

Dear Matilde: Letters from the Refugee Camps

Sofía Rodríguez Serrador

PhD in History at University of Valladolid (Instituto Universitario de Historia Simancas). Her research interests cover the Contemporary History of Spain, focus on the Second Republic, the Civil War and the Francoism.

Abstract

The letters sent by Spanish refugees to different aid committees, and found in the National Archives of France, help us better understand the hardships experienced in the internment camps. They also provide interesting facts about the education of children in the camps, and the relationship that the exiles had with the aid organizations such as the *Comite de Ayuda a los Refugiados* and the *Commission d'Aide aux Enfants Espagnols Réfugiés en France*. Matilde Huici very actively collaborated with both organizations. She was the addressee of many of the letters that Spanish mothers wrote from the camp asking for warm clothes and shoes for their children or requesting information about the situation of their husbands, confined in other centres. Huici also served as an intermediary when, upon the beginning of the Second World War, the collaboration of Spanish refugees in the French economy was needed.

Resumo

Cara Matilde: Cartas dos Campos de Refugiados

As cartas enviadas por refugiados espanhóis a diferentes comités de ajuda e encontradas nos Arquivos Nacionais de França, ajudam-nos a melhor compreender as privações sentidas nos campos de refugiados. Além disso também mencionam factos interessantes acerca da educação das crianças nesses campos e a relação que os exilados tiveram com organizações de ajuda, tais como o Comité de Ajuda aos Refugiados e a Comissão de Ajuda às Crianças Espanholas Refugiadas em França. Matilde Huici colaborou ativamente com ambas as organizações tendo sido a destinatária de muitas cartas que mães espanholas escreveram a partir dos campos a solicitar roupas quentes e sapatos para os seus filhos, ou solicitando informação sobre o estado dos seus maridos que se encontravam noutros campos de refugiados. Huici também atuou como intermediária após o começo da Segunda Guerra Mundial quando o contributo dos refugiados espanhóis se tornou necessário para a economia francesa.

The Spanish Republican Exile

One of the most notable characteristics of the republican exile is its geographical, social, demographic, and political plurality. This exile was also pluralistic regarding the variety of reception countries¹. This massive displacement of population was not the first one to take place in Europe in the 20th century. However, after the First World War the number of refugees reached a previously unheard of proportion, while the figure of the “stateless” emerged. *The Convention Relating to the International Status of Refugees* of 1933 defined the refugee as someone who “doesn’t have or has never had the protection of their country”. At the 1938 International Conference held at Evian, the universal criteria to define the refugee was determined to be “the fear of persecution” (Alted, 2005, p. 25). Sadly, the Republican exile coincided with the migratory movements caused by Hitler’s regime and the human migration of 1939 would be quickly followed by the Second World War, leading in turn to new movements of population².

The first migration of the Spanish civilian population took place at the beginning of the Irun’s final battle (August, 1936) at the Northern Front, and with the siege of Madrid in October of the same year. After the fall of San Sebastian, many people decided to cross the border to seek refuge. This first egress was improvised and disorganized³. In October of 1936, the War Refugee Committee was created to coordinate the tasks of the different institutions in charge of the evacuation. Although the Department of Health was responsible for the evacuation of the civilian population shortly after, the Department of Public Instruction took over the evacuation of children to areas under Republican control, through colonies organized to aid in their daily needs and to continue their education. In 1937, the official evacuations of

