak."



THE EVACUATION OF THE BASQUE CHILDREN

THE JOURNEY FROM BILBAO TO
SOUTHAMPTON - MAY 1937

THEY WERE TOLD ONLY FOR 3 MONTHS

With the threat to Bilbao now imminent, the British Home Secretary was finally persuaded to allow nearly 4,000 children to be evacuated to the UK.

Over 3,861 Basque refugees embarked from near Bilbao on the liner S.S. Habana, alongside 95 'maestras' (female teachers), 120 'helpers' and 15 priests. The group endured a gruelling voyage through the notorious Bay of Biscay.

On the morning of 23 May 1937, the Habana sailed into Southampton harbour. As one child recalled, arriving in England was like "awakening from a nightmare".

'WE WERE ALLOWED A
LITTLE BAG WITH
JUST CLOTHES,
NOTHING ELSE...'

JOSEFINE SAVERY

CAN YOU IMAGINE
HOW YOU WOULD
FEEL?



“it was an
extraordinary
spectacle to see
a vessel...
steaming up
Southampton
Water with every
inch of her deck
covered with
human beings”.

MAURICE WILLIAMS
MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH FOR SOUTHAMPTON





ARRIVAL IN ENGLAND



MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS

The children were medically examined, both before leaving Spain and again in England. These diligent examinations were a response to the perceived medical danger posed by the children's arrival. In all, the chief medical officer of health at Southampton confirmed those findings of doctors Richard Ellis and Audrey Russell, who had examined the children in Bilbao: the refugees were "an alert, intelligent group of children who compared favourably in physique with our children", in spite of the conditions of deprivation, anxiety and overcrowding in which they had been living for several weeks.

They were given different coloured ribbons to indicate whether they were healthy or required further medical intervention. Some had their heads shaved to prevent the spread of lice, which was particularly traumatising for the young girls.



"ALL MY LIFE MY HAIR HAD BEEN MY CROWN AND GLORY... AND THEN SOMEBODY SAID, 'GO IN THERE TO HAVE YOUR HAIR CUT ... YOU HAVE NO CHOICE.' ... IN THE END THEY FORCED ME. I CAN'T FORGET."

Benedicta González





"THE CHANGE THAT TOOK PLACE IN OUR LIVES WAS VERY SUDDEN, FROM BILBAO BOMBING AND SCARCITY OF FOOD...SUDDENLY WE ARE IN SOUTHAMPTON, FULL OF FLAGS AND A BAND PLAYING ON DECK... WITH UNIFORMS WHICH WE HAD NEVER SEEN BEFORE."

Rafael Leandro Flores

A local farmer, Mr G.H. Brown, had responded to pleas for a suitable location to house the children, offering up his land. The camp was set up in less than two weeks by volunteers who worked round the clock to make the land habitable in time for the arrival of the children. .

Although the first week of the children's stay at North Stoneham was chaotic, order and routine were quickly established and the children adapted to life in canvas tents.

HELP SPAIN'S REFUGEES!



SEND
★ SPANISH
REFUGEE
SHIPS
TO THE NEW WORLD!

Give **FOOD, CLOTHING, MONEY**
TO THE
Spanish Relief Committee in your Area
OR TO THE
National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief
4 GREAT SMITH STREET, LONDON, S.W. 1

LONDON CO-OPERATIVE PRINTING SOCIETY LTD, LONDON & KEPPING



FOUR THOUSAND SPANISH CHILDREN HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO SAFETY
FROM WAR-STRICKEN BASQUE VILLAGES AND TOWNS

£2,000 A WEEK IS NEEDED TO MAINTAIN THE CHILDREN IN THE
HOMES THAT HAVE BEEN FOUND FOR THEM

S.O.S. S.O.S. S.O.S. S.O.S.
FUNDS ARE URGENTLY NEEDED

The Labour movement has a special responsibility and a splendid record in organising relief for the Spanish people, and care of the Basque children is an individual duty the movement's members have undertaken in the name of humanity.

Send your contribution now.

If you have already subscribed, do it again.

Expenditure is continuous and funds are running low.

Every penny you can spare will help to keep these helpless victims of War safe and well cared for—

Every penny is needed—Every penny will be well spent—Every penny counts.

Contributions should be sent to:—

SIR WALTER CITRING, National Council of Labour, Transport House, Smith Square, London, S.W.1.

