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The Anarchist in Uniform: The Militarisation of Anarchist Culture during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939)

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During the Spanish Civil War, the Spanish anarchist movement became not only the driving force behind a social revolution but an active participant in an increasingly modern conflict which would eventually see thousands of its affiliates and militants serving on the frontline within the Republican Army. This article proposes to examine how military images, themes and symbols came to dominate anarchism's wartime culture, in the process reconciling their antimilitarist ideals with front-line service and asserting their exceptional quality as antifascist warriors. Examining a geographically and ideologically broad set of cultural materials, this article demonstrates a high degree of participation by many sections of the anarchist movement in the heavily militarised culture of the wartime Republic and European antifascism. This manifested itself in cults of battlefield heroism, the veneration of combative masculinity and the situating of 'the front' as the moral centre of the movement.

Introduction

We have never felt, when listening to drums and bugles, but a concentrated hatred towards everything military. Today, now, in these moments in which, feverishly and wildly, we write these lines, down the street . . . the beat of the drum [and] the call of the bugle, announce to us that the militiamen are passing on their way to the front. And . . . they are ours! 'They are ours!', we say to each other without speaking, while the bugles and drums that we hated before are for us, now that we are at war, the music that moves us and launches us into the fight. They are ours! They are ours! They are our brothers! The best, the bravest, the noblest of our youth!

Nosotros, 4 March 1937¹

Few associations would appear more logical than that of anarchism and antimilitarism.² The Spanish anarchist movement appears a case in point, having emerged from and operated within a working-class culture long alienated from the military through a series of mismanaged imperial expeditions and the importation of colonial repressive practices to the peninsular.³ Yet, during the Spanish Civil War, these avowed antimilitarists became active participants in an increasingly modern conflict within a uniformed regular army and the state-led Republican war-effort. This prompted a major

¹ 'Los nuestros', *Nosotros* (4 Mar. 1937), 1.

² That is, an opposition to the pursuit of war by the state through the curbing or dismantling of the military. For a detailed examination of divergent anarchist responses to war and military service in the early-twentieth century, see Ruth Kinna and Matthew Adams, eds., *Anarchism, 1914–18: Internationalism, Anti-Militarism and War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).

³ José Álvarez Junco, 'Leftist Militarism and Anti-Militarism, 1875–1936', in Rafael Bañón Martínez and Thomas Mack Barker, eds., *Armed Forces and Society in Spain Past and Present*, (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 1988), 163–72. For the importation of colonial practices prior to the war: Eduardo González Calleja, 'Experiencia en combate: continuidad y cambios en la violencia represiva (1931–1939)', *Ayer*, 76 (2009), 37–46.

rupture in the Spanish anarchist movement between the authoritarian leadership of the anarchist syndical organisation, the National Confederation of Labour (*Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*; CNT), and the militant sections of the movement that strived to maintain anarchist orthodoxy against, what Danny Evans terms, the ‘recession of revolutionary horizons.’⁴ Although the political and organisational dynamics of this struggle have been well-analysed, a major cultural shift was also at work in the anarchist movement manifested in the proliferation and elevation of martial symbols not only within the outlets of the Higher Committees (the leadership bodies of Spain’s anarcho-syndicalist movement) but also those of their anti-statist critics, as shown in the extract above.⁵ For while many anarchists decried the resurgence of the Republican state and the authoritarian behaviour of their leadership, they were nonetheless willing to instrumentalise a common repertoire of martial symbols, tropes and archetypes in their battle for organisational hegemony. During the Civil War, anarchism’s hero-martyr traditions came to hail not only the combative masculinity of the gunslinger (*pistolero*) but the technical achievements of the officer, the engineer, and the commissar. For some, military service became a vital step in the emancipation of the working-class by stripping the soldier of his material dependencies, allowing him to attain a more moral and enlightened status. These symbols and narratives drew significantly from the wider antifascist ‘war culture’ of the interwar Spanish left which constituted one of the central mobilising narratives of the Republican wartime coalition.

One could interpret such expressions as hollow propagandising on behalf of an unrepresentative leadership clique, prepared to abandon the achievements of the Spanish Revolution in its alliance with the Republican state. Yet the strength of these images was that they employed the symbolic languages of both revolution *and* antifascism, as spoken by anarchism’s militants in uniform, namely Cipriano Mera, Ricardo Sanz, and Miguel García Vivancos. Through these representations, anarchists serving in the Popular Army were reconstructed as an antifascist elite responsible for Republican victories at Madrid, Guadalajara, and Teruel. Emasculating notions of discipline, crucial to proletarian antimilitarist sentiment, were replaced with homosocial ideals of camaraderie, sacrifice, and bravery. Although many anarchists opposed collaboration and militarisation, few questioned the symbolic importance of the masculine combatant and the role of the front in fomenting revolutionary virtues, away from the corrupt, bourgeois rear areas. Hence, the very strength of the Higher Committees’ narrative was that it employed hegemonic cultural symbols shared by the entire wartime movement.⁶

This article examines representations of anarchist combatants in the movement’s regional and national press over the course of the Civil War, demonstrating how military values came to permeate an apparently antimilitarist culture. Though this militarisation process was a response to the antifascist ‘war culture’ that swept Republican Spain, it also reflected the tension between anarchism’s

⁴ Danny Evans, *Revolution and the State: Anarchism in the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2020), 207; José Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution* (Oakland: PM Press, 2001), Vol. 1, 243. For variations on this theme, see: Helen Graham, “Against the State”: A Genealogy of the Barcelona May Days (1937)’, *European History Quarterly*, 29, 4 (1999), 509; Stuart Christie, *We, the Anarchists!: A Study of the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI), 1927–1937* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2000), 202–3; Julián Casanova, *Anarchism, the Republic, and Civil War in Spain, 1931–1939* (London: Routledge, 2005), 115; Abel Paz, *Story of the Iron Column: Militant Anarchism in the Spanish Civil War* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011); Diego Abad de Santillán, *Por qué perdimos la guerra: una contribución a la historia de la tragedia española* (Cordoba: Almuzara, 2018).

⁵ *Nosotros*, the publication of the FAI in Valencia, provided a platform for vocal critics of the anarchist movement’s concessions to the Republican state, including the militarisation of its militia columns from October 1936 to June 1937. Thereafter, however, it was subordinated to the Peninsular Committee of the FAI, ending its oppositional stance; see Evans, *Revolution*, 61.

⁶ I am employing a broad definition of Antonio Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony as the maintenance of political power by a ‘historical bloc’ through the propagation of its values which are adopted as the common-sense values of wider society. Subordinate groups respond by attempting to construct a counterhegemony, producing a struggle to influence popular consciousness; see David Forgacs, ed., *A Gramsci Reader* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2000), 423–24. For an application to the Second Spanish Republic (1931–39), see Sandie Holguín, *Creating Spaniards: Culture and National Identity in Republican Spain* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).

enlightenment yearning for universal peace and its romantic veneration of popular violence. By mapping the extensive and, occasionally enthusiastic, engagement of the Spanish anarchists with military values and archetypes, this paper also aims to widen existing understandings of militarism and militarisation – which generally link such concepts to the state and institutionalised militaries – by demonstrating how this system of belief can be reinterpreted and instrumentalised by anti-statist movements.⁷

Print was crucial to the establishment and expansion of modern Spanish anarchism, fostering the creation of an actionable ideology and acting as a connective medium between its disparate sections.⁸ During the Civil War, periodicals and newspapers continued to provide a forum for anarchist militants, of all levels, to debate and contest the direction of the movement. Consequently, while these texts do not offer a reliable reconstruction of specific events, they nonetheless provide a valuable window into the ideological divergences and commonalities within their collaborative political culture.⁹ At the same time, addressing generalisable themes – in this case, war and military values – allows the Spanish anarchists to be situated comparatively among histories of subaltern groups which have asserted their agency through military service, in the process widening definitions of military identity and the functions of military institutions.¹⁰ In demonstrating anarchism's contributions towards the antifascist 'war culture' of the interwar period, this research is also consciously aligned with efforts to banish notions of the Spanish anarchists' exceptionalism and to integrate this movement within the wider history of the international left.¹¹

This article will begin by examining responses to war and militarism within European anarchism, noting how the Spanish anarchists' ambiguous intellectual inheritance allowed for a 'popular' militarism to co-exist alongside institutional antimilitarism. Following this, it will outline the dimensions of this popular-militarist vision, beginning with the propagation of a revolutionary brand of military heroism in the early months of the civil war before detailing how the Battle of Madrid enabled this revolutionary militarism to combine with wider traditions of antifascist war, establishing a new pantheon of anarchist military leaders. The final section will examine how anarchists disputed and negotiated manifestations of this militarising process (particularly surrounding the imposition of 'discipline') while retaining the overall vision of the frontline as the moral centre of the movement.

⁷ A full discussion of militarism and militarisation is beyond the scope of this article, but it must be emphasised that these terms have variously been defined as reflecting a set of positive or supportive attitudes towards war and the institution of the military and those focusing on the role of the military/military attitudes and practices in society; see Alfred Vagts, *A History of Militarism: Civilian and Military* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1959), 13; Peter H. Wilson, 'Defining Military Culture', *The Journal of Military History*, 72, 1 (2008), 41; Laurence Cole, *Military Culture and Popular Patriotism in Late Imperial Austria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 11–15; Anna Stavrianakis and Jan Selby, 'Militarism and International Relations in the Twenty-First Century', in Anna Stavrianakis and Jan Selby, eds., *Militarism and International Relations: Political Economy, Security, Theory* (London: Routledge, 2012), 3–18; Anna Stavrianakis, 'Militarism', in James D. Wright, *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Elsevier, 2015), 490–94.