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- 1 Many researchers have studied the numbers and typology of Republican exile, its dispersion around the world, the legal measures that affected them, and the agencies that helped them, their experiences and every aspect that made up the history of a nation who had fled their homeland. The following works are references in the analysis of this issue: Rubio (1977), Cuesta and Bermejo (1996), Dreyfus (1999) and Alted (2005). For an exhaustive bibliographical review of the republican exile, see Piedrafita (2003).
 - 2 In 1936 there were many other communities of foreigners and refugees in France. Ahead of the Spanish group, which was about 250,000 inhabitants before the Civil War, 720,000 Italians and 420,000 Polish lived in France. Of a population of almost forty-two million people, more than two million had not been born in France. In 1939 not only 470,000 Spaniards followed but also 400,000 German and Austrian refugees in October, 1939 from the *Reich*, (Peschanski, 2000, pp. 31-34). Regarding the protection of the refugees in Europe, refer to Ponte (2002) and Mariño (2008).
 - 3 It is estimated that between 15,000 and 20,000 Spaniards went to France as a result of this first campaign on Northern Front, the majority of them were repatriated to Spain. Those received by relatives and resident friends in France could remain in the country.
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children abroad began⁴. In August of 1936, the *Conférence Européenne* was held, in the course of which the *Committee International de Coordination et d'Information pour l'Aide à L'Espagne Republicaine* was constituted⁵. Its intent was to promote the creation of National Help Committees for the Republican Spain, to centralize the humanitarian activities promoted by every country, by coordinating the movements of solidarity and informing the National Committees of the needs of the Spanish population. It was acting simultaneously as a tool of propaganda, spreading social, economic, and cultural activities carried out by the republican government. After Franco's offensive in Vizcaya, an overseas evacuation of Basque children was organized. Thus, 4,000 children left for England, and another 4,500 for France of which one-third were transferred to the Soviet Union, and just a few to Belgium. With the fall of Santander (August 1937) a group of children from different parts of the Basque Country, Santander, and Asturias departed mainly for the Soviet Union⁶. Javier Rubio estimated to be around 125,000 displaced to France due to the campaign of the Northern Front, mostly Basques⁷. The number of children evacuated throughout the war is estimated to be 33,000 mostly (approximately 20,000) admitted to France⁸.

In the Spring of 1938, the Francoist army offensive took place in Alto de Aragon, causing an exodus of 24,000 people, mainly soldiers who were rapidly repatriated, although at the end of the year between 40,000 and 45,000 refugees remained in the neighboring country, of whom approximately a fourth were children. In December 1938 the final offensive against Catalonia began. Since mid-January the roads connecting with France filled with people trying to flee the country in the coldest winter of the war. For little more than three weeks about 465,000 people crossed the border through the *Department of Pyrénées-Orientales*, many of whom were women, children, and the elderly, without political or military responsibilities, forced into exile by fear of the Francoist repression. On top of that almost half a million people who fled to France in disbandment, the previous 50,000 from the first migrations caused by the Civil War is a number to keep in mind⁹.

4 The first expedition took 72 children to the Soviet Union, another led 450 Basque children to France. Though in September 1936 small groups of children had gone out towards France the expeditions organized by republican government took place in March 1937.

5 See facsimile in <https://wdc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/scw/id/1919>

6 They were 1,100 children, some of which stayed in France.

7 At the end of 1937 approximately 25,000 adults remained in the country, dispersed over numerous departments.

8 The Soviet Union admitted 2,900, Mexico 463, Switzerland around 430, Denmark a small group of 100 children, whereas Sweden and Norway supported colonies on the Mediterranean Spanish coast and in French soil. The reception of these children in the various countries varied, as well as reunions with their families into exile, or their return over the following years (Alted, 1996).

9 At the end of 1939 nearly 360,000 people had returned to Spain (Rubio, 1996).

For the French government, the Spanish exiles meant a political and economic problem, therefore the repatriation to Spain or the remigration to third countries was encouraged. Upon the breakout of the Civil War, the government of the Popular Front in France, presided over by the socialist Leon Blum tried to help Spain as much as possible, even after the signing of the Pact of Non-Intervention. Sectors of French society: political and trade union groups of the left-wing organized different ways of assistance, especially in regards to civilian aid. The French government's initial policy of reception during the Spanish Civil War was very well structured, because soldiers would be repatriated to the area of their personal choice, and those civilians who did not want to return to Spain were able to settle down in several departments of the center area of the country. In April of 1938, Edouard Daladier assumed the lead of a centre-right coalition government. This government was in charge of tackling the problem of the very high number of Spanish refugees in France since the middle of January 1939. Although it had been decided that the border between Spain and France would continue to be closed, the pressure caused by the high volume of people headed towards the border under Francoist bombings, and suffering the ravages of winter, persuaded the government to open the border in late January for women, children, the elderly, and the infirm. This action raised the levels of tension amongst the population, which was conditioned by the depiction of the refugees by the press, especially the conservative media who described the exiles as undesirable and dangerous¹⁰. Finally, in February the French government officially opened the border due to the amount of Republican soldiers who were entering the country mixed within the civilian population. After crossing the border, Spaniards were grouped into camps of classification (*triage*) to proceed afterwards to their further distribution in *centres d'accueil*. The majority of children, women, the elderly, and the infirm were driven to locations in the Centre or the West, while men and army fighters were taken to concentration or internment camps, where also children and women would settle later on. This geographical dispersion caused the separation of families and the need to request reunification, which would take months.

