

ARTICLE

Photographs of Child Victims in Propaganda Posters of the Spanish Civil War

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This article examines propaganda posters from the Spanish Civil War that used photographs of child victims in an attempt to galvanise support for the Republican war effort. Rather than discuss the efficacy of these posters as persuasive tools, this analysis focuses on their suitability to support propagandistic narratives of the Civil War, which would form and support 'usable pasts' for collectives – understandings of the past that serve a function in the present – such as identity claims, or the basis of demands for justice. In this instance the photographic discourses of these posters supported broader narratives of the Civil War. The use of child subjects afforded narrative flexibility to the photographs employed in these posters, and this was combined with the supposed veracity of the photographic medium, and the ingrained norms of familial photography – that taken of and by family members – to construct narratives with propagandistic value.

Please note: This article contains graphic images of child death.

Regarding War

To set aside the sympathy we extend to others beset by war and murderous politics for a reflection on how our privileges are located on the same map as their suffering, and may – in ways we might prefer not to imagine – be linked to their suffering [...] is a task for which the painful, stirring images supply only an initial spark.

(Sontag 91–92)

So why create and publish such images? And if horrific, disturbing images of conflict and suffering provoke only sympathy and an initial spark for reflection, then why are they reproduced unendingly in news media, posters, cinema, television, and online? Many of the photographs that emerged from the Spanish Civil War remain arresting, disturbing, and emotive today, in spite of fears of the normalisation of atrocity photography in the modern era.

The use of atrocity photography in Spanish propaganda posters is part of a much larger cultural canon of public images of war, and of child victims. However, the specific use of graphic photographs of child victims raises particular questions about these posters. This article addresses *why* these photographs were suited to supporting propagandistic narratives and strategies, rather than attempting to measure the efficacy of their use. This analysis considers the influence of historical visual representations of war, and the inherently familial discourses of 'looks' within photographs of children, as theorised by Hirsch. The documentary

power of photographs, the potential narrative breadth afforded by *anonymous* child subjects, and the familial relationships of 'looking' combine in these posters to construct narratives of war that harness the universal horror of child deaths to galvanise the wartime population to support Republican war efforts.

The cultural reflection, commentary on, and response to narratives of war is, of course, an ancient practice. Laura Brandon supposes that as long as there has been war, there has been war art (1). War art, in its most basic terms, is 'art shaped by war' (Brandon 3), with all of the ranges of professional, permanent, critical, and impressionistic that this now includes.¹ Foreshadowing the graphic images seen in Civil War posters, Francisco de Goya's *Los Desastres de la Guerra* (1810–16) advanced war art beyond the historical glorification of battle and nationalism, while also being 'timeless in its ferocious personal response and its depiction of brutality' (Brandon 1). Although it was arguably Jacques Callot who '[used] art for the first time to protest the conduct of war' (Brandon 26) in *The Large Miseries of War/Miseries and Misfortunes of War* (1633), Goya's images of war were 'incomparably more dramatic and varied in their narrative, more piercing in their documentary power, more savagely beautiful, and, in every way more humanly moving' (Hughes 265).

Women and children fought, were raped, injured, and killed in the 1808 War of Independence, and several of the plates in *Los Desastres* depict this in graphic scenes. Previous battle paintings of heroism and national achievement 'fostered national identity, especially through public display and access and/or reproduction' (Brandon 28). The fundamental change in representations of war in Goya's work was the focus on victim and civilian suffering, displaying war's true barbarity without glorification or justification (Brandon 1; Hughes 265; Hofmann 142). The critical and emotive content of *Los Desastres* marks a turning point in war art, making them 'the ancestors of all great visual war reporting' (Hughes 265).

The manipulation of images to support an external narrative is facilitated by a compositional focus on victims and their anonymity. *Los Desastres de la Guerra* played a dominant role in the cultural memories of the War of Independence, providing memories and images that are still appropriated in contemporary works. However, unlike propaganda posters, Goya's influence on war narratives took place after the war. The prints were published after Goya's death, and were not as easy to reproduce as photographs. The publication of the complete series perhaps parallels books of war photography, rather than press or propaganda dissemination of images. Narratives of the War of Independence, such as its depiction as a Spanish national battle against invading armies and politics, were supported during the Civil War through the use of Goya's work. Due to Goya's status as one of the 'testigos fundamentales' (Rosón and Vega 254) of the 2 May uprising in 1808 'se convirtió en un punto de referencia utilizado por ambos bandos para reclamar sus respectivas partes de la tradición artística española' (Basilio 2008: 99). Propaganda posters such as *iFuera el invasor!* (Bardasano 1937) and *Catalanes Refugiados a treball!!* (Anon. nd.) are just two examples of this influence.² As such, *Los Desastres de la Guerra* precedes the mediation of war narratives seen in later works, but also prefigures them, informing their construction and the cultural history of

¹ The term 'war art' was coined relatively recently; the most closely related terms in the Oxford English Dictionary Online are 'battle-piece', the first recorded usage of which was in 1713, and 'war picture', the first recorded usage of which was in 1883. The latter has since come to include 'a photograph of a scene from the theatre of war; also, a documentary film or action from a war, and [...] a cinematographic film with war as its subject or background', as well as paintings of which the theme is war (OED.com). The entry 'war artist', as first used in 1859, also features in the Oxford English Dictionary Online, defined as 'an artist commissioned to depict events and situations arising during a war', apparently excluding those who work independently, possibly while serving or being victims during wartime.