⁸ James Michael Yeoman, *Print Culture and the Formation of the Anarchist Movement in Spain, 1890–1915* (London: Routledge, 2019), 1.

⁹ François Godicheau, 'Periódicos Clandestinos Anarquistas en 1937–1938: ¿Las Voces de la Base Militante?', *Ayer*, 55, 2004, 175–205; Casanova, *Anarchism*, 121–25.

¹⁰ Notable examples include: Peter Blanchard, *Under the Flags of Freedom: Slave Soldiers and the Wars of Independence in Spanish South America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008); Nicola Foote and René Harder Horst, eds., *Military Struggle and Identity Formation in Latin America: Race, Nation, and Community During the Liberal Period* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010); Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat: A History of Violence on the Eastern Front* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Roberto J. Carmack, *Kazakhstan in World War II: Mobilization and Ethnicity in the Soviet Empire* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2019); Elizabeth Shesko, *Conscript Nation: Coercion and Consent in the Bolivian Barracks* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020).

¹¹ D. Evans and James Yeoman, 'New Approaches to Spanish Anarchism', *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, 29, (2016), 199–204.

Foundations of Anarchist Militarism

The romanticisation of war, the lionisation of combatants and the promotion of warrior virtues may seem antithetical to anarchist ideology but, in many ways, it reflected the ambiguous legacy of nineteenth-century European attitudes towards war. Many anarchists absorbed the enlightenment yearning for universal peace but retained an eminently romantic view of popular insurgency, said to be in the ‘intellectual, moral and even the material interests of the populace,’ according to Bakunin.¹² The founder of anarchist mutualism, Joseph Pierre Proudhon, while condemning the tyranny and avarice driving nineteenth-century wars of conquest, nonetheless praised the creative impact of war as ‘a divine fact’ whose antagonisms had educated and matured humankind culturally, economically, and socially.¹³ The intellectual hinterland from which Spanish anarchism emerged was thus caught between a rejection of war as an instrument of the state and a reverence for the creative potential of popular violence.

The former sentiment found many sympathetic ears among Spain’s labouring classes who, thanks to the corrupt *quinta* (draft) system, disproportionately paid the ‘blood contributions’ for colonial wars in the late-nineteenth century.¹⁴ The army’s participation in repressive measures against communal mobilisations (such as during the Tragic Week insurrection of 1909) only cemented the Spanish anarchists’ distinctive conception of the military as an invasive presence while their prefigurative ideology provided impetus for young workers to evade the emasculating subordination of conscription, thereby remaining independent of the state’s coercion.¹⁵ It also added military officers to those subject to violent escalatory reprisals by a minority of militants – *pistoleros* – who aimed to publicly reply to economic and political injustices, underscore the repression of the state, and ultimately provoke popular insurrection.¹⁶ Though frequently at odds with the gradualist and purist factions, the wider movement nonetheless channelled rhetorical and material support to such ‘men of action.’¹⁷ These *grupistas* were largely young, unmarried, unskilled workers with deep familial and social roots in the movement who had been hardened into anti-state violence during the campaign of *pistolero* violence provoked by the economic hardships which followed the end of the First World War.¹⁸ Within these, it was the Nosotros Group (*Grupo Nosotros*) (whose notable members included Buenaventura Durruti, Juan García Oliver, Francisco and Domingo Ascaso, Miguel García Vivancos, and Ricardo Sanz) which possessed the most radical insurrectionary ideology. Described by Chris Ealham as having an ‘essentially military’ conception of revolutionary strategy, *Nosotros* – to the chagrin of the intellectual grandees within the movement’s ideological body, the Iberian Anarchist Federation (*Federación Anarquista Ibérica*; FAI) – discarded the need for an organised mass movement as a prerequisite to revolution, calling for power to be seized by a cohesive force of experienced fighters.¹⁹

¹² Peter Ryley, ‘The Manifesto of the Sixteen: Kropotkin’s Rejection of Anti-War Anarchism and His Critique of the Politics of Peace’, in *Anarchism, 1914–18*, 51–57; Sam Dolgoff, trans., *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 205.

¹³ Aaron Noland, ‘Proudhon’s Sociology of War’, *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 29, 3 (1970), 289–98.

¹⁴ José Álvarez Junco, *La ideología política del anarquismo español (1868–1910)* (Madrid: Siglo veintiuno editores, 1976), 255–65; George Richard Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology and the Working-Class Movement in Spain, 1868–1898* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 25–26.

¹⁵ Ángel Herrerrín, ‘Anarchist Sociability in Spain. In Times of Violence and Clandestinity’, *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*, 38, 1 (2013), 161–72.

¹⁶ Óscar Freán Hernández, ‘¿Cómo hacer la revolución? Los anarquistas y la crítica de la violencia insurreccional’, *Cahiers de civilisation espagnole contemporaine. De 1808 au temps présent*, 2 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.4000/cccec.5399> (last accessed 22 June 2022); Julián Casanova, ‘Terror and Violence: The Dark Face of Spanish Anarchism’, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 67 (2005), 87–91.

¹⁷ Freán Hernández, ‘¿Cómo hacer la revolución?’; Herrerrín, ‘Anarchist Sociability’, 157–67.

¹⁸ Chris Ealham, ‘“From the Summit to the Abyss”: The Contradictions of Individualism and Collectivism in Spanish Anarchism’, in *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936–1939* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 143–55; Chris Ealham, *Class, Culture and Conflict in Barcelona, 1898–1937* (London: Routledge, 2004), 136–42.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 51; Agustín Guillamón, *Ready for Revolution: The CNT Defense Committees in Barcelona, 1933–1938* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2014), 37–38.

In June 1936, alert to the imminent coup-d'état being organised within the Spanish officer corps, the *Grupo Nosotros* brought their proposals before the Plenum of Anarchist Groups in Barcelona, pressing the case for creating a clandestine 'revolutionary army' from the CNT's network of defence committees that would be capable of harnessing the violent potential of the masses. 'Armed force must be in the anarchists' hands,' maintained García Oliver, 'lest it fall into the clutches of others.' Strikingly, an unnamed member of the group made what would become a commonplace appeal to masculinity and pragmatism during the Civil War: '[the anarchists] had to be men. The time had come for action and daring.'²⁰ Although some voices were raised in support, much derision and outright hostility was apparent, encapsulated by none other than Cipriano Mera's heckling voice: 'Maybe comrades Ascaso and García Oliver could let us know what colour of general's braid they would like?'²¹ Yet if such ideas were a minority among the FAI, they had echoes within the larger anarcho-syndicalist milieu of the CNT. The resolutions of the Zaragoza Congress in May 1936 had such a form of revolutionary warfare plainly in view:

The People Armed will be the best assurance against any attempt to restore the system destroyed either within or without. There are thousands of workers who have marched in the barracks and who are acquainted with modern military techniques . . . The confederal defence cadres . . . will be the most valuable auxiliaries in consolidating the gains of the revolution and in equipping producers for large-scale battles in its defence.²²

Indeed, strident military themes had been expressed within the CNT's discourses during the elections of February 1936, when its National Committee demanded 'a war footing', declaring that democracy had 'no place on the field of battle.'²³ This reflected the antifascist 'war culture' of interwar Europe, a militarising process common to the political left and right, and particularly their youth wings, which transformed urban public spaces into sites of violent contestation.²⁴ Where physical force was absent, aggressive discourses diffused through print and visual culture clamoured for the eradication of opponents as a prerequisite for a new social order rooted in revolutionary masculine vitalism.²⁵ For the anarchists, and for the majority of Spain's antifascist left, such declarations helped to solidify the expectation of impending battle between the armed masses and the forces of reaction, a sensibility which laid the foundations for the FAI's 'men of action' to define the direction of the movement.²⁶

This process of redefinition began with the representations of the July Revolution and the formation of militia columns to defend the new order. The attempted coup led by a group of nationalist military officers from 17–19 July 1936 secured much of northwest Spain but met fierce resistance by groups of armed workers in many urban centres. In Barcelona, the CNT Defence Committees, forewarned of the rising through their informants and reinforced by local Republican security forces, rapidly seized arms and defeated the military columns attempting to converge on the city centre, before storming the military holdouts in the Sant Andreu Armoury and Atarazanas Barracks, actions that

²⁰ Guillamón, *Revolution*, 40–41.

²¹ Alexandre Skirda, *Facing the Enemy: A History of Anarchist Organization from Proudhon to May 1968* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2002), 155.

²² Peirats, CNT, Vol 1., 110.

²³ *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁴ Sandra Souto Kustrín, 'Taking the Street: Workers' Youth Organizations and Political Conflict in the Spanish Second Republic', *European History Quarterly*, 34, 2 (2004), 131–56.

²⁵ Mary Vincent, 'Political Violence and Mass Society: A European Civil War?', in Nicholas Doumanis, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of European History, 1914–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 393–404; Eduardo González Calleja, 'La cultura de guerra como propuesta historiográfica: una reflexión general desde el contemporaneísmo español', *Historia Social*, 61 (2008), 69–87.