At the end of November 1938, the Daladier government took measures on the part of the Spanish population considered undesirable. The intention was to expel them, and were this not to be possible they would be sent to special centers where they would be monitored permanently. These special centers would be real concentration camps. At first, all civilian men and soldiers would come into this category of undesirable population, and were thus transferred to the concentration camps.

10 *Le Figaro* branded the exiles as "undesirable and subversive", the far-right *Gringoire* y *L'Action Française* were warning of the dangers for the public health this "red pest" of communists and anarchists (Alted, 2005, p. 66).

The first camps were created on Argeles and Saint-Cyprien beaches, followed by the fields of Vallespir and Cerdagne (soon evacuated to others in the center of the country because of the low temperatures in the area). It is necessary to remember that Saint-Cyprien and Argeles were vast expanses of sand, surrounded by barbed wire, where the sea acted as the “fourth wall” while its inhabitants were under strict surveillance by the French police and colonial troops. Due to administration and health issues, the French government built one more camp in the same department of Oriental Pyrenees, on the Barcares’s beach. In order not to concentrate the whole immigration of the Spanish republicans on the beaches of the Rousillon more camps were constructed: Agde (Herauld), Bram (Aude), Gurs (Bearn) and Judes’s field (in Septfonds, Tarn et Garonne). Further detention centres were created for those considered dangerous, such as Collioure Fortress (the most dangerous of all¹¹), and the disciplinary camps of Vernet-d’ Ariege and Rieucros (for women)¹².

From the beginning of the Republican exile, numerous institutions provided aid including the International Red Cross, and the Quakers. Organizations were created for the purpose of caring for Spanish Republican children, the *Commission d’Aide aux Enfants Espagnols Réfugiés en France* – where Matilde Huici very successfully helped the refugees¹³, among others.

Matilde Huici: an Intellectual Committed to the Second Republic

Matilde Huici worked intensely with Clara Campoamor, Victoria Kent, and Maria de Maeztu both intellectually and politically. Her extensive academic and professional life was focused quickly on the attention for disadvantaged and delinquent minors. As a very active militant feminist, she also pursued a remarkable political career over the Republican period, continuing to support minors in need. This activity increased over the Civil War and the exile periods.

Huici was a national teacher, therefore when in 1916, the *Residencia de Señoritas*, linked to the *Institucion Libre de Enseñanza* opened she applied for a vacancy there to prepare her joining in the *Escuela Superior de Magisterio de Madrid*. She immediately became very close to Maria de Maeztu, director of the residence where Huici would work as a librarian. When she finished her studies at the *Escuela Superior*, she

11 The League of the Human rights denounced that the prisoners were submitted to a brutal treatment.

12 The first group of communist German women arrived in this camp in the middle of 1939, followed by women of other nationalities. In 1942 a convoy left for Auschwitz.

13 Her academic and life path is extremely extensive, she cultivated associationism, feminism, socialism, and endless labor in favour of the minors at risk of social exclusion and delinquency. Two biographies that detail her extraordinary life are García-Sanz (2010) and San Martín (2009).

pursued Law and obtained a two-year grant¹⁴ from the *Junta para la Ampliación de Estudios e Investigaciones Científicas*, for an internship in the United States with the purpose of studying those institutions relating to delinquent children, and learn about different educational models that were applied, becoming one of the pioneers in child correctional psychology in Spain. Upon her return from the United States she completed her studies of Law in 1926, becoming the third woman registered in the *Ilustre Colegio de Abogados de Madrid*¹⁵ that year, obtaining shortly after her doctorate in Law¹⁶. Luis Jimenez de Asua was one of her professors in the degree, and she collaborated with him (among other tasks) at the Commission which wrote the first draft for the 1931 Constitution¹⁷. Upon obtaining her the Law degree, she took an official exam for inspector of penitentiaries, and from early 1927, she was a member of the Minors Tutelary Court of Madrid, working as a lawyer in her spare time. She married Luis San Martín Adeva, colleague and judge for the juvenile court of Madrid – a position he held until the end of the Civil War. When they got married, Luis was a widower and father of a child who Matilde legally adopted. Over the late 1920s Matilde Huici strengthened her bonds with the modern Spanish feminine intellectuals and joined feminist and cultural societies and organizations, also in some cases organizations of legal scope¹⁸. One of the most important asso-

14 1923-1924, 1924-1925 school years.