² More recently, the Chapman brothers have reappropriated several of Goya's pieces as commentaries on modern conflicts (Brandon 2007).

representation on which they draw. Such mediated narratives, form what Wertsch terms 'usable pasts' (*passim*): narratives of events, mediated by cultural artefacts, to serve a purpose, such as supporting identity claims, demands for justice, or erasing the sting of defeat. All of these functions can be seen in the appropriation of Goya's War of Independence narratives by later artists and propagandists.

Although Goya did not see much of what was depicted in *Los Desastres*, he created a unique form: 'that of vivid, camera-can't-lie pictorial journalism long before the invention of the camera, of art devoted reportage, claiming its power as propaganda from its immediacy as an act of witnessing' (Hughes 272).³ This distortion of artistic distance is what Hughes calls Goya's 'illusion in service of the truth: the illusion of being there when dreadful things happen' (272). Such an illusion allowed for the 'as-seen' narration, used to condemn the savagery of war and the brutality of men (Glendinning 61). Subsequent war photography and journalism have continued this style of apparent witnessing, lending assumptions of veracity to the narratives that they convey.

Photographing War

Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it. In one version of its utility, the camera record incriminates.

(Sontag 5)

This apparent truth of photography remains in spite of knowing the photograph or photographer's ability to distort. Sontag asserts that the presumption of the existence of something, or something *similar*, remains. Photographs of war and its suffering began with those of the Crimean War (1853–1856) and the American Civil War (1861–1865), and continued similarly until the First World War (1914–1918). By the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, advances in photography had expanded the possibilities for its use in the news media and visual propaganda. Due to the availability of more portable lightweight cameras and 35 mm thirty-six exposure film, the Spanish Civil War was the first in which photo-journalists were able to work at the front, and therefore could capture images of combat, as opposed to scenes of its aftermath (Sontag 18).⁴ The immediacy of the medium made photographs available for those 'who sought to inform and shape public opinion regarding the causes and consequences of the conflict' (Vernon 1). Spanish and other national presses, as well as propagandists, were able to support their narratives of the war with this visual 'evidence' – narratives that would become the 'usable pasts' on which calls for action, justice, and revenge would be based.

The notion of photographs as evidence is particularly linked to death. Sontag (2004) attributes this suggestion of evidence to the requirement of the subject's presence in front of the camera, creating a 'thereness' of the record, a presence that becomes the central notion within discourses of 'looking' in family photographs – as the exploration of examples of propaganda will demonstrate.

The presumed veracity of photographs lends authority, interest, and seductiveness. However, unlike their ability to solicit desire, photographs must be embedded in a history in order to awaken conscience in a viewer, as conscience and moral feeling are tied to specific historical contexts, as Sontag argues: 'The images that mobilize conscience are always linked to a given

³ Goya was invited to visit Zaragoza to see some of the destruction, after the initial successful defence of the city (Symmons 234).

⁴ The popular predecessor to 35 mm film was 120 film, which allowed a maximum of sixteen exposures.

historical situation. The more general they are, the less likely they are to be effective' (Sontag 17). In the case of propaganda posters, the historical context exists within accompanying wartime narratives, constructed by individuals or by collectives. Sontag is careful to clarify that photographs do not *create* the moral position in the viewer, that this is constructed externally, but that photography may reinforce or nurture a moral position. The depictions of death, specifically child death in propaganda, were undoubtedly related to moral positions that existed beyond political beliefs. As such, it was the evidentiary nature of photographs that allowed for political discourses to build upon viewers' existing morals.

The focus on anonymous victims witnessed in Goya's work, which facilitated the manipulation of images for various narratives, is seen in the photographs used in these propaganda posters. Established forms of formal family photographs by the outbreak of war in 1936 had accustomed people to the norms of viewing child subjects within a familial context. As such, there was the potential for the manipulation of images of children in wartime propaganda. It is worth noting, however, that this type of 'family photography' was class related at the time, not something to be found in family photograph albums in every household, but was nonetheless familiar to the wider Spanish public thanks to the newsprint media. As Hirsch (1997) has demonstrated, even formal photographs of families or family members exist within the familial gaze and participate in the familial looks that played upon in these posters.

Within the Wartime Familial Gaze

The supposed veracity of the photographic medium, the narrative malleability or fluidity afforded by universal, anonymous subjects, and the ingrained familial norms of photography all converge in the construction of wartime narratives in these posters. The photographs used are not traditional family photographs, however; Hirsch's understanding of 'familial gaze' and 'familial looking' provides norms of visual discourse in family photographs (or those with an implied or possible familial connection between viewer and subject).