²⁶ Calleja, 'Experiencia en combate', 46–53; Julio Aróstegui, 'Introducción: La militarización de la política durante la II República', *Historia Contemporánea*, 11 (1994), 17–27.

became the defining symbols of the July Revolution.²⁷ In the following days, the rallying cry of ‘To Zaragoza!’ swept through the victorious anarchist militants, a move backed by Durruti, the hero of the Atarazanas, and the newly-formed Central Committee of Antifascist Militias which set about converting the Defence Committees into a militia force to recapture Aragon from the military rebels.²⁸ The anarchist press breathlessly recorded ‘the virile and Olympian epic’ of these militants who were now ‘a great Popular Army’ which would ‘allow us to chase and sweep [the rebels] off the face of the Peninsula.’²⁹ The columns advancing across Aragon, the Levante and towards the Guadarrama Mountains were construed as instruments of revolutionary providence, hailed and embraced as ‘liberators’ and ‘saviours’ by the population.³⁰ In anarchist reportage, the columns had already acquired a violent mystique within the movement. Writing of the Francisco Ascaso Column (named for the revolution’s most prominent martyr), *Land and Freedom (Tierra y Libertad)* – the central newspaper of the FAI – praised ‘the cold blood’ of the militiamen: ‘they are hungry for the struggle and for victory. They carry the rifle as something precious.’³¹ Having seized these weapons from the mutineers, the rifle was now a potent symbol of the anarchist hegemony in Barcelona, underpinned by their monopoly on violence.³²

Open warfare with the Nationalists, moreover, demanded a new and distinctly martial idiom as anarchist leaders assumed military roles, capturing large swathes of territory. In the forefront were the members of the *Grupo Nosotros*, establishing a template for charismatic military leadership.³³ Durruti’s star shone brightest among these; even *Anarchy (Acracia)*, a weekly whose editor, José Peirats, had virulently opposed the most radical *grupistas*, applauded Durruti for speaking ‘the language of the trenches.’³⁴ *Acracia* also proposed offering a ceremonial pistol to the veteran anarchist, paid for by public subscription, in response to a similarly funded ceremonial sword gifted by French nationalists to General José Moscardó Ituarte, the hero of the Siege of the Alcázar.³⁵ While the pistol was an established anarchist symbol, its competitive positioning here gave it an inescapable martial quality, equating Durruti’s military status with that of Moscardó.³⁶ This illustrates an important aspect of the militarisation of anarchism’s print culture. While salutes and decorations were commonly abhorred by anarchist militants, engaging the Nationalists in combat required that they partially replicate their opponents’ symbolic language of charismatic-warrior heroism, if only to emphasise the superiority of their own warrior leaders.³⁷

While this triumphalism persisted, cracks began to appear in the façade of the supposedly invincible columns, prompting a crisis of confidence among many anarchist leaders. By late August, the ‘human ant-hill’ which had departed Barcelona mustered only 35,000 men (organised in units rarely in excess of 2,000) scattered across the 250-mile-long Aragon Front.³⁸ The tactical shortcomings of most antifascist militias were made obvious during the summer and autumn of 1936 by their scattering at the sight of aircraft, failures of operational co-ordination, and the lack of a unified military

²⁷ Chris Ealham, *Anarchism and the City: Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Barcelona, 1898–1937* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2010), 170–72; Guillamón, *Ready for Revolution*, 45–70.

²⁸ Pelai Pagès i Blanch, *War and Revolution in Catalonia, 1936–1939* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 44–46.

²⁹ ‘El pueblo a sus mártires: ¡No habéis muerto, no!’, *Solidaridad Obrera* (2 Aug. 1936), 2; ‘Organización de las Milicias de Barcelona’, *Tierra y Libertad* (29 July 1936) 4.

³⁰ ‘Los grandes combates en el frente Aragónés’, *Tierra y Libertad* (1 Aug. 1936), 1; ‘El pueblo aclama nuestros bravos milicianos’, *Solidaridad Obrera* (25 Aug. 1936), 11.

³¹ ‘De campo de batalla’, *Tierra y Libertad* (20 Aug. 1936), 3.

³² Evans, *Revolution* 64.

³³ Casanova, *Anarchism*, 110.

³⁴ ‘Durruti, altavoz de la anarquía’, *Acracia* (6 Nov. 1936), 1.

³⁵ ‘Una pistola de honor ofrecida a Durruti’, *Acracia* (11 Nov. 1936), 1.

³⁶ For the symbolic importance of *pistolero*, see Casanova, ‘Terror and Violence’, 90–91.

³⁷ *Ibid.* and Enrique Álvarez, ‘Man Un/Made: Male Homosocial and Homosexual Desire in Anarchist Culture of the Spanish Civil War’, *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, 18, 1 (2012), 18–20.

³⁸ ‘¡Salud y suerte, hermanos!’, *Solidaridad Obrera* (25 July 1936), 1; Michael Alpert, *The Republican Army in the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 37–40.

command structure.³⁹ Many anarchists rejected the advice of loyal military officers (referred to dismissively as ‘technical advisors’), surmising that their proposals were outdated bourgeois conventions rather than practical measures. In his memoirs, Mera recorded an early confrontation with Colonel Francisco del Rosal when the Republican officer found that his militiamen had retired from their positions in the Guadarrama Mountains without digging trenches: ‘We are the FAI, and we don’t need parapets,’ Mera retorted, ‘For us, it is a question of always going forward.’⁴⁰ Military experience, however, was a hard teacher: by September the columns had failed to secure the urban centres of Huesca, Teruel and, most significantly, the anarchist stronghold of Zaragoza.⁴¹ The celebrated Balearic expedition organised by the Council of Catalan Antifascist Militias collapsed amid sectarian distrust and the refusal of anarchists to obey orders unsanctioned by the National Committee.⁴² For some, the intensity of the conflict prompted a volte face on their hostility to established military practices. After a chance mortar shell claimed the lives of two of his *grupista* comrades in the Battle of the Somosierra, Mera concluded that the anarchists’ ‘revolutionary self-discipline’ was insufficient to meet the demands of modern warfare: ‘We found ourselves at war, and we could not play at war without the grave risk of paying irreparable consequences.’⁴³ The military failure of the romanticised militia columns and the transition towards modern positional warfare created a striking pragmatism among even outspoken antimilitarists like Mera, yet reverence for fighting men persisted and ultimately facilitated a dramatic transformation in the cultural repertoire of Spanish anarchism as it sought to represent its militants as both heroic *and* effective on the modern battlefield.

The Impact of the Battle of Madrid

The Battle of Madrid has justifiably been called ‘the forcing house of anarchist pragmatism,’ imposing fresh compromises on the movement after four of its leaders joined Largo Caballero’s government as the Republic desperately sought to counter the rapid advance of Franco’s Army of Africa from the south-west.⁴⁴ Simultaneously, however, Madrid served as an opportunity for the movement to appropriate and instrumentalise the language of antifascist warfare through the participation of its affiliates on a modern battlefield. The most symbolically important display of this rearticulation came on 11 November 1936, with the arrival of a CNT militia column from the Aragon Front led by Durruti, an event immortalised in anarchist print culture. One improbable rendering from a 1937 edition of *Libertad* recorded how emissaries from Madrid arrived at the Durruti Column’s headquarters to plead directly for aid: ‘The fate of Madrid, and the war, is in your hands.’⁴⁵ Durruti’s 4,000 strong column was, in the words of *Workers’ Solidarity (Solidaridad Obrera)*, ‘composed of ideal men, anxious to fight without rest,’ whose ‘impetuous momentum [...] is the essential factor for victory.’⁴⁶ The flight of Caballero’s government on 6 November, while disgracing the four complicit CNT ministers, had also saved Durruti’s men from appearing to be defending the state; rather they were joining the people in arms – ‘in the streets of Madrid there remain only the heroes, the workers.’⁴⁷ The CNT’s regional press rallied around this symbol, exhorting their members to go on the offensive in solidarity and to transform loyalist Spain ‘into a giant Madrid.’⁴⁸ This form of popular warfare provided an acceptable

³⁹ Michael Alpert and James Matthews, ‘“With Nothing but Our Bared Chests”: Republican Armed Columns in the Militia Phase of the Spanish Civil War’, in James Matthews, ed., *Spain at War: Society, Culture and Mobilization, 1936–44* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 22–24.

⁴⁰ Cipriano Mera, *Guerra, exilio y cárcel de un anarcosindicalista* (Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1976), 29.

⁴¹ Charles J. Esdaile, *The Spanish Civil War: A Military History* (London: Routledge, 2018), 80–82.

⁴² Blanch, *War*, 50–53.

⁴³ Mera, *Guerra*, 33.

⁴⁴ Helen Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War, 1936–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 177–78.

⁴⁵ Pedro Pablo Portero, ‘Del Aragón en Llamas...’, *Libertad*, (1937), No. 5, 12.

⁴⁶ ‘Con la columna de Durruti: sin novedad...’, *Solidaridad Obrera* (12 Nov. 1936), 2.

⁴⁷ ‘Madrid, “la ciudad de héroes” cubre con gloria quedo la etapa más difícil de la guerra’, *Hombres Libres* (18 Dec. 1936), 5.