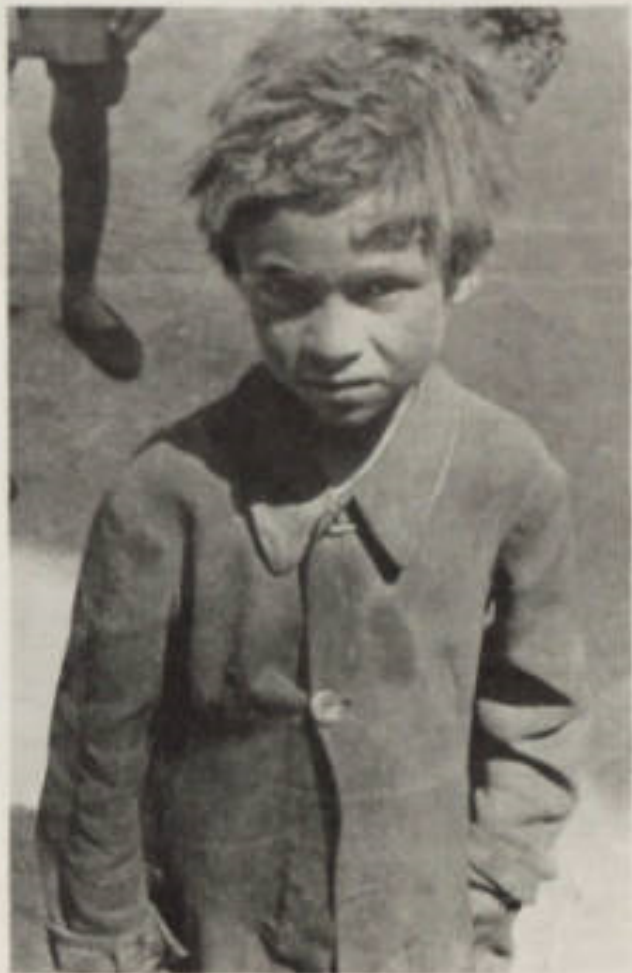
HELP

THE SPANISH CHILD REFUGEES!

THIS CHILD REFUGEE FROM SPAIN has lost his home and his parents. His home was bombed to pieces in an air raid. His parents are reported "missing." No one knows whether he will ever see them again.

He is just one of thousands of children for whom the Spanish War has meant the destruction of security, health, and all the normal joys of childhood.

Shortly after the bombing of Guernica, four thousand Spanish children from the Basque country were brought to Great Britain for safety. More than two thousand of them have since been restored to their parents. The remaining 1,700 how-



THE COLONIES: WHERE THE CHILDREN STAYED

The camp at North Stoneham was only a temporary home while the Basque Children's Committee worked to find more permanent accommodation for the children. Within a week the children began to be moved out of the camp and dispersed into homes known as 'colonies.' The number of colonies changed over time with around 100 overall across the UK- made up of large country mansions, empty hotels, ex mills and workhouses, among others. About one third of the children were looked after by the Catholic Church.