The 'familial gaze' is an aspect of the national or cultural context of photographs which perpetuates a 'hegemonic familial ideology' (Hirsch 8). The gaze cannot remain static nor ahistoric, and is therefore invalid cross-culturally and transhistorically. This gaze is created by a family mythology: an image to live up to that shapes the desires of individuals within a social group, influenced by historical, social, and economic factors. The camera functions as an instrument of this gaze: the familial gaze situates people as subjects in the ideology of family and the viewer encounters and projects a screen of mythologies and preconceptions between the subject and the camera that shape the representation. Through this screen the subject recognises, and can attempt to contextualise, their embeddedness in familiarity.

Extending this notion to the Spanish Civil War, shifting ideologies of family are represented as a wartime familial gaze draws on existing and emerging myths of family. Myths of family emanating from political, cultural, and religious sources during the Second Republic (1931–1936) and earlier would undoubtedly have existed within conceptions of family during the Civil War. In the immediate pre-war period in Spain there had been many socio-political and legislative changes. Such changes added to exiting shifts caused ripples through discourses, expectations, and experiences of the notion of family. However, it must not be forgotten that changes in governance (including democratic changes) would not have had an immediate or comprehensive impact on the social conscience, and notions of the family based on the 1889 Civil Code, Church teachings, and the 'habitual patriarchal behaviour of Spanish society' (Ginsborg 229) did not just disappear under the secularising Second Republic. Alternative understandings of family (especially women's roles) were supported by lawmakers during the Republic, and joined the traditionalist Catholic conceptions of family within society and

government.⁵ The Spanish wartime familial gaze therefore drew on pre-existing family myths, but with the unavoidable influence of the processes of war.⁶ For example, the model of a family living together with the caregiving mother, as projected by the Church and nationalist groups, is both painfully lacking *and* evoked by wartime posters, for instance Carlos Sáenz de Tejada's *En nuestra justicia está nuestra fuerza* (1937).⁷ Such photographs demonstrate their position in the space of contradiction between the myth of the ideal family and the lived reality of life (Hirsch).

'Familial looks' are discourses established during the creation and viewing of photographs of family members. These 'looks' construct and confirm relations between the subject(s), the photographer, and the intended or later audiences. When these processes involve family members, the reading of 'looks' draws on affective family experiences and narratives. Alongside recognition, this exchange also creates identity. National, historical, and ideological identity claims are thus reinforced through narratives associated with these familial looks.

The returned look of the viewer by the subject is central to the dialogue of familial looks. Drawing on Barthes, Hirsch identifies this return as the confirmative 'ça' of a child recognising the presence of a parent, or the 'ça a été' of an adult viewing their parent in infancy or past life. The reading demanded by family photographs tends to return to 'an ongoing proto-narrative of mother and child, in which the child points, simply saying "ça": assuring himself of his mother's presence and of her (approving) return look' (Hirsch 9). The familial looks exchanged are specifically located, mutual and reversible, traversed by desires, defined by lack, and mediated by the familial gaze.

Similar to the 'thereness' of photographs discussed by Sontag, Hirsch builds on Barthes' notion of a metaphorical umbilical connection with the subject. This renders time delays between the photographs and their viewing insignificant, as it 'links the body of the photographed thing to my [the viewer's] gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed' (Barthes 81). Hirsch observes how in moments of loss this umbilical cord is cut, but reformed by the photographic image-text. This particularly resonates when viewing photographs of child relocation or death in wartime. Their literal separation from their mothers cuts the metaphorical umbilical cord, but they remain visually present.⁸ Embodying a liminal or dual space, '[t]he referent haunts the picture like a ghost: it is a revenant, a return of the lost and dead other' (Hirsch 5).

⁵ The traditionalist patriarchal notions of male authority within the family, and of female duty and abnegation were updated in the 1931 constitution of the Second Republic (Ginsborg 229–230). Article 43 of the 1931 Constitución introduced equal rights in marriage for women and men, divorce by mutual consent, and established parental duties for both parents for all children (legitimate or otherwise) (Congreso de los diputados np).

⁶ Although often described as a fratricidal conflict, an enormous change in the family myth would be necessary for the acceptance of fratricide as part of Spanish understandings and expectations of familial relations. The war was indeed bloody, and pitted family members with opposing social, political, and religious views against one another; however, Ginsborg notes that except for the score-settling of *rencillas*, killings were usually carried out by people from different villages or towns, not family members, and that suggestions from divided families are that divisions were across political lines, not emotional ones. In fact many testimonies posit that family connections across political divides (including extended family such as godparents) could be essential for survival, and that 'a great many families, far from being fratricidal in the literal sense of the word, seem to have expressed a great sense of solidarity, loyalty and love, confirming [...] suggestions of the long-standing power of Spanish family ties' (Ginsborg 274).

⁷ Nash (160) describes the nationalist crusade for the restoration of the family as the primary social unit of Spanish society. In this understanding of the family, the woman's role was as mother and confined to the domestic sphere.