⁴⁸ ‘Convirtamos la Andalucía leal en una inmensa y potente fortaleza militar’, *Hombres Libres* (12 Feb. 1937), 1; ‘Descentralización de la guerra’, *Acracia* (22 Nov. 1936), 4.

narrative for the militarisation of the militias; the Popular Army being formed in Madrid was channelling the spontaneous mobilisation of the people against the fascist invader and was a testament to their creative, revolutionary potential.⁴⁹ Within this paradigm, the central anarchist press constructed their militiamen as a force of veterans ('courageous, battle-hardened and disciplined') whose very presence was sufficient to drive the enemy into flight.⁵⁰

CNT forces – including many prominent militants – had endured heavy casualties while fighting the enemy to a standstill in the university city and the trenches of the *Casa de Campo*.⁵¹ Conceptualising these grievous battlefield losses required that the anarchists expand their definitions of martyrdom within the press to give meaning to these seemingly arbitrary blows. Martyrs had long been a part of anarchism's symbolic repertoire stretching back to the Paris Commune (1871) and the Black Hand Affair (1872–3), yet this form of commemoration had been broadly bestowed on the victims of the state rather than leaders on a modern battlefield.⁵² The July Days had provided a distinctly military martyrology visible in Barcelona through the newly designated Squares of the Unknown Militiaman and Captain Biardeau (a Republican martyr of the *Bienio Negro* – the period of conservative government from November 1933 to February 1936), as well as the memorialisation of Francisco Ascaso's place of death during the assault on the Atarazanas barracks.⁵³ Representations of the Battle of Madrid carried this theme still further, hailing the 'tank-hunter' Antonio Coll, a sailor killed after disabling four Nationalist tanks in the street-fighting for Carabanchel.⁵⁴ Recent research suggests Coll may have been a propaganda invention inspired by the Soviet war film 'We Are from Kronstadt' being screened to militiamen in Madrid, which even contained a scene of a lone soldier disabling a tank.⁵⁵ Despite this provenance, both the regional anarchist journal *Libertarian Front (Frente Libertario)* (which claimed Coll was a CNT affiliate) and the national anarchist dailies joined other Republican newspapers in portraying this act as a turning point in the city's defence, after which '[t]he tanks lose all their effectiveness . . . The militiamen wait for them calm, confident and smiling.'⁵⁶ Despite the Soviet connection, Lisa Kirschenbaum aptly situates Coll within a broader antifascist reverence for the 'larger-than-life masculinity' being depicted which allowed international archetypes to acquire new resonance in the Spanish cultural context.⁵⁷ Local anarchists were therefore able to claim Coll as a 'symbol and example', a call for the wider membership to present their masculinity and antifascist credentials through acts of martial courage.⁵⁸ Coll constituted a milestone in anarchist heroic representations; not only was military sacrifice revered, but anarchists were instrumentalising a symbol common to the Republican coalition: the antifascist combatant.

If Coll was the first example of an explicitly military martyr idolised by many sections of the anarchist movement, the posthumous cult of Durruti took this novel archetype to new heights.⁵⁹ Killed in suspicious circumstances on 19 November 1936, Durruti's death was retold by the CNT

⁴⁹ 'Madrid, "la ciudad de héroes"'; '¡No pasan!', *Tierra y Libertad* (14 Nov. 1936), 1; 'Hay que tomar granada', *Hombres Libres* (22 Jan. 1937), 2.

⁵⁰ 'La CNT en Madrid', *Tierra y Libertad* (21 Nov. 1936), 7; 'Nuestros camaradas anarquistas, con furia e ímpetu arrollador, atacan a los facciosos Casa de Campo, que huyen gritando: ¡con los de la FAI, no! ¡con los de la FAI, no!', *Solidaridad Obrera* (24 Nov. 1936), 12.

⁵¹ Esdaile, *Spanish Civil War*, 143.

⁵² Yeoman, *Print*, 73–94. See also Brian D. Bunk, *Ghosts of Passion: Martyrdom, Gender, and the Origins of the Spanish Civil War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 68–69.

⁵³ Ealham, *Anarchism*, 183; 'El monumento a Antonio López y López, destruido por el pueblo', *La Vanguardia* (25 Aug. 1936), 6; 'Lugar donde cayó muerto nuestro compañero Francisco Ascaso', *Solidaridad Obrera* (1 Aug. 1936), 1.

⁵⁴ 'Antonio Col: Héroe del pueblo', *Solidaridad Obrera* (12 Nov. 1936), 10.

⁵⁵ José Cabeza San Deogracias, 'Buscando héroes: la historia de Antonio Col como ejemplo del uso de la narrativa como propaganda durante la Guerra Civil española', *Historia y comunicación social*, 10, (2005), 38–40.

⁵⁶ 'Antonio Col: Un héroe del pueblo', *Tierra y Libertad* (14 Nov. 1936), 5; 'Noventa días de asedio', *Frente Libertario* (7 Feb. 1937), 1.

⁵⁷ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *International Communism and the Spanish Civil War: Solidarity and Suspicion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 123–25.

⁵⁸ 'Antonio Col: Un héroe del pueblo'.

⁵⁹ C. Bannister, *The Rival Durrutis: The Posthumous Cult of Personality of Buenaventura Durruti, November 1936–June 1937*, MLitt Dissertation, Newcastle University, 2009.

leadership as one of falling at the head of his troops.⁶⁰ ‘Generals like Durruti do not die in bed!’ proclaimed the editor of *Tierra y Libertad*, Diego Abad de Santillán, praising him as the ‘authentic representation of the people’s war against fascism.’⁶¹ Drawing on Spanish anarchism’s established reverence for classical and mythical heroes, other writers proclaimed him a ‘Hercules’ or ‘our Siegfried.’⁶² Most striking, however, were the efforts to incorporate Durruti into nationalistic discourses as the incarnation of Spain’s warrior traditions stretching back to El Cid and the conquistadors Hernan Cortés, Diego de Almagro and Vasco Núñez de Balboa, described as ‘men of the people’ whose political and military genius spoke to ‘the qualities of a great race.’⁶³ While such nationalistic discourses ran against the internationalism that had defined much of European anarchism, leading Spanish militants embraced the Popular Front’s narrative of the Spanish as an inherently heroic race confronting fascist invasion.⁶⁴ Furthermore, Durruti’s death provided them with an icon respected across the entirety of antifascist Spain who had provided all anarchists with (a likely fabricated) dictum through which to idolise duty, and above all military duty: ‘we renounce all except victory!’⁶⁵

Anarchism’s living heroes also witnessed a representational transformation. The death of anarchism’s own *caudillo* – as Durruti was not infrequently dubbed in the press – provided a new paradigm for its military leadership: figures of impeccable anarchist pedigree who were nevertheless committed to discipline and the war-effort.⁶⁶ Foremost among these was Cipriano Mera, who had risen to command the Fourteenth Division in November 1936 and later the IV Corps (a force composed of the anarchist militiamen in the Madrid region).⁶⁷ Mera’s trajectory from a bricklayer to ‘a commander in the popular army’ was regularly invoked in both the national and the regional CNT press, who dubbed him ‘the authentic soldier of the people’ as well as ‘the hero of Brihuega,’ following his rout of the Italian ‘Black Feathers’ Division in March 1937.⁶⁸ Yet Mera embodied an anarchist variation of charismatic leadership with Frederica Montseny dubbing him ‘a new figure of messianic status . . . immortal blend of Quixote and Sancho . . . mystic and *caudillo*.’⁶⁹ Ricardo Sanz, Durruti’s successor as commander of the Twenty-sixth Division (formerly the Durruti Column) was likewise praised in affective terms, with articles describing his ‘iron will’ alongside his ‘sentiment and heart.’⁷⁰ Miguel Vivancos, whose military abilities earned him both the respect of the communist commander, Enrique Lister, and command of the Twenty-fifth Division, was also spoken of as a mystic leader: ‘[his men] see in him the companion, then the commander and the friend, to whom love makes discipline magnificent and indispensable.’⁷¹ At the same time, he followed Sanz and Mera as a paragon of discipline, telling the periodical *Mi Revista*:

⁶⁰ Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain: The Spanish Civil War 1936–1939* (London: Penguin Publishing Group, 2006), 180–81; Abel Paz, *Durruti in the Spanish Revolution* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2007), 637–75.

⁶¹ Abad de Santillán, ‘Un general que no muere en la cama’, *Tierra y Libertad* (26 Nov. 1936), 3.

⁶² ‘La mascarilla de Durruti’, *Solidaridad Obrera* (21 Nov. 1936) 1; ‘SIGFRIDO’, *Solidaridad Obrera* (25th Nov. 1936), 3.

⁶³ Santillán, ‘Un general’; ‘Durruti: una gran figura ibérica’, *Solidaridad Obrera* (24 Nov. 1936), 3.

⁶⁴ Xosé-Manoel Núñez Seixas, *Fuera el invasor!: nacionalismos y movilización bélica durante la guerra civil española (1936–1939)* (Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2006), 62–77.

⁶⁵ Bannister, *The Rival Durrutis*, 22–23.

⁶⁶ In the central CNT press, the title *caudillo* was applied readily to Durruti and other wartime leaders, for example: ‘La columna de Durruti ha entrado ayer en combate’, *CNT Madrid* (17 Nov. 1936), 4; Mauro Bajatierra, ‘Batalla y muerte de Durruti ante Madrid’, *CNT Madrid* (20 Nov. 1937), 1; ‘¡Tu! Acuérdate de Durruti’, *Solidaridad Obrera*, 15 Dec. 1936, 17; ‘La muerte del héroe’, *Mi Revista* (12 Jan. 1936), 16; ‘La muerte del guerrillero de la libertad en Madrid: Buenaventura Durruti’, *Mi Revista* (15 Oct. 1937), 24. So prevalent was this trope that *El Amigo Del Pueblo* issued a strong rebuke to the efforts at resurrecting *caudillaje* while at the same time conceding that Durruti had earned that title ‘through his life, in the street and in the field of battle’; see: ‘Los Caudillos’, *El Amigo Del Pueblo* (8 Dec. 1937), 1.

⁶⁷ Alpert, *Republican Army*, 140–42.

⁶⁸ ‘Un Militar del Pueblo’, *25 División* (Jan. 1938), 24; ‘Cipriano Mera’, *Cultura y Acción* (31 July 1937), 1; Frederica Montseny, ‘El descubrimiento de una lápida que da el nombre de Vía-Durruti a la antigua Vía-Layetana’, *Acracia* (3 July 1937), 4.

⁶⁹ Frederica Montseny, ‘Mera’, *Umbral* (6 Nov. 1937), 10.

⁷⁰ ‘La columna “Durruti”’, *Tierra y Libertad* (9 Jan. 1937) 7.

