

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Southampton
Unit of Assessment: 28 Modern Languages and Linguistics
Title of case study: 28-01 <i>Los Niños: Life Histories of Child Exiles of the Spanish Civil War</i>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The <i>Los Niños</i> oral history project has added a new voice to the discourse around conflict and migration, and in doing so has brought a forgotten chapter of Spanish Civil War history to the attention of the public and media. The insights gathered have found resonance locally, nationally and internationally, as people across three generations gained greater awareness and understanding of the experience of exile. Outputs have been widely disseminated through a digital archive of life stories, a popular oral history book, a virtual and a touring exhibition, a set of online education resources and two documentary films.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Following the bombing of Guernica in 1937, 4,000 children were evacuated from the Basque region of Spain to Southampton – an event that has been widely overlooked in Civil War narratives. The oral history project <i>Los Niños: Child Exiles of the Spanish Civil War</i> (2009-2012) aimed to give surviving evacuees a voice by collecting, preserving and disseminating their personal stories and experiences and feeding into a wider debate on migration. The research was conducted by Dr Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez, Lecturer in Spanish at the University of Southampton (2005-13) in collaboration with Padmini Broomfield, an oral historian at Hampshire Archives and Local Studies, Southampton City Council. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) awarded funding of £47,000 in 2009 [3.1].</p> <p>From the outset, the project involved close engagement with surviving evacuees in Britain and their families. One of the most significant outputs of the research was a digital archive of 30 life histories, compiled by volunteers who had been trained in oral history methods as part of the project. This, together with the published outputs, has added a new perspective to the existing historiography on migration, making children central to the study of violent conflicts and displacement. In turn, the research dissemination activities – including community symposia, commemorative events, talks and multimedia exhibitions – added a transnational and intergenerational dimension to the study. The research demonstrated how different constituencies, groups and individuals responded to difficult past experiences, as well as the meaning they attached to the process of commemoration.</p> <p>Two key insights emerged from the research. Firstly, the life stories of the former evacuee children acknowledge losses at many levels (family, home, language, culture, education and childhood), yet at the same time transcend the dominant image of exile as a traumatic experience. Pozo-Gutiérrez and Broomfield argue that despite the suffering and trauma that is often associated with war and displacement, and despite the disruption to their education, the children developed a wide range of skills that enabled them to adapt and survive in a totally alien environment [3.2]. The <i>Niños'</i> interpretation of their life histories thus feeds into a wider narrative of resilience and adaptation, where migrants and refugees are seen as active agents in their own lives as opposed to mere victims [3.3, 3.4, 3.5].</p> <p>Secondly, the narrators relate their stories in such a way as to reveal that the context and purpose of their storytelling impact on their memories, determining the details they choose to remember and those they forget. The narrators are sometimes conscious of this process, often driven by the awareness of the extraordinary nature of their life journeys and the desire to share their experiences with their descendants. Others are aware of their role in a collective project of 'historical memory recovery' aimed at a wider audience and fulfilling a conciliatory social and political function: claiming a public space for voices that have long remained silenced.</p> <p>Many stories about past events tend to repeat learned and rehearsed 'scripts' that reproduce a</p>

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very generalised account of what in reality were highly individual experiences. Constructing life stories as a collaborative project between the researchers and the *Niños* has produced profound and nuanced findings and shown how the relationship between the Basque children and their own pasts turns out to be highly diverse and often conflictive.

3. References to the research

Grants

[3.1] Heritage Lottery Fund Grant (£47,000) to carry out the project *Los Niños: Child Exiles of the Spanish Civil War* by Dr Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez and Prof Chris Woolgar, University of Southampton, 2009-2012. An additional grant of £1,000 from the Hartley Library enabled further fieldwork in Spain in 2009.

Publications

[3.2] Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez and Padmini Broomfield, 'Education, inspiration and determination: life lessons of child exiles of the Spanish Civil War', in *Words and Silences, Journal of the International Oral History Association*, Vol. 6. No. 1, 2011, pp.37-48. (Article in peer-reviewed journal)

[3.3] Célia Keren and Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez, 'Des cahiers d'enfants aux souvenirs de vieillesse: récits autobiographiques d'anciens enfants espagnols réfugiés, 1940-2006', in *Témoigner. Entre Histoire et Mémoire*, Revue pluridisciplinaire de la Fondation Auschwitz, Dossier *Les enfants de la Guerre d'Espagne. Expériences et représentations culturelles*, Didier Corderot et Danielle Corrado (eds), No. 112 / Juin 2012, pp. 32-44. (Article in peer-reviewed journal)

[3.4] Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez and Padmini Broomfield, "*Here, look after him*": *Voices of Basque Evacuee Children of the Spanish Civil War*, University of Southampton, 2012. (Popular oral history book)

[3.5] Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez, 'Au-delà du script: Histoire(s) des enfants de la guerre civile espagnole en Grande-Bretagne', in *Enfances en guerre. Témoignages d'enfants sur la guerre (UNESCO déc. 2011)*, Genève: Éditions Georg, 2013, pp. 139-153. (Chapter in edited book)