⁸ Hirsch focuses on loss in terms of the death of the subject of the photograph, but evacuated children's indefinite absence undoubtedly stirred fears and resonances of similar loss for their parents. In some cases, evacuation became permanent separation. Many evacuees were never returned, or died before their intended return, and

Owing to the ability to reveal familial complexities,

[a]rtists and writers have thus attempted to use the very instruments of ideology, the camera, the album, and the familial gaze, as modes of questioning, resistance, and contestation. They have interrogated not only the family itself, but its traditions of representation. They have shown that in disrupting their own documentary authority and their use as evidence [...] photographs and become powerful weapons of social attitudinal change (Hirsch 7–8).

Atrocity Photography as Propaganda

Photographs of child victims were suitable for use in particular modes of propaganda. Although theories of propagandistic strategy and efficacy are not the focus of this article, an understanding of the propagandistic needs that these images fulfilled is necessary in the reading of the discourses that they conveyed. Unlike the delayed release of Goya's *Los Desastres de la Guerra*, posters were considered an ephemeral art form, providing 'arte de urgencia' (Grimau 18; Labanyi 162), and those using photography even more so, due to its immediacy and its increased presence in journalism (Sontag 18–19). The developing associations of photographs with frontline reporting, combined with the universally shocking images of child victims, created propaganda that produced an unsustainable level of shock and reactive engagement in the Republican cause. Atrocity photography therefore became an important tool in this type of high-energy visual propaganda.

Of the propaganda models identified by Ellul, propaganda of agitation, rather than integration, is the most common during wartime (71) – and is a concept most commonly seen in propaganda of opposition, often used by those seeking rebellion. However, it can also be employed by those seeking to 'galvanize energies to mobilize the entire nation for war' (Ellul 71) in defence of existing power structures – as was the case with Spanish Republican propaganda. In both cases, the 'enemy' is undermined, so that they may be overcome by physical and psychological means. As photographic subjects, child victims of war met the requirements of high-energy propaganda of agitation: the need to address and affect individuals within a collective, and to elicit and capitalise on base sentiments against an enemy.

Propaganda can never target just individuals, as to create convictions in someone in isolation is impossible (Ellul 6). Conversely, 'any propaganda that aimed only at groups [...] as if a mass were a specific body having a soul and reactions and feelings entirely different from individuals' souls, reactions, and feelings – would be an abstract propaganda that likewise would have no effectiveness' (Ellul 6). In this sense, propaganda must appeal to its target audience at both an individual and collective level in order to be successful. In these posters the images of child victims are universally affective, with the impact of a child's death exiting beyond all social and national boundaries. These children are also affiliated with the viewers. Although there is an inherent distancing in the mediated viewing of a subject through a photograph, these children are presented as part of the Republican collective, to which the viewer is expected or encouraged to belong as well. The language of these posters is often inclusive of the viewer; for example, in the posters *Defiende a tu hijo!* (Tejada 1936) and *Los niños evacuados son vuestros propios hijos* (Cluselles Albertí 1937), collective or familial links exist between the viewers and the children in the images.⁹ As such, the universal affective

the majority of those evacuated to the Soviet Union did not return until 1956 (Totoricagüena 353). Furthermore, of those who did return after the war, some were subjected to illegal forced adoptions and name changes by families favoured by the Franco regime (Duva and Junquera 13–14).

⁹ *Defiende a tu hijo!* can be seen via the Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deportes online archive: <http://pares.mcu.es/cartelesGC/servlets/visorServlet?cartel=15&page=1&from=catalogo>, as can *Los niños [...]* <http://pares.mcu.es/cartelesGC/servlets/visorServlet?cartel=625&page=1&from=busqueda>.

power of infant suffering is more specifically targeted to individual Spanish Republicans. The rhetoric of the posters addresses viewers as supporters of the Republican cause, but those not vehemently in support of either political grouping may nonetheless have been unlikely to strongly disassociate themselves from a message of child protection or mourning. An apolitical moral basis for these posters therefore allows individuals to be addressed across the political spectrum.

At its core, subversive propaganda of agitation must be addressed to 'the most simple and violent sentiments' (Ellul 73).¹⁰ Most commonly elicited by propaganda is the feeling of hatred, often by 'attributing one's misfortunes and sins to "another" who must be killed in order to assure the disappearance of those misfortunes and sins' (Ellul 73). The directing of hatred and blame towards another is part of the construction of a 'usable past', in this case motivating support for the Republican cause. As such, propaganda can 'gain acceptance for the biggest lies, the worst delusions – sentiments that act immediately, provoke violent reactions, and awaken such passions that they justify all sacrifices' (Ellul 74). The need to 'justify all sacrifices' was essential in a war in which great losses and apparent hopelessness had to be combated by the Republican government, whose military tactics and defence of civilians was reactionary and chaotic compared with the military rebels' approach (Preston *xiii*). The use of photographs of atrocities accompanied a narrative of what had happened, used not for grieving but for mobilisation and support. Images of child mortality will always be shocking and abhorrent, but these posters' treatment of the child subjects provokes further shock. The photographs, or the use of them, refuse to treat these victims with the usual discretion or sensitivity that is expected with victims close to home; '[t]o display the dead, after all, is what the enemy does' (Sontag 57). These child victims are depicted with a frankness reserved for *other* victims, not that expected for Spanish victims on home soil.¹¹ The composition of these images disrupts the norms of visual discourse, adding strength to their visual 'evidence' of the accompanying propagandistic narratives.