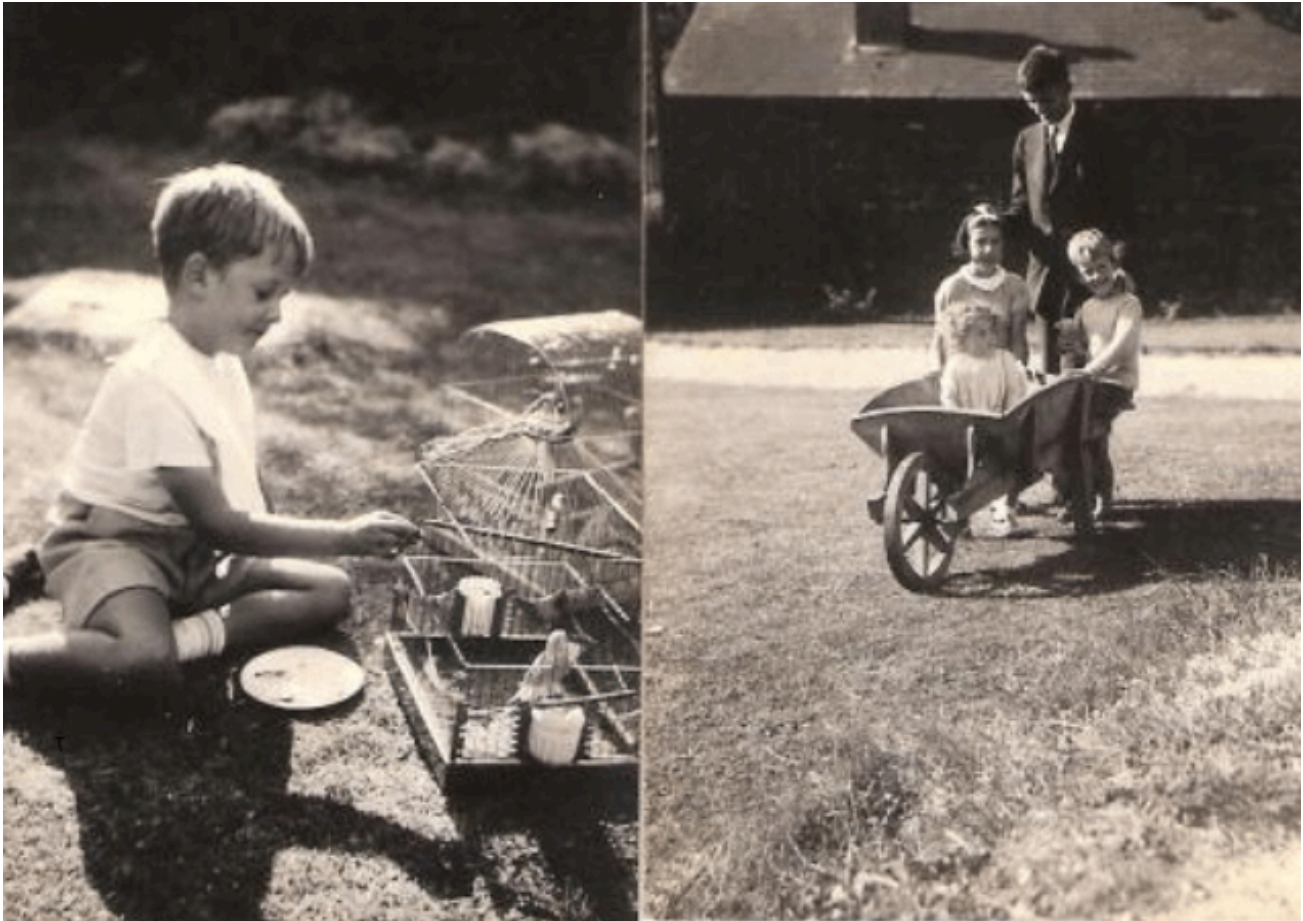
There was huge variation in the quality of care provided at each colony. As they were reliant on donations and volunteers, local public support had a drastic impact on the children's experiences. In areas of high public support the colonies were comfortably sustained for the duration of their existence.

Some locals were encouraged to 'adopt' children and would even take them out on excursions, or bring them into their own homes for meals. These colonies went beyond meeting just the physical needs of the children: they provided stimulating activities and were sympathetic to the children's traumatic experience of leaving their homes and families. Many of these children spoke of happy years spent in the colonies.



"SAFE FROM BOMBS AND
BULLETS. CHILDREN AT
CAMP HERE. THIN BODIES
AND SUNKEN CHEEKS
SPOKE ELOQUENTLY OF THE
SUFFERING OF THE
BASQUE CHILDREN, 2,000
OF WHOM SPENT LAST
NIGHT TUCKED IN THE
WARM BLANKETS OF THE
ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE"

THE SHEFFIELD TELEGRAPH:
24 MAY 1937



Some colonies received much less local support, meaning children went cold and hungry, were left without adequate staff and received no education, entertainment, or care. Some of them were so underfunded that they ended up closing after only a few months, leading to some children experiencing repeated transfers and no stable home, which for some children was very distressing.

HERMINIO: "SOME OF THEM WERE AWFUL PLACES, BUT NEVERTHELESS YOU BELONGED TO A GROUP OF PEOPLE"

Regardless of the state of the individual colonies, the children still experienced the underlying sadness of separation from home, and the anxiety that accompanied not knowing whether their families were safe back in Spain.

746/83/41
916/32

Aid for Spain



IFTU
LSI

International Solidarity Fund

ATTITUDES OF THE MEDIA



Local attitudes were crucial resources for the colonies. In order for the children to have a good experience in the UK, they needed to gain public sympathy. Initially, on their arrival in 1937, the media presentations of the children were largely positive. There was a particular focus on the praising of Britain for the merciful rescue of the children and the traumatic experience of evacuation.

Newspapers that were sympathetic to the children portrayed them as passive victims in an attempt to separate them from the politics of the war. However, this was not a true reflection of the children who were not just passive victims, but may have held their own political opinions and beliefs. This was especially true of some of the older children who in some cases had a much greater understanding of the war.