⁷¹ ‘Miguel García Vivancos’, *Mi Revista* (1 Dec. 1938), 7. This affective frame of leadership had its roots in what Javier Krauel refers to as the ‘irruption of charismatic forces’ on the part of the anarchists and socialists against liberal

circumstances and an imperious duty have made me a soldier of the Revolution and for the independence of our beloved fatherland . . . we should be proud to wear the uniform which embodies discipline and order, the best guarantees of victory.⁷²

Emphasising the revolutionary heritage of these militants-turned-soldiers alongside their charismatic leadership as modern *caudillos* served two functions for the narrative of the higher committees. First, it established a thread of continuity between the pre-war struggles against the state, the heady days of the July Revolution and the ongoing antifascist war of national liberation. Secondly, it allowed the anarchists to mount a mimetic challenge to the charismatic hero-cults established around Spain's communist commanders. In a 1938 interview with the French communist, Simone Téry, Líster related a similarly emotional connection with his men: 'I am the Eleventh Division. And even when I am not with them, it is as if I am there.'⁷³ The Battle of Madrid and the death of Durruti thus served as a turning point in anarchist commemorative practises. While the image of the people rising to meet fascism and of Durruti falling in the line of fire served as common symbols to the CNT's regional committees, the higher committees (*comités superiores*) worked through the press to establish new paladins through which to defend their breaches of ideological orthodoxy and counter the growing magnetism of the Spanish Communist Party and its military leaders.

This process of reconciling military and revolutionary ideals was also achieved through dozens of lesser *caudillos*, presented to the wartime anarchist movement from late 1936 onwards. These figures were explicitly designated as anarchists; Julio Rodríguez, a hardened militant, was openly described in *Tierra y Libertad* as having received two death sentences prior to the war and now commanded the Toledo Battalion which was, Rodríguez boasted, 'exclusively anarchist.'⁷⁴ This duality was expressed at the level of individual character, as embodied in the dynamiter (*dinamitero*) Batista on the Aragon front: 'an inimitable fortress, and . . . a complete anarchist. So much so, that we do not know which of his two qualities is greater; that of an anarchist or a warrior.'⁷⁵ *Dinamiteros* – specialised raiding units wielding improvised hand grenades – were not exclusively affiliated to the anarchists but the battlefield conduct of these 'Heroes of the Holy Dynamite' captured the imagination of their regional and national press, producing improbable accounts of the *dinamiteros*' decisive interventions in the urban warfare at Madrid and Teruel.⁷⁶ As the descendants of the dynamite-hurling miners of the Asturian Revolution (1934), these military specialists were also a symbolic link connecting the Popular Army to a deeper proletarian heritage.⁷⁷ Their very tactics, which consisted of sudden raids on enemy positions, seemed to mirror the *pistoleros*' small group violence while their humility and abnegation attested to their continued faith in the ideal: 'They refused to give their names,' reported one correspondent after witnessing them in action, 'saying only that they were anarchists.'⁷⁸ This brand of unpretentious, proletarian heroism was explained in opposition to the communist concept of 'Stakhanovism', that is, the allocation of privileges to the ultra-productive.⁷⁹ The confederal

Republicanism's emotional restraint under the Second Republic which, in turn, formed part of a wider rejection of liberal consensus in interwar Europe in favour of assertive forms of political action and leadership; see Javier Krauel, 'The Battle for Emotional Hegemony in Republican Spain (1931–1936)', in Luisa Elena Delgado, Pura Fernández and Jo Labanyi, eds., *Engaging the Emotions in Spanish Culture and History* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2016), 153–54; Vincent, 'Political Violence', 404.

⁷² 'Héroes del pueblo: Manuel García Vivancos', *Mi Revista* (1 June 1938), 45–6.

⁷³ Martin Hurcombe, 'Heroes of the Republic, Heroes of the Revolution: French Communist Reportage of the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1938', *Journal of European Studies*, 41, 1 (2011), 53.

⁷⁴ 'Desde Madrid: Nuestros hombres', *Tierra y Libertad* (24 July 1937), 5.

⁷⁵ 'Tres hombres de Aragón', *Cultura y Acción* (21 Nov. 1937), 2.

⁷⁶ '¡¡Vivan los Héroes de la santa dinamita!! Continente... Batista... Remiro...', *Cultura y Acción* (28 Dec. 1937), 2.

⁷⁷ Bunk, *Ghosts*, 31–32.

⁷⁸ Samuel del Pardo, 'Nuestros dinamiteros en Teruel', *Umbral* (5 Feb. 1938), 5; Aurelio Jerez Santa-María, '¡Valor, valor, mucho valor!', *Acracia* (11 Jan. 1938), 4.

⁷⁹ Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935–1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 2–8.

dinamitero, by contrast, did not require such ‘petit bourgeois’ inducements since he had conducted himself in this manner ‘all his life.’⁸⁰ In this way, the anarchists’ armed affiliates became both an elite caste within the Popular Army and the carriers of the insurrectionary traditions of the movement’s revolutionary golden age.

It has been claimed that, by as early as December 1936, images of the anarchist warrior-hero were ultimately replaced by those of ‘the politician and the office-holder’ in response to the movement’s integration into the modernising processes of the Republican war effort.⁸¹ This was particularly visible in the National Committee’s efforts to discourage the exaltation of Durruti as a revolutionary martyr by the Friends of Durruti group, who instrumentalised his image and example in their campaign against anarchist collaborationism.⁸² Yet military hagiographies did not disappear within anarchism’s wartime culture; rather they were transformed to better identify their militants and affiliates with the hitherto unfamiliar military roles demanded by the Civil War. While Durruti and the militia columns were consigned to the status of a glorious pre-history which sanctified the movement’s participation in the war-effort, this did nothing to mitigate the expanding number of military heroes cited in the pages of Workers’ Solidarity (*Solidaridad Obrera*), *Tierra y Libertad* and the regional newspapers.⁸³ Some of these still evoked a romantic vision of the struggle, such as ‘the cavalry officer, Miguel Arcas, who raised a company of 200 horsemen in Andalusia and undertook a number of daring missions to resupply isolated villages in the Province of Malaga prior to its conquest in February 1937.’⁸⁴ Many more, however, exhibited the full range of technical and organisational tasks required by a modern army with lionising accounts of artillerymen, engineers, stretcher bearers and despatch riders (evocatively dubbed ‘steel centaurs’).⁸⁵ Consequently, the anarchists’ wartime pantheon became a space in which anarchist standards of individual heroism were rearticulated in an overtly martial direction.

Disciplining the Organisation

While such narratives portrayed the process of militarisation as essentially natural and smooth, the adoption of more conventional military practices had opened major fissures within the anarchist movement, exhibited through the intense debates at the Plenum of the Confederal Columns on 5 February 1937. The most contentious question was that of ‘discipline’ and, more specifically, whether the columns should subject themselves to it.⁸⁶ Yet the term ‘discipline’, much like the term ‘culture’, possessed evolving and contested meanings within the movement, ranging from an emasculating bourgeois imposition to a pragmatic necessity and an organisational mantra.⁸⁷ From 1926, organisational discipline had become a renewed focus within European anarchism after Nestor Makhno and his comrades, reflecting on their defeat by the Red Army, proposed confronting anarchism’s perennial lack of cohesion by creating a unified organisation protected by a disciplined, revolutionary, army.⁸⁸ Although many libertarians condemned this apparent effort to ‘Bolshevise’ the movement, a number

⁸⁰ ‘El dinamitero’, *Libertad*, No. 3 (1937), 7.

⁸¹ Graham, *Spanish Republic*, 277.

⁸² Graham, ‘State’, 522–3; Bannister, *Durrutis*, 4–9.

⁸³ ‘Un marino rojinegro del mediterráneo’, *Tierra y Libertad* (9 Jan. 1937), 2; ‘Los mártires de las Milicias Confederales’, *Frente Libertario* (7 Mar. 1937), 1; ‘La 26 División en la defensa de Catalunya’, *Umbral* (7 Jan. 1939), 8.

⁸⁴ ‘Nuestros valores militantes en la guerra: Miguel Arcas’, *Umbral* (19 Feb. 1938), 6.

⁸⁵ ‘La primera batería Sacco y Vancetti’, *Solidaridad Obrera* (27 Jan. 1937), 3; ‘Nuestros hombres: El comandante Iglesias’, *Solidaridad Obrera* (1 Jan. 1939), 2; ‘El barbas’, *Solidaridad Obrera* (22 Jan. 1938) 7; ‘Centauros de acero’, *Mi Revista* (15 May 1937), 13–14.

⁸⁶ ‘Acta del Pleno de Columnas Confederales y Anarquistas’, 5 Feb. 1937, Biblioteca Virtual del Ministerio de Defensa, FM-14-C1, 6–32.

⁸⁷ Carl-Henrik Bjerström, ‘Entrenching Democracy: Education and Cultural Participation in the Spanish Republican Army, 1936–1939’, *European History Quarterly*, 50, 3 (2020), 446.