Unshrouded Victimhood

Photographs of child victimhood used in Republican propaganda posters included atrocity photography of child deaths, and images illustrating the upheaval and protection of children from wartime dangers. All drew on the exchange of familial looks within the wartime familial gaze, although in photographs of child mortality the lack of returned looks subverts the norms of familial looks.

In posters about child protection the return of the viewers' looks by child subjects confirms their safety and presence. For example, in *Estoy muy bien madre!* (Anon. 1936–1937), eight photographs in comic-strip style rows document the evacuation of children from war-ravaged Madrid to safer areas.¹² The first four photographs are captioned and depict the reasons for protective evacuation: a photograph of a bombed Madrid street; three children sleeping in the metro; three other children with a doll; and three more smiling, and possibly eating.¹³

¹⁰ This is not to say all Republican propaganda only appealed to base feelings of the Spanish people; early pieces that focused on cultural events, for example, appealed to ideological and intellectual reasoning. However, the cases of infant mortality and absent children in the Republican posters exemplify and evoke core sentiments in response to violence and death.

¹¹ As Sontag surmises, 'The more remote or exotic the place, the more likely we are to have full frontal views of the dead and dying. Thus postcolonial Africa exists in the consciousness of the general public of the rich world [...] mainly as a succession of unforgettable photographs of large-eyed victims' (63).

¹² A copy of this poster can be seen via the Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte archive: <http://pares.mcu.es/cartelesGC/servlets/visorServlet?cartel=618&page=1&from=busqueda>.

¹³ The captioned text of these images is as follows: 1. 'Madrid destruido, el Madrid heróico sometido a las bombas de la aviación y a los obuses'; 2. 'para salvar su vida, contantemente en peligro, los niños duermen en el metro'; 3. 'se alejan algunos en busca de la seguridad que otras zonas les ofrecen'; 4. 'vuelven a reír los pequeñuelos, ya han vuelto a la vida, a ellos les corresponde la paz'.

The following four frames depict the experiences of relocated children: a child being bathed; children playing with a toy boat; a girl with a doll; and a large country house.¹⁴ Over these images is a larger photograph of a smiling girl writing a letter, and the quotation 'Estoy muy bien madre!'

The three children with the doll, and the three smiling boys, in the third and fourth photographs, are looking at the camera and return the viewer's look, implied to be that of relocated children's parents. Their affirmative returning look visually confirms their presence, a happy and safe one as underscored by the captions. The little girl writing in the enlarged photograph further reassures the viewers of the safety of relocated children. Although she does not look towards the camera, the accompanying text, presented as her writing, directly addresses the audience and responds to their need for affirmation of the security and happiness of relocated children.

The children sleeping in the metro in the second photograph are in imminent danger of aerial attacks. They face the camera, but do not meet the look of the viewer – this image lacks the confirming or reassuring 'thereness' or 'ça a été' of other photographs. The subjects' inability to return the viewers' looks is an uncanny reminder or precursor to images of dead children seen in other posters and the press.

In a country with widespread illiteracy, as Spain was in 1936, images were afforded the maximum privilege in posters to ensure that their message was understood (Grimau 26). Efforts to improve literacy rates were made, and as part of the Republic's 'frente cultural' (Grimau 26–28; Labanyi 161) the Ministerio de Instrucción Pública created cultural militias, whose aim was to 'luchar contra el analfabetismo y conservar el patrimonio artístico' (Eguizábal 163). This movement was rooted in the notion that illiteracy and ignorance had long been powerful tools of oppression (Eguizábal 163).

Nevertheless, images dominated propagandistic communication in posters. High levels of illiteracy and the challenges of mass distribution do not inhibit the effective deployment of propaganda of this type, as its basis in core sentiments means that 'such propaganda feeds on itself, and each person seized by it becomes in turn a propagandist' (Ellul 76). Although guided by the text, the images serve to demonstrate a narrative of improving circumstances for children, in a format familiar to audiences. The affirmative returned looks provide a visual message of 'thereness' or 'ça', accessible to all viewers. However, the concern for the children in the metro forewarns about the victimhood of children facing aerial bombardments. They are, after all, not the same children depicted in the photographs of those who have been safely relocated.

In addition to narratives of child protection in response to enemy threats, narratives of opposition killings of children were disseminated with photographs of child victims. These posters using images of child deaths demonstrate a subversion of the norms of looking, creating powerful narratives harnessed in support of propagandistic 'usable pasts'. In these posters the child victims are displayed with an indignity usually seen with *other(ed)* victims. These children are not othered in an orientalist sense, as is often the case in news reports of victims from distant, foreign conflicts, in which their photographic treatment underscores the psychological and geographical distance from the audience. The exclusion of these Spanish children is through the display of their corpses, a practice associated with enemy or foreign fatalities, and the inherent distance created by the mediated gaze of the photograph and posters. The Spanish children are placed in a conflicting position in which they are both children of the collective Republican cause, and distant innocent victims whose deaths have occurred at 'another' front.