Newspapers across the UK reported on the children, giving updates on them and asking for volunteers to help and donate. There was a great local response in many areas, especially in working-class industrial areas that tended to support the Republican government.

THE REPORTS OF THE CHILDREN WERE BY NO MEANS ALL POSITIVE...

One particular incident of bad behaviour happened at Scarborough in 1937, where a group of the young boys were reported as having an altercation with the chef, which generated a number of headlines presenting the Basque children as "bad" and "wild."

In July of the same year, a report was made of a "riot" amongst the Basque children at Brechfa in Wales. They were accused in the newspapers of smashing windows and throwing a knife at a policeman. The event resulted in 24 of the boys being returned to Spain.

**BACK
TO
SPAIN
THEY
WILL
GO**

HOW THIS EXAGGERATION OF EVENTS INFLUENCED THE SECURITY OF THE CHILDREN

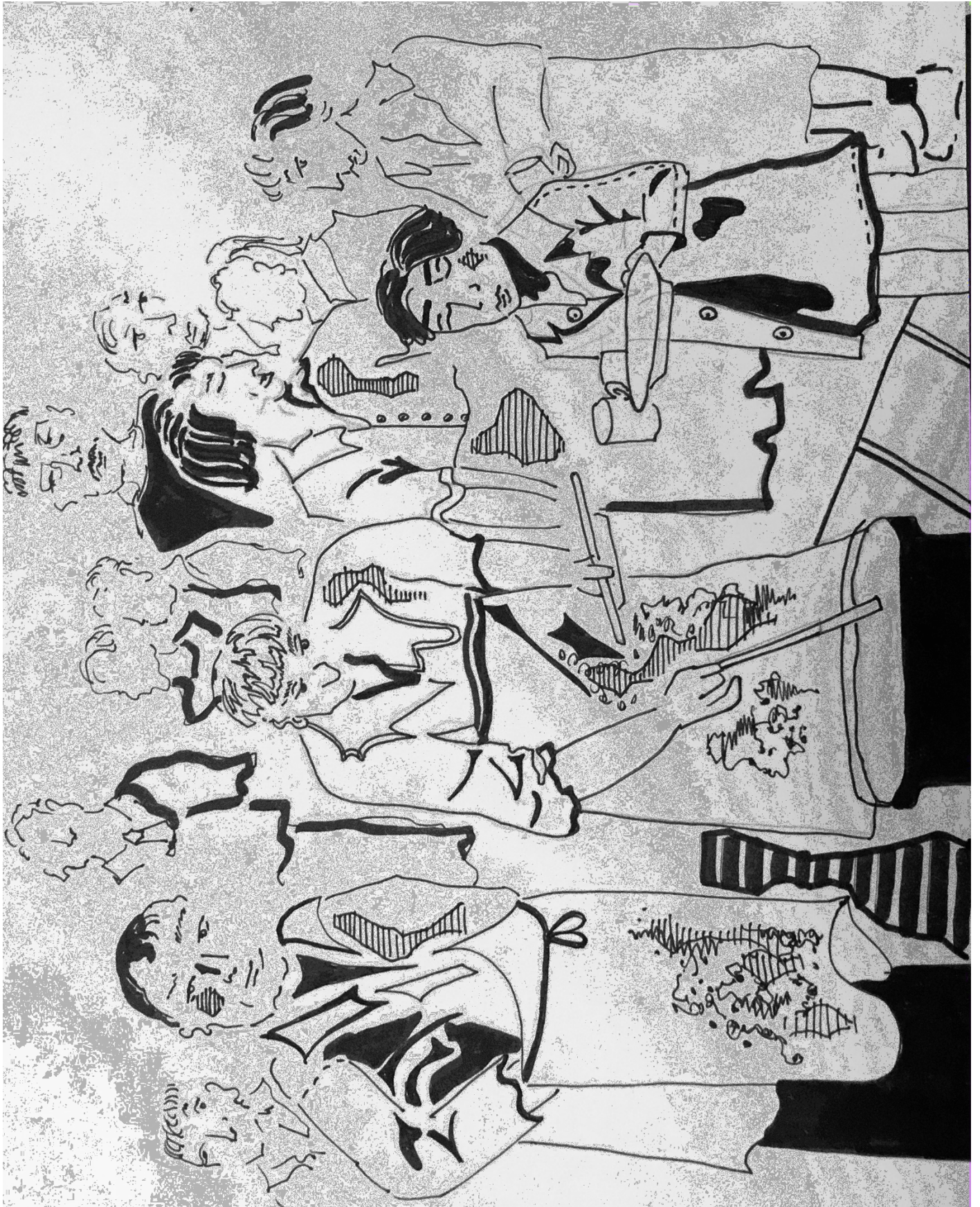
Each of these incidents were ones of very few instances of bad behaviour amongst the children and the majority of the children behaved well in their new homes. Nevertheless, these events were exaggerated in the media, perpetuating a negative stereotype of the niños (Spanish for children). These negative reports raised concerns among MPs across the UK who began fearing the Basque children and conversations began about their return to Spain. The humanitarian support towards the children lessened and soon after they began the process of repatriation.