⁸⁸ Alexandre Skirida, *Nestor Makhno: Anarchy’s Cossack: The Struggle for Free Soviets in the Ukraine 1917–1921* (Oakland: AK Press, 2003), 274–80.

of Spanish anarchists embraced Makhno's model of revolutionary defence through 'self-disciplined' guerillas.⁸⁹ This critique of conventional military structures was invoked in the summer of 1936 with *Solidaridad Obrera* announcing 'We are incapable of blindly complying with the formation of a disciplined army . . . We need to organise freely and we have precedents in our syndical struggles with the bourgeoisie.'⁹⁰ A particularly odious aspect for many sections of the movement was the gendered symbolism of military discipline: 'To be a soldier is to cease to be a man,' wrote *Acracia*, 'hang up their testicles in the barracks [and] resign them to the status of automata.'⁹¹ Famously, a member of the Iron Column, a unit that publicly rejected and resisted militarisation, the author penned a series of articles in *We (Nosotros)*, describing any form of martial discipline as tantamount to 'submission, blind obedience and the obliteration of men's personalities.'⁹² These were not merely semantic disputes but rather stemmed from growing unrest among many militiamen at the National Committee's imposition of militarisation upon the anarchist columns in the spring of 1937.⁹³

Many other voices, however, argued for discipline as a pragmatic necessity, fit not only for the urgent circumstances of the moment but also compatible with their masculine identities. The Aragonese publication *Culture and Action (Cultura y Acción)* put it starkly: 'Reality tells us, in its harsh and cruel language, that without iron discipline there can be no powerful army, and without it there will be no freedom.'⁹⁴ *CNT Asturias* concurred, arguing that 'before we are anarchists, we are men. Men who live on the earth and not in limbo.'⁹⁵ The National Committee stressed the distinction between the bourgeois 'barracks discipline' with their concept of 'war discipline' which 'valorises man and drives him towards victory.'⁹⁶ Indeed, other militants argued that 'determination and self-discipline' had always been displayed by anarchists 'across the globe' and hence this military discipline was simply a formalisation of their untarnished ideals.⁹⁷ This was complemented by the affective model of leadership outlined above; it was claimed that anarchist officers were obeyed out of respect and confidence they had earned through their pre-war years of insurrectionary struggle.⁹⁸ Parades and drills thus became public demonstrations of the anarchists' organic, but firm, discipline:

A great mass of men marches in magnificent, disciplined, formation. Their synchronised steps create a perceptible *thud-thud*; the firm footfalls of men, workers yesterday, and revolutionary fighters today.⁹⁹

Another feature describing the drilling of the Eighty-third Mixed Brigade (a militarised element of the Iron Column) encapsulated what an anarchist correspondent called 'the spirituality between soldiers and commanders'¹⁰⁰:

The officer who moments before had squared off before his commander, almost without daring to look at him, now approaches and, slapping him on the back, says: 'My commander . . . I will do you the favour of accepting a cigarette.'¹⁰¹

⁸⁹ 'Defensa Revolucionaria', *Solidaridad Obrera*, 25 May 1936, 8; Skirda, *Makhno*, 276–83; Paz, *Durruti*, 124–27.

⁹⁰ 'De Barcelona a Zaragoza: Una asamblea de milicianos', *Solidaridad Obrera* (8 Aug. 1936), 5.

⁹¹ '¡No pasará! ¡No pasará!', *Acracia* (6 Nov. 1936), 4.

⁹² Republished as: Kate Sharpley Library, *A Day Mournful and Overcast* (London: Kate Sharpley Press, 2003), 16.

⁹³ 'Acta del Pleno de Columnas Confederales y Anarquistas', 6–32.

⁹⁴ 'Libertad y disciplina', *Cultura y Acción* (26 Nov. 1937), 1.

⁹⁵ 'No hay claudicación', *CNT Asturias, León y Palencia* (1 Mar. 1937), 1.

⁹⁶ 'Nuestro Lema de Hoy', *Frente Libertario* (20 Oct. 1936), 4.

⁹⁷ 'Autodisciplina', *Frente Libertario* (11 Jan. 1937), 1.

⁹⁸ 'La disciplina en nuestro ejército', *La 70: Órgano Semanal de La Brigada* (17 Oct. 1937), 7.

⁹⁹ 'La lucha en el sur', *Umbral* (7 Aug. 1937), 3.

¹⁰⁰ Mauro Bajatierra, *Crónicas de la Frente de Madrid* (Barcelona: CNT-AIT Comité Nacional, Sección de Información y Propaganda, 1937), 206.

¹⁰¹ 'Evolución de nuestro ejército', *Umbral* (22 Jan. 1938) 2.

Discipline, then, was not entirely anathema to the anarchist movement; in the anarchist press it was reconciled at times as a pragmatic measure and, at other times, as a distinctively anarchist virtue.¹⁰²

One should not exaggerate the spontaneity of these pro-militarisation narratives. They were considerably encouraged and shaped by the National Committee of the CNT who, under General Secretary Mariano Rodríguez Vázquez, sought to make discipline the organising principle of the entire movement. In post-war writing, Vázquez's emphasis upon discipline, coupled with his premature death in 1940, allowed him to become the scapegoat for the collapse of the Spanish Revolution. His critics, including many who had themselves supported militarisation and antifascist collaboration, accused him of a range of crimes which, in a similar manner to Stalinist modes of condemnation, blended the personal, moral and political together. These included submitting to Negrín ('the Communist puppet'), smuggling jewels across the French border and being seduced by Russian women in the pay of the Soviet diplomatic mission.¹⁰³ Many, though not all, of these claims were unsubstantiated and occasionally accompanied with a strain of anti-Romanyism.¹⁰⁴ What is beyond doubt was Vázquez's absolute commitment to discipline as 'the know-it-all, the decider-of-all' in the words of one subordinate.¹⁰⁵ It was Vázquez who defended militarisation to the anti-statists within *Nosotros* in April 1937:

Get rid, comrades, of the mistaken notion that it is a despotic sort of militarisation we are concerned with now. From the first days we set about the task of establishing a firm discipline and now, for the interests of everyone, we intend to give it a definite direction.¹⁰⁶

For Vázquez, it was organisational discipline on which the very survival of the CNT depended in order to counter the 'tidal wave of confusion' resulting from the communists' aggregation of power.¹⁰⁷ Through such exhortations, and an aggressive campaign of press centralisation, Vázquez and the National Committee sought to impart this discipline across the entirety of the movement, imposing the austere values of the frontline upon the morally corrupt rear-guard.¹⁰⁸ Particularly during the strained months of 1938, CNT circulars attempted to transform the syndicates into a disciplined component of the war effort, announcing further recruitment drives, calling explicitly for an end to 'frivolous spectacles', and railing against the phenomenon of *señoritis* – the presence of young men of fighting age supposedly lounging in cafes behind the lines.¹⁰⁹ Contempt for these *señoritos* – a derogatory term for idle, bourgeois young men – was a common sentiment across the movement, expressed in film as well as print. In *The Empty Chair (La Silla Vacía)* – a documentary feature produced by the Council of Aragon in 1937 – an indolent, callow youth is moved through visions of suffering to volunteer on the Aragon Front, ultimately giving his life in battle and breathing a last appeal to the audience: 'Men, women, comrades of the rear-guard, think of us!'¹¹⁰

Anarchist affiliates and sympathisers were also connected on a daily basis with the frontline through a new species of libertarian journalist – the war correspondent. Prior to the war, reporting had been undertaken by local anarchist militants as one element of their praxis rather than a full-time

¹⁰² For discussions of militarisation among foreign volunteers, see: Morris Brodie, *Transatlantic Anarchism during the Spanish Civil War and Revolution, 1936–1939: Fury Over Spain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

¹⁰³ Isaac Martín Nieto, 'Gitano, ignorante y traidor. Mariano R. Vázquez en la literatura histórica militante libertaria', in Alejandra Ibarra Aguirregabiria, ed., *No es país para jóvenes* (Vitoria: Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, Instituto de Historia Social Valentín Foronda, 2012), 8–14.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Juan López, *Una misión sin importancia: memorias de un sindicalista* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1972), 154–55.

¹⁰⁶ As reprinted in 'Army Organization', *Spanish Revolution* (9 Apr. 1937), 3.

¹⁰⁷ 'CNT-AIT Comité Regional Circular No. 2', 1938, Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya, 1-886-T-13795, 1.

¹⁰⁸ Isaac Martín Nieto, 'Anarcosindicalismo, resistencia y grupos de afinidad. La comisión de propaganda confederal anarquista (1937–1939)', *El Futuro del Pasado: revista electrónica de historia*, 1, 2010, 599–600.

¹⁰⁹ 'Nota del día: comité ejecutivo', ANC, 1-886-T-14720, 1.

¹¹⁰ Valentín R. González, *La Silla Vacía* (1937) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PsJrgsB0Ga0&t=5s&ab_channel=Cineanarquistaespa%C3%B1ol.Unamiradaalinfinito> (last accessed 26 Oct. 2020).

undertaking.¹¹¹ The rapid pace of military events, together with heightened public demand for information, stimulated this new category of reportage from front-line anarchist journalists, including Aurelio Jerez Santa-María, Samuel del Pardo and – most famously – the militant-intellectual, Mauro Bajatierra.¹¹² While previous correspondence writing had served to link the disparate local branches with the wider movement, war correspondents connected anarchist affiliates in the rear with a heavily mythologised vision of the frontline. The national newspapers *Solidaridad Obrera* and *Tierra y Libertad*; the regional journals *Free Men (Hombres Libres, Granada)*, *Acracia* (Lerida) and *CNT Madrid*; and *Nosotros* ran features by Bajatierra and Santa-María.¹¹³ These pieces were generally intimate – if implausible – portraits of individual acts of battlefield heroism, such as a bold raid by a *dinamitero* known only as *El Chino*, or of local successes by CNT-FAI units.¹¹⁴ Bajatierra earned some degree of celebrity through his reporting, which offered romanticised portraits of military leaders alongside blow-by-blow accounts of the fighting around Madrid, later published as anthologies by the CNT's Office of Press and Propaganda.¹¹⁵ In such works, the unique fighting potential of the anarchists was expounded; through their years of insurgency against the state, the anarchists had hardened themselves into 'a military institution' in their own right as 'the descendants of the guerillas of yesteryear.'¹¹⁶ Strikingly absent were the questions of militarisation and collaboration; instead the articles presented continuity between the militias and the Popular Army, linked together by the anarchists' innate heroism and fraternity.¹¹⁷ The ubiquity of these accounts provides a powerful indicator of the extent to which military values and symbols became quotidian features of the anarchist cultural landscape, encouraging the wider movement to identify with its affiliates and militants in the Popular Army while erasing the divisions opened by militarisation.