15 The first woman was Victoria Kent, followed by Clara Campoamor, both in 1925.

16 In 1927 a North American paper published that Matilde Huici was the third Spanish woman who practiced Law in the country, being one of the most diligent candidates ever graduated. The article analyzes the situation of the women who decided to study Law in Spain, to end by mentioning how Huici, after passing brilliantly her examinations, acted as defending attorney in a penal case at the Supreme Court of Madrid *The Arizona Republican*, 1927. Third woman to practice Law in Spain faces Bar, *The Arizona Republican*, 5 February, p. 4.

17 One of the most important roles Matilde Huici played, after the proclamation of the Republic, was her work as a member on the Subcommittee on Criminal Law of the Juridical Commission Adviser of the Department of Justice, in which she took part of the Subcommittee that wrote the draft for the Constitution. Huici worked in favour of divorce law, presenting her particular vote, together with Jiménez de Asúa. In her defense of the rights of women presented her candidacy to the court.

18 It is very likely for Huici to even have been a founder of the *Juventud Universitaria Femenina* (JUF), promoted by María de Maeztu, although it is certain that Huici was, in 1928, its Vice-Secretary. She was part of the Committee created by the International Federation of University Women (FIMU) to investigate the position of women in public services. She was linked to another entity in these years, the *Liga Femenina Española por la Paz y la Libertad*. In 1915 the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) was founded, with headquarters in Geneva, aimed to persuade women around the world to object all exploitation by men and any form of oppression. When in 1919 the Congress of Associations pro Company of Nations was held in Madrid, Matilde Huici was among the Spanish delegates, as well as Clara Campoamor, María de Maeztu and Isabel de Oyarzabal. Afterwards arose the idea of creating

ciations she joined was the Lyceum Club, founded in 1926, being its leader Maria de Maeztu and Huici one of its founding members. She held several talks and was appointed vice-president in 1931¹⁹. At the Lyceum she joined several partners (Clara Campoamor or Elena Soriano, among others) to recover the leading figure of Concepcion Arenal and erect a statue in her honour in Madrid.

She also stood out in her political militancy: she was always a committed Republican, and together with Campoamor, refused any position of responsibility she received during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera²⁰. She actively participated in the vindication for women's right to vote, claiming the recognition of women legal rights in the Constitution. From 1927, she and Campoamor took part in the founding of the *Agrupación Liberal Socialista*, although this formation did not consolidate. She was a team member for the female socialist group of Madrid as Victoria Kent and Clara Campoamor, but she did not join the PSOE (the socialist association of Madrid) until 1931, at the same time that her husband and Margarita Nelken did. During the Republican period she took advantage of her official positions to reform the structures dedicated to the protection of infancy. She was part of the Commission which, in April and May 1931, studied the law on minor tutelary courts and introduced numerous changes in their operations. She was part of the *Consejo de Protección de Menores* which replaced the *Consejo Superior de Protección de la Infancia*, of which Luis Jimenez de Asua, Clara Campoamor and her husband, Luis San Martin Adeva were members as well. She became involved in the activities of the *Instituto de Estudios Penales*, through conferences to train prison staff, and for those interested in taking a Law degree. In 1933 she was designated, temporally, the chair for the Minor Tutelary Court of Appeal. In recognition of her labor for the protection of children, the first operational female preventorium in Spain (in 1933) was named after her²¹.

She obtained the title of Pedagogy after this degree started to be taught in the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts of the Central University in 1932, and one year later she visited the USSR to observe the new methods used in the country related to the protection of juvenile delinquents and abandoned minors. In 1935, she founded the Child Auxiliary Association, offering Angel Ossorio y Gallardo to be its president.

the *Liga Femenina Española por la Paz y la Libertad*, which was integrated by members of the JUF. Matilde Huici, as part of its board of directors, requested to join the National Association of Pro League of Nations.

19 The *ABC* newspaper of 24 November, 1929, gathers that Huici spoke in the "Woman in Spanish Law" conference. In: *ABC*, 1929. Informaciones y noticias de lecturas y conferencias: "La mujer en el derecho español. La mujer como persona", *ABC*, 24 November, p. 32.