¹⁴ The final four images have one line captioning them all, 'Todo el afecto para ellos, que son el mañana'.

Yet, these children *are* close to home, and the shock of the posters is compounded by this inappropriate display of these victims, jarring with all other information presented. The victorious display of the beaten enemy occurs in adult, battlefield contexts, and the dead and dying of postcolonial nations are too distant and unfamiliar to be comforted. But these children are in Spain. Their geographical and cultural proximity is unavoidable in these posters. They are identified as non-combatant victims of Republican Spain, the Republican Spain to which the viewer is expected to be loyal and feel a part of.

The shock and indignity of displaying photographs of the unshrouded faces of child victims is afforded further narrative power in circumstances in which children are considered part of a collective or familial group. The dynamics of familial looks in these images provide narrative depth that supports their propagandistic power and rhetoric. If the posters about child protection saw the parental look met with affirmation of existence, then in these images of dead children, destruction or 'ce n'est pas ça', is confirmed. This refusal of the parental look, confirming the loss of life, is seen in the most disturbing posters of the conflict.

¡Aseinos! (Pérez 1936–1937) (Figure 1)

On a red background, eight photographs in two rows show children facing outwards, towards the viewer. Their lifeless bodies are numbered; their unshrouded faces demand focus. This is particularly shocking, perhaps because '[w]ith our dead, there has always been a powerful interdiction against showing the naked face' (Sontag 63). There is a disturbing uncanniness to these images, as for a moment they perhaps suggest sleep, in turn evoking viewers' experiences of the positioning of infants after natural deaths soon after birth. In a war in which it was possible to capture the much sought after 'moment of death' in photojournalism (Sontag), epitomised perhaps in *Death of a Republican Soldier* (Capa 1936), these photographs do not show dying, the moment of death, or the suffering that preceded it. They instead show the trace and ruin of war, the loss of life and what remains. In a war in which battles *could* be photographed, there is an attention-grabbing stillness and quiet to photographs of the aftermath and the horror that must be processed by survivors.

The children's identities are simultaneously abolished and displayed. Their names are unknown to the viewers, but have been replaced with identifying numbers. This pragmatic identification removes all humanity, and adds to the association of photography with the documentation of evidence.¹⁵ Whether relatives have identified the corpses or not is unknown. The absence of any further visual context adds to the strange silence of these photographs. The adult discourses of grief and anger are demonstrated in other photographs of adult and child deaths from the Civil War, but the absolute universality of these children remains, entirely separated from any information on their parents' politics, their class – even their attempts to escape have been erased. A very limited amount of information can be gleaned from the scant contextual evidence available in each of the images, such as signs of medical treatment before the children's deaths and details of their clothes.

The accompanying text provides the propagandistic narrative for these horrifying images. The voice is not that of the children, nor is it speaking on their behalf; rather, it is a detached commentary on the events and a call for action in response. As such, the use of the hatred elicited against the enemy as a response to these child deaths in order to mobilise individuals, as required by propaganda of agitation, is clear to see. The children are denied all agency, their visibility but inability to engage in a discourse of looks confirms their presence and their deaths.

¹⁵ For later viewers, such identification of victims of war through numbering will, of course, become part of the vast human rights atrocities of the twentieth century, including the numbering of prisoners in Nazi concentration camps, as well as the tendency to focus on the counting of bodies in historical enquiry.



Figure 1: Pérez Contel/Alianza de Intelectuales para la Defensa de la Cultura. 1936–1937. *¡Asesinos!/¿quién al ver esto, no empuña un fusil para aplastar al fascismo destructor?: niños muertos en Madrid por las bombas facciosas...* Distributed by Ministerio de Propaganda. Gráficas Valencia, intervenido UGT-CNT.

The images of these dead children appear to be the source for several other posters, reminding the viewer of the facile appropriation or even manipulation of such anonymous images.¹⁶

Mañana el mundo, hoy España (Anon. n.d.)

Once more the children's corpses face outwards, this time fanned around an apparently official communication from Germany, headed by a Swastika, and with a photograph of Hitler above the children's heads.¹⁷ After the infamous bombing of Gernika, Picasso's masterpiece *Guernica* shared the horror of the Luftwaffe's involvement in the Spanish war with the

¹⁶ Due to the largely anonymous and collective process of poster design and production, the order in which these were produced is hard to ascertain. The source of these photographs was probably through Soviet journalist Mikhail Koltsov, who wrote of receiving them, but did not attribute a photographer to the images (Stradling 104). However, which poster used them first is unknown.