The narrative of the virtuous front set against the corrupt, bourgeois rear-guard also struck a chord across the full spectrum of the anarchist regional press. During the Brunete Offensive (6–25 July 1937) – notably an operation spearheaded by communist-led divisions – *Acracia* continued to praise 'the magnificent, revolutionary and combative spirit' on the Aragon Front while also declaring 'the entire civil population must live by, and for, war!'¹¹⁸ In Granada, *Hombres Libres* – which had clashed with the National Committee over the imprisonment of its regional paladin, Francisco Maroto – rhapsodised about the 'generous and noble acts' which characterised the front in contrast to the 'shameful and counterrevolutionary spectacle of cafes full of young idlers.'¹¹⁹ The Regional Defence Committee of the Madrid area, which successfully resisted the centralisation efforts of the National Committee, similarly portrayed regional anarchist forces as hardened warriors, while also condemning *señoritismo* and the corrupt, 'shameful' capital of Valencia.¹²⁰

¹¹¹ Yeoman, *Print*, 45.

¹¹² Aurelio Jerez Santa-María, 'Milicias Confederales: Columna "España libre"', *Tierra y Libertad* (9 Jan. 1937), 7; Samuel del Pardo, 'División Durruti en el frente de Zaragoza', *Acracia* (6 July 1937), 4; Mauro Bajatierra, 'Caballería de la Revolución', *Umbral* (23 Oct. 1937), 5. For the development of Republican wartime journalism, see Josep M. Figueres Artigues, 'Periodismo de guerra: las crónicas de la guerra civil española', *Estudios sobre el Mensaje Periodístico*, 11, (2005), 280–81.

¹¹³ Bajatierra published regular columns in *CNT Madrid*, *Fragua Social* and the national newspapers, covering both the Central Zone and the Aragon Front, and even had his poetry featured in *Nosotros*; see Mauro Bajatierra, 'En las trincheras', *Nosotros* (2 Apr. 1937), 8. Santa-María similarly provided regular front-line correspondence from the Central Zone for *Hombres Libres*, *Acracia*, *Nosotros*, and the national papers.

¹¹⁴ Aurelio Jerez Santa-María, 'Golpes audaces de nuestros dinamiteros', *Hombres Libres* (8 Oct. 1937), 2–3.

¹¹⁵ Bajatierra, *Crónicas de la Frente* and *Crónicas de la guerra* (Valencia: CNT Subsecretaría de Propaganda, 1937).

¹¹⁶ Samuel del Pardo, 'Nuestros dinamiteros en Teruel'.

¹¹⁷ Bajatierra, *Crónicas*, 203–6.

¹¹⁸ 'En la guerra como en la guerra', *Acracia* (15 July 1937), 1. It should be noted that these pronouncements came after the departure of José Peirats as editor, ushering in a pro-collaborationist line.

¹¹⁹ Miquel Amorós, Maroto, *el heroé – una biografía del anarquismo andaluz* (Barcelona: Virus Editorial, 2011), 132–44. 'El verdadero alcance del asunto de Maroto', *Hombres Libres* (3 Mar. 1937), 6; 'La vida de nuestros milicianos en los frentes', *Hombres Libres* (1 Jan. 1937), 6; 'La Herencia de Napoleón', *Hombres Libres* (11 Dec. 1936), 4.

¹²⁰ Nieto, 'La comisión de propaganda confederal anarquista', 601; 'Palabras al aire, siembra de vaguedades', *Frente Libertario* (3 Feb. 1937), 2; 'Las milicias confederales dignas de la Revolución no se las puede torpedear por ningún señorito de retaguardia', *Frente Libertario* (10 Jan. 1937), 2.

There was a clear gendered symbolism to such representations. The temptations of the rear-guard were often personified by women, with *Acracia* denouncing prostitutes as ‘venomous serpents,’ while the widespread use of the *mater dolorosa* trope established the feminine vulnerability of the urban home-front.¹²¹ European anarchism had long expressed a certain puritanism towards sex work while also instrumentalising images of female suffering to underline societal inequity.¹²² In many ways, though, this was also a replication of Spanish anarchism’s particular constructions of masculinity which, as Richard Cleminson notes, contrasted physical improvement, moral strength and the purity of rural life with the corrupting influences of urban spaces.¹²³ Consequently, descriptions of the front often highlighted the combatants’ physicality, with their ‘dark torsos, like animated bronze.’¹²⁴ Indeed, common masculinity was considered fundamental to the military identity of the anarchists, with one commissar writing: ‘Every soldier a number? No. Every soldier a man.’¹²⁵

The presence of female combatants among the militia columns, albeit in small numbers, posed a major obstacle to this narrative.¹²⁶ Despite the protagonism of women in working-class mobilisations (such as the subsistence strikes of 1918–9) and the theoretical embrace of equality in the workplace, the CNT largely ignored the intersections of class and gender subordination while anarchist intellectuals constructed models of gender relations based on their complementary, ‘natural’ distinctions.¹²⁷ The advent of war opened greater spaces for women’s empowerment and mobilisation, as exhibited in the campaigns for educational access and ‘consciousness raising’ by the autonomous libertarian organisation Free Women (*Mujeres Libres*), but the broader movement was critical of women usurping ‘masculine’ roles in combat.¹²⁸ As a concomitant process to militarisation, the CNT leadership demanded the removal of women from the frontline, re-establishing masculine hegemony over the trenches.¹²⁹ Although the image of the militiawoman (*miliciana*) did not disappear altogether, it was instrumentalised more as a symbol of antifascist victory than as a genuine subversion of gender norms.¹³⁰ Patriarchal tropes were not limited to the central leadership but were common to the anti-collaborationists; *The People’s Friend* (*El Amigo del Pueblo*), the newspaper of the dissident Friends of Durruti group, complained of fuel being wasted on taxis for ‘scoundrels and loose women’ in Madrid while fuel shortages persisted at the front.¹³¹ Even the newspaper of the vocally autonomous *Mujeres Libres* largely portrayed combat as a masculine domain in which female participants were notable exceptions.¹³² Constructing the front as a space of ideal men thus formed a common touchstone for the movement and created a space in which anarchist ideals and military attributes could co-exist.

¹²¹ ‘Marte y Venus’, *Acracia* (21 Dec. 1936), 1; ‘El dolor de Euzkadi’, *Nosotros* (16 June 1937), 1.

¹²² Sharif Gemie, ‘Anarchism and Feminism: A Historical Survey’, *Women’s History Review*, 5, 3 (1996), 428–32.

¹²³ Richard Cleminson, ‘The Construction of Masculinity in the Spanish Labour Movement: A study of the *Revista Blanca* (1923–36)’, *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, 24, 3 (2012), 206–11.

¹²⁴ Álvarez, ‘Man Un/Made’, 25–30; ‘Frente de Aragón, frente de bronce’, *Umbral* (24 July 1937), 11.

¹²⁵ ‘Soldados’, *25 División* (Jan. 1938), 1.

¹²⁶ Lisa Lines, ‘Female Combatants in the Spanish Civil War: Milicianas on the Front Lines and in the Rearguard’, *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, 10, 4 (2009), 169–80; Lisa Lines, *Milicianas: Women in Combat in the Spanish Civil War* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011).

¹²⁷ Herrerin, ‘Anarchist Sociability’, 171–74; Martha A. Ackelsberg, *Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2005), 72–79; Cleminson, ‘Construction of Masculinity’, 208–11.

¹²⁸ Ackelsberg, *Free Women of Spain*, 151–76; Mary Nash, *Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War* (Denver, CO: Arden Press, 1995), 102–10.

¹²⁹ Sara Hernández Martín and Luis Antonio Ruiz Casero, ‘Mujeres combatientes en el ejército popular de la República: (1936–1939)’, in Eduardo Higuera Castañeda, Angel Luis López Villaverde, and Sergio Nieves Chaves, eds., *El pasado que no pasa: la Guerra Civil Española a los ochenta años de su finalización* (Cuenca: Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2020), 283.

¹³⁰ As an example, the covers of *Mi Revista* exhibited *milicianas* throughout 1937 but in highly beautified poses that undercut any subversion of gender norms. Similarly, the July 1937 issue of *Libertad* (the newspaper of the anarchist affiliated Forty-second Division) displayed a *miliciana* in a pose evoking the Victoria trope.

¹³¹ ‘La guerra y la revolución’, *El Amigo del Pueblo* (26 May 1937), 3.

¹³² For example, the February 1937 issue of *Mujeres Libres* featured a stylised image of *milicianas* on its cover yet much of the issue was dedicated to highlighting their contributions to the workplace, the auxiliary services, and childcare, without

Although the disciplining process that this derived from certainly responded to the immediate needs of civil war, it was also a manifestation of anarchism's longstanding struggle to maintain ideological purity while recognising the importance of organised force in effecting political change.