4. Details of the impact

From the outset, researchers formed a close link with the Basque Children of '37 Association, which contributed its archive to the University Library. The collaboration culminated in May 2012 in a two-day event commemorating the 75th anniversary of the *Niños*' arrival in Southampton. Around 100 people attended the event, the highlight of which was the launch of a book co-authored by Pozo-Gutiérrez and Broomfield, "*Here, look after him*": *Voices of Basque Evacuee Children of the Spanish Civil War*. The event provoked strong reactions even in those who had no family ties to the *Niños*. One member of the public commented: "To be able to listen and to speak to people who had either been evacuees themselves or children of evacuees, and through the films to understand something of what they had to go through, was unforgettable". Another attendee remarked on the gap in public knowledge around the Spanish Civil War and the evacuation. After the event, Pozo-Gutiérrez received a number of emails from second-generation descendants of the *Niños*, as well as students and researchers who had been influenced or inspired by the project and book **[5.1]**.

Throughout the project, researchers gave talks to audiences of up to 40 at local community groups including Hampshire Archives and Southampton Arts and Heritage, and impact was sustained through a space in Southampton's new SeaCity Museum (visited by 140,000 people April 2012 – April 2013 **[5.2]**). Talks at international events, including a UNESCO colloquium in Paris, extended the impact beyond the UK. An unexpected consequence of the colloquium showed how the research helped to put the marginal voices of war children on the research agenda: when the UNESCO Turkish delegation protested at the display of children's drawings of the Armenian genocide, President Nicolas Sarkozy defied protestors to announce that denial of the persecutions was to be an offence.

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Researchers also participated in a travelling public exhibition, with venues including the University of Zaragoza; University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria; Southampton Solent University; and Hampshire Records Office [5.3]. In May 2012 an electronic version of the exhibition was made available on the University Library's Special Collections webpage [5.4]. A user commented: "With Libya and now Syria suffering from civil war, the project is hugely significant not just for the *niños* and *maestras* but also as a lesson for the future to us all" [5.5].

The project has inspired several documentary films, bringing the experiences of the Basque children to wider and younger audiences and enabling new generations to make relevant connections with contemporary debates on immigration. Directed by Matt Richards, *To Say Goodbye* is an animated documentary film featuring voice recordings collected during the research. It was released at San Sebastian Film Festival in September 2012 and has been shown in 16 towns and cities in Spain. It has been selected for four international film festivals, including the London Spanish Film Festival, and has been nominated for two awards. During the making of the film a Facebook page acted as a platform to engage with a second and third generation of descendants [5.6]. The forum proved extremely popular and allowed members to participate in the May 2012 symposium via Skype. Following the film's release Pozo-Gutiérrez and producer Izaskun Arandia were interviewed by the regional BBC news team. Arandia said: "The [children] that returned by 1939 got more recognition than those who didn't come back – now with this film they finally get that recognition. The interviews are the core, the backbone of the film. If it wasn't for Alicia's research there would be no film" [5.7]. *Los Niños de Guernica también tienen memoria*, directed by Roberto Menéndez, used footage from the Basque Children of '37 Association's 70th anniversary celebrations. It was released in 2008 and is available on various online sites, such as Vimeo [5.8].

Further reach was achieved through the distribution of a DVD of material gathered during the project. The DVDs were launched in Refugee Week in June 2010 and were distributed to secondary schools across the country and made available to the local exile and refugee community. The testimonies collected as part of the research have also influenced modern languages curricula at the Universities of Southampton, Leeds and Portsmouth through their transformation into Open Educational Resources (OERs) thanks to the JISC-funded project OpenLIVES: Learning Insights from the Voices of Émigrés from Spain, now accessible through the University's digital repository [5.9].

Extensive media coverage of the research by the local, national and international press has substantially increased awareness of the plight of the Basque refugee children and helped to establish connections between past and contemporary refugees. An article published by the Guardian helped raise awareness of the research by including web links [5.10]. Articles in The Times, El País, ABC and La Vanguardia also increased awareness, as did television reports (BBC's *The One Show*, 28 July 2010, Canal + *Informe Robinson*, 30 September 2013), and radio broadcasts locally (BBC Radio Solent) and internationally (BBC World Service *Weekend* 30 September 2012, Radio Nacional de España, RNE, WRadio).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[5.1] Representative of Basque Children's Association.

[5.2] Customer Services Manager, Arts and Heritage, Southampton City Council. For information on the Gateway to the World display at the SeaCity Museum, Southampton:

http://www.seacitymuseum.co.uk/?page_id=309

[5.3] Information on the exhibition forming part of the 75th Anniversary Commemoration:

<http://bit.ly/JanHO7>

[5.4] Electronic version of the travelling exhibition:

www.soton.ac.uk/archives/exhibitions/basques.html

[5.5] Email from exhibition user.

[5.6] Social media activity surrounding the film can be viewed at www.facebook.com/tosaygoodbye

[5.7] Producer of film *To Say Goodbye*. See also BBC news item on the film:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hampshire-19439627>

[5.8] *Los Niños de Guernica también tienen memoria* <http://vimeo.com/43027787>

[5.9] Website of the OpenLIVES project:

http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/digitisation/content2011_2013/openlives.aspx

[5.10] Guardian article: 'Forgotten children of Spain's civil war reunite 75 years after exile' (11 May 2012) <http://bit.ly/JB4IPR>.