¹⁷ Unfortunately, this poster is not available in the online archives of the Imperial War Museum, or the Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte archives; however, a small copy is available via: <http://libraries.ucsd.edu/spec-coll/scwmemory/>.

world. Like Picasso's painting, this poster provides the international context for the murder of anonymous innocents on Spanish soil.¹⁸

From the numbers that mark the corpses, the repetition of the photographs of the children from *iAsesinos!* is confirmed, the most clear being the girl with the number 29 on her chest. These are in fact artistic reproductions of the photographs, as opposed to re-cropped versions, but their photographic source and aesthetic are evident. Placed over a map of Spain, and with the possible audience familiarity with the children's images, these are unequivocally Spanish child victims. Now contextualised within a pan-European fascist threat, the discourse of looks – or rather the refused look of the viewers – (correctly) predicts the child victimhood to come in Europe. Hitler's salute appears to direct the pictured Nazi planes towards France, indicating that after bombing Spain the fascist assault would continue across Europe, with a photograph of a smiling blond baby placed next to Paris, understood as next target for the killing of innocents.

Madrid: The 'Military' Practice of the Rebels (Anon. 1937) (Figure 2)

Possibly the most famous poster from the Spanish Civil War in Britain, the broader European threat is once more a salient theme in *Madrid: The 'Military' Practice of the Rebels*. Circulated in Britain and France, this poster also directly confronts the audience with the dangers of

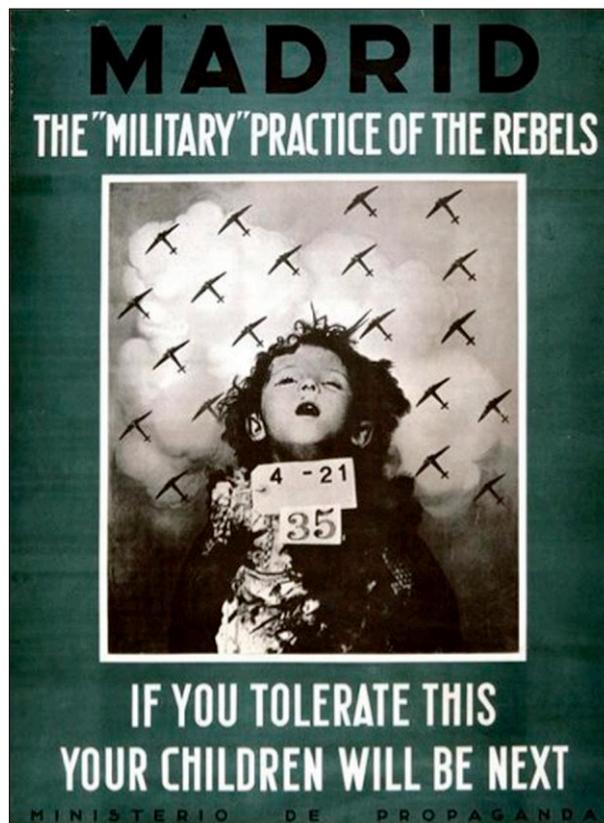


Figure 2: Anonymous, 1937. *Madrid: The 'Military' Practice of the Rebels*. Distributed by Ministerio de Propaganda.

¹⁸ Although Picasso's piece was not marked with any Nazi iconography, its title and display at the Paris World's Fair arguably presented the international significance of the Spanish conflict and of Germany's involvement.

European fascism and total warfare. The subtitle, 'If you tolerate this your children will be next', addresses the viewer with a call to arms, this threat to the children of Britain reinforced by the death of a Spanish girl. The bombers in the background fly in formation to the top left of the poster, or to the northwest of Spain, towards British shores. The planes are, however, not the central focus of this poster. The image of child '4–21: 35', once more taken from *iAsesinos!*, may at first look not to be dead; she is 'facing' the camera, almost looking out. On closer examination, the reality of the image and its implications with regards to this new form of warfare are realised by the viewer.

This photograph provides the 'ce n'est pas ça' of that which has been lost and is now absent, through the inability of the dead girl to return the look of the viewer. The text, though, reiterates 'reality' or 'thereness' – the 'ça' of the situation cannot be ignored, this *is* happening – and adds the secondary messages of propaganda of agitation: a call to arms in order to protect the basic needs of the people, in this instance, security.¹⁹

¡Esto es el fascismo! (Padial 1936–1939) and ¡Kultur! (Muro 1936–1939)

It was not simply one group of children's deaths that were used in the propaganda posters of the Spanish Republican war effort. Two further examples here depict child death within the broader threat of European fascist ideology.

¡Esto es el fascismo! frames four photographs of the ruins of war within a Swastika, again evoking the link to German fascism and its threat to Spain and the rest of Europe. This poster combines photographs and graphics, stylising the bottom-right photograph, labelled 'y muerte', to exaggerate blood that is not confined to the frame of the photograph but instead covers part of the Swastika and the bottom half of the poster – another symbolic acknowledgement perhaps of the impossibility of confining the deaths perpetrated by the fascist enemies. The bodies depicting death in the image are unclear and muddled, there may or may not be the body of a child there, but the victimhood of children is demonstrated in the upper-left photograph, labelled 'miseria...', in which a young girl carries a baby girl next to her solemn mother. The paratextual narrative provided in this poster is minimal, although it highlights what it sees as the effects of fascism – 'miseria... destrucción... persecución... y muerte' – the context and circumstances of the images are left open to interpretation. The image of the family is perhaps suggested as the response to a scene similar to that next to it, 'destrucción' in which a home has been torn open. Sontag has written on how both the destruction of cityscapes and depictions of moments prior to certain death (of which the photograph entitled 'persecución' could well be) elicit a similar response to those of moments of pain and suffering seen in such photographs as these.