20 Huici received offers to be a member of the board of the *Ateneo de Madrid* and to participate in the Paritary Committees of the Ministry of Labour.

21 In Vigo.

The intention of this association was to prevent situations of risk for lower class children who spent many hours on the streets while their parents were at work, providing libraries, clubs, and workshops for them in various neighborhoods of Madrid.

Huici participated in the 1936 elections by giving numerous speeches, encouraging the vote for the Popular Front, and at the outbreak of the Civil War, her political commitment increased. In October of 1937, she took part in the Second Conference of Anti-Fascists Women²² in Valencia, bringing up issues related to the situation of women, their education, and their technical and cultural preparation. She chaired the Conference with other important women of the time, including Dolores Ibarruri. In the same year, she was a delegate for the Government of the Republic in the Consultative Commission of Social and Humanitarian Questions of the League of Nations, and the Minister of State, Julio Alvarez del Vayo appointed her, with provisional character, second-class Secretary in his Department. With this position she attended the General Advice of the League of Nations in Geneva. When the foreign organizations of Aids to Spain requested that someone be named to advise them in the meetings held to help the Republic, Huici was designated to carry out this function. Throughout the following year she continued her work in the League of Nations. Her role in the evacuation of Spanish children during the war led to her death sentence by the Francoist regime.

Matilde Huici and the *Commission d'Aide aux Enfants Espagnols Réfugiés en France*

The marriage Huici-San Martin moved from Madrid to Valencia, spending the last months of the war in Barcelona and, probably, at the beginning of 1939, they crossed the Catalanian border, taking turns to live between Paris and Geneva. In Paris she continued to look after Spanish children evacuated from the war, collaborating with the *Comité de Ayuda a los Refugiados*, the *Commission d'Aide aux Enfants Espagnols Réfugiés en France*, the International Red Cross and the League of Nations²³. The family moved to Geneva, until they had to leave the European continent on their way to America in 1940.

Although their exile in France was short, around one year, from the letters that she received requesting her help as a member of the *Commission d'Aide aux Enfants*

22 Huici was a member of the National Women's Committee against War and Fascism, established in Spain, as associate section of the World Committee with headquarters in Paris, in 1933.

23 Very little information is known on the work carried out by Matilde Huici in collaboration with the International Red Cross – merely her cooperation with this institution and the efforts made between the International Red Cross and the *Commission d'Aide aux Enfants Espagnols Réfugiés*. Her participation in the League of Nations is better known, although not the specific tasks she carried out during her time there.

*Espagnols Réfugiés en France*²⁴, it is possible to deduce her intense activity. She received a large number of missives sent by women in exile to request clothes and footwear for them and their children, reporting their serious lacks, not having winter clothes, and at times not even shoes or underwear. Sometimes, detailed lists including measurements were attached²⁵. Among these letters requesting clothes, one by Victoria Kent stands out. She asked for clothing for the children of a friend confined in a camp²⁶. Although most of the senders of these letters were women some of them were men. Eleuterio Verdes de la Villa (Juan de Gredos, former editor of the Madrid newspaper *Política*²⁷), addressed a letter to Huici in March 1940 asking her to appear before the *Commission* in order to have clothes sent for his son, due to the fact that their situation was very bad because he could not find a job, he only knew how to be a journalist, and he did not receive any subsidy²⁸. Many refugees wrote Huici requesting information from their families, dispersed, sometimes for months, by the policies of classification and internment of the Republicans in the camps. The *Commission* sent clothing, medicines, sanitary material for women, and food to the camps. When the *Comission* and Matilde Huici received the letters they wrote back to obtain specific clothing and footwear sizes. Sometimes the answers came back as templates with the shape of a foot²⁹. Part of her work on the *Commission* consisted in coordinating with other organizations to aid refugees such as the *Service Social d'Aide aux Emigrants*, whose director was Blonay Adeli³⁰, the *Commission Internationale d'Aide aux Enfants Espagnols Réfugiés en Espagne*, that collaborated in turn with the Quakers of Philadelphia and their delegation in London; and also with the *International Civil Service* (with headquarters in Berne) and the *Union Internationale de Secours aux Enfants* (with headquarters in Geneva). Without a doubt, her role as link and organizer for the Republican Government during the Civil War, allowed Matilde to effectively continue her work in exile. Some of these organizations derived requests to her, especially regarding the aid for children, so that the *Commission Internationale d'Aide aux Enfants Espagnols Réfugiés en Espagne* would share the cases of missing exiled children³¹. Some of these organizations established a service of visitors or inspectors for the concentration and hosting camps, to write reports that then would be sent to their respective organizations, but also to Matilde Huici asking for help and narrating the situation of the refugees. Thus, Lucy Palsen, member of the International Civil