The Front and the Rear-guard

Over the course of the war, the virtues of the front received still greater prominence in anarchist culture, reflective not only of the militarisation of Republican society but of the reverence for the creative potential of mass struggle within its revolutionary tradition. This was discernible as early as November 1936, when praiseworthy anarchist conduct and military duty became strikingly interchangeable in the press. *Frente Libertario* reminded the anarchist soldier-militiaman to conduct himself in an exemplary manner; a demonstration to other antifascists that they were neither 'primitives' nor 'bandits with licenses'.¹³³ Apart from their defining capacity for heroism, abnegation and sacrifice, anarchist military formations earned praise for their commitments to development and modernisation. In Aragon, units were reported to have helped to gather in the harvest while in Granada the Maroto Column opened their field hospital to the public.¹³⁴ In Huesca, the 141st Mixed Brigade, a reserve unit composed largely of anarchists, distinguished itself by constructing and staffing five schools in villages close to the front, demonstrating their 'passion for the construction of a new life,' as phrased by *Solidaridad Obrera*.¹³⁵ The Popular Army was animated by an educating spirit, with substantial resources devoted to the cultural militias (pedagogical teams embedded on the frontline), a project which broadly aligned with anarchism's emphasis on the prefigurative potential of education.¹³⁶ The barracks would, consequently, become 'a school of ideas to make the soldier an enlightened brother, responsible for his actions . . . with a determined revolutionary personality.'¹³⁷

Some anarchists not only praised these displays of revolutionary praxis on the frontline but also the ennobling effect of military service upon the individual. In their estimation, the hardships and austerity of military service afforded soldiers the opportunity to purify themselves of the corruption of urban life and embrace a more moral and enlightened condition. *El Amigo del Pueblo*, many of whose contributors were themselves veterans of the Aragon front, looked to 'the combatant' to provide a moral example for the wider movement:

The morale that the comrades at the front exude is unsurpassable. Life in the trenches – the heat, the cold, the thirst and the vigilance – harden their spirits and brotherhoods through suffering. We see the stoic spirit born in these men, through which man aggrandizes himself . . . The combatants of the vanguard must be the ones who will inject the vitalizing lifeblood and give new vigour to the Spanish people and its militant proletariat.¹³⁸

In a more extreme case, one anarchist contributor approvingly quoted Field Marshal Helmut von Moltke: 'War sustains among men the greatest and noblest feelings – honour and courage – which prevent them from succumbing to the most disgusting materialism.'¹³⁹ Journalist Ángel Vázquez

reference to their service at the front. See 'Mujeres heroicas', 3, and 'Las mujeres trabajan', 5–6; For *Mujeres Libres*' policy of autonomy: Ackelsberg, *Free Women*, 193.

¹³³ 'Milicianos confederales', *Frente Libertario* (8 Jan. 1937), 2; '¡No; no nos importa...!', *Acracia* (20 Jan. 1938), 1.

¹³⁴ '¿Disciplina?', *Tierra y Libertad* (23 Jan. 1937), 3. 'Nuestras fuerzas siguen recogiendo material y avanzando hacia Jadraque y Sigüenza', *Nuevo Aragón* (2 Apr. 1937), 1; 'La obra de la Columna "Maroto": Hospital de Sangre Universal', *Hombres Libres* (25 Dec. 1936), 5.

¹³⁵ 'Labor cultural realizada por la 141 Brigada Mixta', *Hombres Libres* (3 Mar. 1938), 4; 'Una generación de guerra', *Solidaridad Obrera* (2 Jan. 1938), 8.

¹³⁶ Bjerström, 'Entrenching Democracy', 447–49; Christopher H. Cobb, *Los Milicianos de la Cultura* (Bilbao: Servicio Editorial Universidad del País Vasco, 1995), 135–42 Holguín, *Spaniards*, 26.

¹³⁷ 'La revolución moral dentro de los Cuarteles', *Hombres Libres* (11 June 1937), 5.

¹³⁸ 'La voz del frente', *El Amigo del Pueblo* (1937), No. 1, 2.

¹³⁹ 'Efectividad en la guerra', *Hombres Libres* (12 Mar. 1937), 3.

Barranco echoed this sentiment, claiming that war provided men ‘full freedom of action to develop intellectually, giving free rein to their true moral and material inclinations . . . the soldier . . . when the war ends, is a completely “perfect” man.’¹⁴⁰ Others claimed the soldier had become the ‘new man’ of anarchism, as *Hombres Libres* recounted:

The combatant. His face darkened and hardened by the sun. The image of a new life, of a new way of thinking, of feeling, of loving . . . He is the soldier, the hero, the new man who has marked the path to a new era.¹⁴¹

Such eulogising was mirrored by a campaign of commemoration sponsored by International Antifascist Solidarity (*Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista*; SIA), a libertarian aid organisation responsible for a ‘Day of the Combatant’, celebrated on 1 January 1938, in order to mobilise popular support for the front and gather monetary and material donations.¹⁴² The image of the wounded veteran (*mutilado*) as the embodiment of sacrifice also began to proliferate in libertarian publications, including the notoriously autonomous *Mujeres Libres*.¹⁴³

The anarchists’ fixation on virtues of ‘the front’, even among anti-statist publications, reflected the hegemonic symbol of the combatant within the Republican coalition. From the outset, the image of the soldier-militiaman had been a crucial legitimising symbol for all members of the Popular Front.¹⁴⁴ By mid-1937, it fed into a Republican campaign of cultural militarisation which saw the innate heroism of the Spanish people and the virtues of the combatant extolled through every public medium, from theatre, to poetry, cinema, and elaborate public exhibitions.¹⁴⁵ In some cases, this involved the symbolic transfer of front-line values to the rear-guard, as when the Cultural Militia of the Thirty-first Division constructed a replica trench in Barcelona’s Plaça de Catalunya in order to stimulate the Republic’s ‘collective yearning to win the war.’¹⁴⁶ Similarly, in November 1938, representatives of the Twenty-sixth Division held an exhibition of their unit’s military and cultural achievements in commemoration of the second anniversary of Durruti’s death. These included everything from trophies captured from the enemy to ‘the clothes which covered the robust, athletic body of the fierce fighter from León [Durruti].’¹⁴⁷ In this respect, both the higher committees and their dissidents were replicating hegemonic Republican cultural symbols, namely the masculine combatant and the virtuous frontline, even while proposing radically different courses of action. Despite these dissenting voices, however, the anarchist leadership was effective in instrumentalising these common motifs towards creating, in its own words, ‘a mighty organisation’ whose legitimacy was assured by the military achievements of anarchists within the Popular Army.¹⁴⁸ The anarchist soldier, then, became not a walking contradiction but a common symbol of charismatic leadership, revolutionary virtue, masculine identity and the creative potential of armed struggle.

¹⁴⁰ ‘En los frentes aragoneses’, *Hombres Libres* (31 Dec. 1937), 2.

¹⁴¹ ‘¡El combatiente!’, *Hombres Libres* (1 Oct. 1937), 3.

¹⁴² ‘S. I. A. organiza “el día del combatiente y del niño” ¡Ayúdale!’, *Tierra y Libertad* (18 Dec. 1937), 2.

¹⁴³ Enrique Gómez, ‘El viejo veterano’, *Umbral* (19 July 1938), 16; ‘Los mutilados de la guerra’, *CNT Madrid* (4 Oct. 1938), 1; ‘El mutilado de guerra’, *Mujeres Libres* (Autumn, 1938), 9.

¹⁴⁴ Alpert and Matthews, ‘Columns’, 28.

¹⁴⁵ Holguín, Sandie, *Spaniards*, 173–77; Mario Martín Gijón, ‘La poesía durante la guerra civil española en el frente y la retaguardia de la zona republicana. Notas para una revisión’, *Monteagudo*, 16 (2011), 191–97; Mario Martín Gijón, ‘El teatro durante la Guerra Civil Española en el frente y la retaguardia de La Zona Republicana’, *Lectura y Signo*, (2011), 268–72.

¹⁴⁶ Cesc Foguet i Boreu, ‘Cultura y teatro en las trincheras: La 31a División del ejército Republicano’, *Teatro: Revista de Estudios Culturales*, 13–14 (1998), 162–64.

¹⁴⁷ ‘Un homenaje a Durruti’, *Mi Revista* (1 Dec. 1938), 20.

¹⁴⁸ ‘A Would-be Justification’, in D. Guérin, ed., *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2005), 660–1.

Conclusion

The fall of the Spanish Republic and the disintegration of the Popular Army in April 1939 largely ended and discredited participation in regular armed forces by anarchists, not only among Spaniards but also among the international movement.¹⁴⁹ Much of their exiled memoir literature construed militarisation as a fatal compromise which betrayed the revolution and undercut the war-effort by sapping the revolutionary zeal of the militias.¹⁵⁰ These bids for repentance by the anarchist leadership have heavily influenced scholarship on Spanish anarchism which has often emphasised resistance to militarisation and the defence of revolutionary values.¹⁵¹ However, this neglects the diversity of anarchist thought and the full extent of anarchism's participation in the 'war culture' of the Republican Zone and European antifascism. Anarchism's intellectual heritage included an admiration for the theoretically creative potential of war, and civil war in particular. Indeed, the creation of militarised standards of heroism and martyrdom was a fusion of existing anarchist traditions with the wider proliferation of military heroes across the antifascist spectrum. Discipline, though controversial, was not a fixed concept but rather a contested term whose meaning was mobilised by different factions of the movement in their struggle for hegemony. Crucially, the front became a space where new virile, virtuous men were being forged through military service, a sentiment shared across the militarised cultural framework of Spanish antifascism. Examining anarchist participation and negotiation of this cultural milieu, we can therefore arrive at a more nuanced understanding not only of Spanish anarchism but of the potency of martial values and ideals outside of statist politics.

¹⁴⁹ The exception to this trend being the Spanish anarchist refugees who joined the Free French forces during the Second World War, see: Evelyn Mesquida, *La nueve: los españoles que liberaron París* (Madrid: B de Bolsillo, 2014).

¹⁵⁰ Isaac Martín Nieto, 'El mito del paraíso revolucionario perdido. La Guerra Civil Española en la historia militante libertaria', *Ayer*, 89 (2013), 148–56.

¹⁵¹ Examples include: Augustin Guillamón, *The Friends of the Durruti Group, 1937–39*, trans. by Paul Sharkey (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1998); Paz, *Iron*; Amorós, *Maroto*; Evans, *Revolution*.