The icon of the Swastika is also used in the next example, *iKultur!*, issued in French by the Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores. The photographs are this time framed within the shape of the Swastika and numbered, the numbers corresponding to captions at the bottom of the poster. Behind the Swastika are further images of aerial bombardments within plumes of smoke. There are eleven photographs of what are labelled as attacks on Madrid, three of which show images of dead children. The corpses are once more unshrouded, but their faces are not immediately visible, and they do not appear to be directly facing the camera. The focus of this poster is clearly the threat of the rise of European fascism, a threat that history now reveals was a very real and present one for France. This image draws on universals of wartime destruction and the internationally recognised symbol of the Swastika, which

¹⁹ The international 'witnessing' of these children is part of this call to arms and the significance of these haunting photographs is discussed in Arturo Barea's 1946 novel *La llama*. Drawing on his experiences at the Oficina de Censura y Prensa Extranjera during the Civil War, and referring to these same photographs, the sentiment that 'las caras de aquellos niños asesinados tenía que verlas el mundo' (234) is clear in these posters.

arguably represented a more threatening political force across Europe than the Yugo y las Flechas associated with burgeoning Spanish fascism. The use here of the Swastika broadens the narrative to include the spread of European fascism, but also might be seeking to portray fascism as fundamentally 'un-Spanish' and 'foreign' so as to appeal to a unifying patriotic discourse amongst Spaniards.

Conclusion

[Goya] was the first painter in history to set forth the sober truth about human conflict: that it kills, and kills again, and that its killing obeys urges embedded at least as deeply in the human psyche as any impulse toward pity, fraternity, or mercy. Most of all, he drives home the undeniable message that *there is nothing noble about war*.

(Hughes 289, emphasis added)

A uniformed man stands at a calm shoreline, dwarfing the limp body of a toddler that lies in the surf. The little boy will later be identified as three-year-old Aylan Kurdi, a Syrian refugee who drowned with his mother Rhean and five-year-old brother Ghalib while trying to reach Kos. Aylan's unshrouded face is uncomfortably visible. There is no urgency in the police officer's stance; he is not rushing to lift Aylan's nose and mouth out of the shallow water. It is all too clear that this boy, whose homeland has been in conflict his whole life, cannot be saved.

The image, published globally on 2 September 2015, was said to have encapsulated '[t]he full horror of the human tragedy' of the Syrian conflict and refugee crisis (Smith). One thing can be said for certain about publishing photographs of child victims: it does not halt their being killed. Sadly, the reader can recall too many other images of fleeing, dying, and dead children of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.²⁰

There is nothing noble about war, nothing noble about the killing of children, and indeed nothing noble about displaying those dead children on posters in the streets. The use of photographs of anonymous child victims in Spanish propaganda posters is difficult to defend morally, but their use in this way demonstrates continued development in twentieth-century representations of war. If Goya's aim was to use victim suffering to condemn the barbarity and futility of war beyond all political boundaries, then these posters used victim suffering to elicit hatred and further violence along specifically political lines. The technological advances in photography, and the cultural development of relationships of looking between subject and viewer strengthened the narrative potential of these images in wartime propaganda. As in *Los Desastres de la Guerra*, an examination of the veracity of the 'witnessing' presented is less important than the *perceived* veracity of the visual narrative by audiences.²¹ Building on Goya's introduction of the suffering of anonymous innocents, and the narrative potential created by their universality, a series of propaganda posters in which the visual narrative confirmed the deaths of children belonging to the Spanish collective was displayed internationally. These child victims and their images became part of 'usable pasts' of the Spanish Civil War, calling citizens to arms to

²⁰ It should be noted that although coverage of the ongoing conflict in Syria is beyond the scope of this article, Western press coverage has been imbalanced in its portrayal of civilian deaths. It can be anecdotally acknowledged that in the aftermath of US air strikes graphic images of civilian injury and death have not been widely published. This is in contrast with the photographs of Omran Daqneesh, a five-year-old Syrian pictured bloodied in an ambulance after a regime airstrike, published a year after the images of Aylan Kurdi (Hunt). Clearly, there is a broader discussion here of the reporting, written and photographic, of casualties of war.

²¹ Contentions around where the children in these posters were killed (Stradling 104) have had no effect on the narratives presented, nor the documentary quality of the use of photography. The fact that Spanish children were killed by aerial attacks remains, and is indisputable in these photographs.

fight for the Republic. In the decades and conflicts since, images of victims have built upon this development in the possibilities afforded to propagandists by photography, anonymity, universality, and the familial.

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