There is a possible link between these two events; both happened in places that showed little initial support for the Basque children's arrival. Scarborough was reported in the newspapers as protesting their arrival, whilst Brechfa was reported to be one of the worst colonies in the country for living conditions. In both colonies the staff often left the children unsupervised. These were likely factors in why the Basque children may have behaved in a rebellious manner on these days, however, neither of the newspapers reported on this.

**'BASQUE CHILDREN'S ATTACK
ON BRITISH CITIZENS'**

**INCIDENT AT
BASQUE CAMP:**

**SCARBOROUGH
STORY THAT
COOK WAS
CHASED BY BOY
WITH KITCHEN
KNIFE**



'UNRULY MOB OF BASQUE CHILDREN'

'POLICE CALLED IN TO STOP "RIOT"'

"TABLES
KNIVES FILED
TO
DAGGERS"

'BASQUE BOYS CAUSE TROUBLE'



FRANCO'S TROOPS CLOSED IN ON BILBAO, AND AT 6PM ON 19 JUNE THE REPORT THAT THE CITY HAD FALLEN REACHED THE CHILDREN IN THE UK



THE CHILDREN WEPT! SOME HID IN THEIR TENTS WHILST OTHERS RAN AWAY AND SPENT THE NIGHT IN THE FOREST/ROAD.



ONE RIGHT WING NEWSPAPER RELEASED AN AGGRESSIVE ARTICLE ABOUT THE CHILDREN'S OUTBURST OF MOURNING.



REPATRIATE THE CHILDREN

After the fall of Bilbao the Francoists launched a campaign to repatriate the Basque children. The presence of many Catholic Basque refugees in the United Kingdom undermined Franco's claim that he was fighting a war to defend the Church. The right-wing and the Catholic Church in England also campaigned for the children to return to Spain.

However, it was still not safe for the children to return as many of their parents were in jail, had been exiled or were too poor to care for their children. This meant that only those whose parents directly requested their return were sent back to Spain. Franco knew this and so provided letters from parents, of which many were fake.

