

# **Conference Report:**

## **Refugees and Exile: commemorating the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Spanish Civil War**

**University of Leeds**

**27 & 28 March 2019**

On 27 and 28 March 2019, the University of Leeds hosted a public conference to showcase some of the latest research on Spanish exile after the Spanish Civil War. Speakers came from a number of universities across the UK and abroad: London, Cardiff, Sheffield, Southampton and York in the UK, as well as Zaragoza, Barcelona, Madrid, Malaga and Paris. The conference was also organised in collaboration with the Basque Children of '37 Association and the International Brigade Memorial Trust, as well as a number of local migration and refugee charities.

The conference opened with a panel on Hispanic exiles in the UK. Charlotte Eaton, PhD student at the LSE, spoke on the experiences of Basque refugee children in Britain and how they perceived the British government's policy of non-intervention in Spain. Eva Nieto McAvoy of the University of Cardiff spoke on Spanish Republican exiles in Britain working for the BBC World Service during the Second World War and their continued struggle against fascism. Maria Vasquez, PhD researcher at the University of Sheffield, discussed the experiences of Chilean refugees who escaped the repression of the Pinochet regime and their experiences in Britain from the 1970s to the present.

The second panel of the day focused on Spanish exiles across Europe during the Second World War and Cold War. Diego Gaspar of the University of Zaragoza presented his research on Spanish exiles who were interned in concentration camps in France after the civil war and later joined the French Free Forces to continue their fight against the tyranny of fascism. Alba Martínez, PhD researcher at the University of Granada, cast new light on the experiences of Spanish women refugees in France during and after the Second World War. Luiza Iordache, researcher at Spain's National Distance Education University, discussed the overlooked plight of Spanish refugees in Soviet Gulags. Olga Glondys, historian at the Complutense University of Madrid, shifted the conference's focus to later in the Cold War and discussed transatlantic networks and the anti-Franco struggle leading up to the 1961 Amnesty Campaign.

The conference's keynote speaker, Luis Montferrer Catalán, discussed his seminal research on Spanish exiles in Britain during the civil war and focused on those who remained in Britain for the rest of their lives.

Day two of the conference opened with an open roundtable discussion and brought together academics working on exile from both historical and contemporary perspectives, as well as representatives of local organisations that work with those who have experienced exile. Representatives came from Migration Yorkshire, the Bahar Women's Association and St. Vincent's. The two-hour discussion fostered the exchange of real-life experiences and academic approaches to the theme of exile and cast light on how refugee crises have changed from the mid-twentieth century to the present.

The final panel of the conference brought together some renowned experts to focus on the aftermath and legacy of the Spanish Civil War. The University of Southampton's Scott Soo, one of the leading experts on Spanish exiles in France after the civil war, discussed the concept of collective memory and

the impact it had on the experiences of Spanish refugees. Mercedes Yusta of Universite Paris-8 spoke on how exile served as a transnational political space for women through a case study of the *Union de Mujeres Españolas*. Richard Baxell, former Chair of the International Brigade Memorial Trust, discussed the continued struggle against fascism among some of the 2,500 British volunteers that served in the International Brigades. Simon Martínez, trustee of the Basque Children of '37 Association and son of one of the child refugees evacuated to the UK in 1937, explored the personal experiences of Basque children in the UK, both those repatriated and those who would remain in the UK.

In addition to the conference, the organisers also worked in collaboration with the Leeds Central Library to put on display exhibitions from the International Brigade Memorial Trust and the Basque Children Association. In the case of the latter, the exhibition displayed personal items which Basque children brought with them to the UK as well as information and photos about the children's journey on the SS Habana and their experiences in the various colonies around Britain. To officially launch the exhibitions, Dr Peter Anderson and Scott Ramsay from the University of Leeds gave public lectures to provide the historical context of the themes of the exhibitions.

**Scott Ramsay**  
**University of Leeds**  
**October 2019**