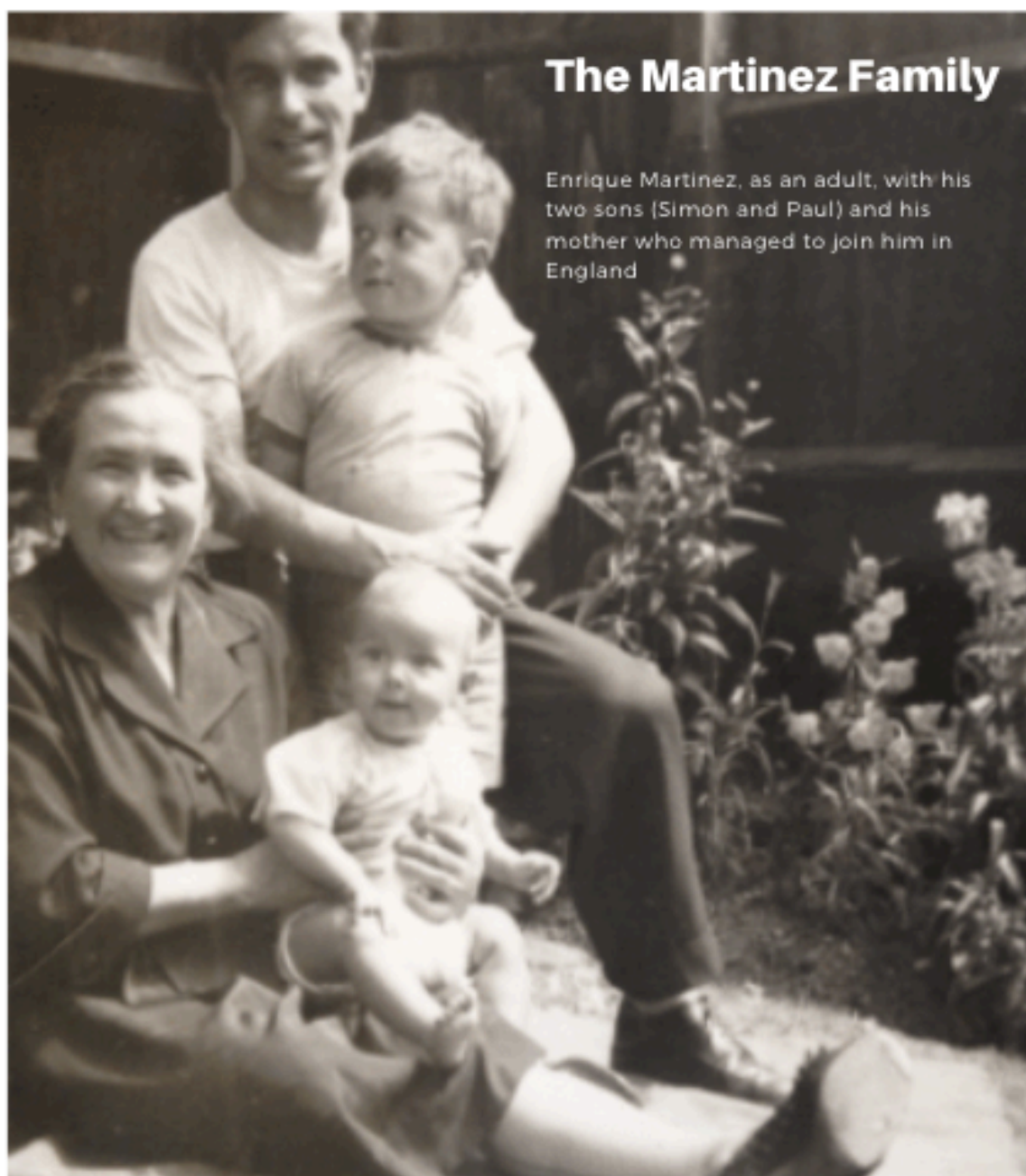
Despite thinking they would only be in the UK for 3 months, about 1,000 children were still in the UK at the start of World War Two. About 250 remained after 1945, some of whom had been taken in by British families. Many chose to remain in the UK and adopted a British identity. In some cases they no longer spoke Spanish.

The children were not used to the Spain they returned to. Some were so young when they left that they had no recollection of life in Spain. The older children returned to a very different Spain to the one they remembered. Although some settled down, others struggled to adjust to the restricting regime and poor living conditions.

Some felt like they no longer belonged after being away for so many years.

THOSE WHO REMAINED IN THE UK

EXPLORING THE IDENTITIES OF THOSE WHO DID NOT RETURN
TO SPAIN





"WE FEEL A FOREIGNER IN BOTH COUNTRIES; WE'RE ENGLISH WHEN WE'RE IN SPAIN AND SPANISH WHEN WE'RE IN ENGLAND; TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH, WE'RE MISFITS IN BOTH PLACES."

TEARS AT THE STATION

Some of these remaining children had become orphans, or their parents could not be traced, leaving them with no home to return to so they remained permanently in the UK, settling down and having families of their own. Starting their own families in Britain was incredibly important to the exiled children, who had tragically lost their own homes and families during the war.

These remaining niños were left with co-existing British and Spanish identities, often feeling like they did not quite fit into either culture.

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For further information visit <https://www.basquechildren.org/>

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TURN ME INTO A BOOKLET

When you print this document it can be easily stapled together to create a visually pleasing, historically focused zine (booklet). Do this as many times as you like!

TURN ME INTO A POSTER BOARD

This resource can also be used to create an invigorating display that catches people's attention and expose stories that have arguably never been heard before by most of the public.

PRINT ME OUT

It has been created by University of Leeds students to be printed out free of charge by anybody who is interested. We hope it sparks your interest as much as it did for us!

SHARE IT ONLINE

By creating an online resource, we hope that we can stimulate some interest online too. Share this on your social media or with friends if you wish as this is a public resource.

Also, if you have any questions please do get in touch with the Basque Children's Association (BCA'37 UK) who would love to hear your thoughts at secretary@basquechildren.org

For more information see <https://www.basquechildren.org/>

WE WANT TO ELEVATE FORGOTTEN VOICES AND STORIES