24 The letters are deposited in the National Archives of France.

25 Box 20010221/6: National Archives of France (NAF).

26 Box, 20010221/6: NAF.

27 This newspaper was founded two years before the start of the Civil War.

28 Box 20010221/5: NAF.

29 Box 20010221/3: NAF.

30 Box 20010221/4: NAF.

31 Box 20010221/5: NAF.

Service wrote from the lower Loire, requesting help to find jobs for the refugees³². Jacinta Landa was another contributor to the *Commission*, in charge of field reports. She kept in touch with Matilde Huici and with the general-secretary of the *Comission*, Renee de Monbrison, even accompanying Lucy Palsen in some of the visits. Among the stories of life at the camps one which took place at the center where Landa lived (located in Niort) can be highlighted. The interpreter appointed to help communicate the commissioner and the prefect for the French department, told false stories about the danger posed by anarchists in the center, whom he accused of being armed with knives, intending to frighten the commissioner so the later would delegate the interaction with the refugees to the interpreter, turning thus his work at the camp into something essential.

Thanks to letters from Rosa Poy³³, Huici received more information by the International Commission for the Assistance of Child Refugees in Spain (ICACRS) regarding the situation of reception centres. She was one of the most active collaborators of the Quakers, through the work "Quaker friends" (Friends Service Council) of London, organizing canteens and colonies for the refugee children in Catalonia. From July 1939 to September 1942 (date in which she emigrated to Mexico) she was a delegate in France for the same organization, and in addition to the Service Committee in Philadelphia, she aided Spanish political refugees and from other countries, visiting concentration camps. She organized the help for a group of Spanish students that lived in Montpellier, who had interrupted their studies because of the war. Poy reported on the situation in Ceilhes, stressing its insalubrity and lack of medicines. She also mentioned the education of the children who lived there describing them as "savages", as well as the lack of teachers. Rosa Poy was at that point in contact with Miss Linsley who, in August of 1939, was working on a documentary on the camps, filming the situation of the Spanish exiles. The camp's visitors received funding from the *Commission* for travel expenses, while often the Quaker Committee in London financed their support. However, a more detailed reading of these letters reveals how sometimes inspectors would cover their own travel expenses³⁴.

Upon the beginning of the Second World War in September of 1939, Matilde Huici spread out a request from the French Department of Employment demanding

32 Box 20010221/4: NAF.

33 Rosa Poy Martí, was a dentist (graduated in 1923) and national teacher of catalan origin. She was a member of Esquerra Republicana. Poy went to Mexico on the ship Nyassa in October 1942, as the database of migratory movements Ibero-American of the MEC shows. Her name appears on the list of passengers of the ship provided by the journal *Adelante* in its issue of October 15, 1942. In Mexico she was hired as a dentist by *Colegio Madrid*. In exile, she was one of the founders of the *Grupo Femenino Español Mariana Pineda*.

34 Box 20010221/4: NAF.

feminine workforce, indicating that one or several women should make lists of those willing to sign up for jobs, listing their skills³⁵. She would then send the lists to the Department of Work. In one of the letters that she forwarded with lists of workers, she explained how in the new centres of housing some associations of aid to refugees had set up “charity wardrobes” (as a way to combat the idleness of the women) which according to her, could be used to make clothes for soldiers³⁶.

Moreover, Spanish aid agencies (the SERE and JARE) turned to the *Commission*, forwarding Matilde Huici the requests of clothing, and footwear that the refugees sent from the camps. In 1940, JARE contacted Huici requesting information about a rumour that the quartermaster military was providing wool for the refugees in the camps to manufacture garments for soldiers³⁷. In their letters, they suggested specific people to take them into account for the distribution of labour. This was the case of Leonor Menendez Vinuela, qualified nurse, specialized in laboratory and surgery. They also denounced the attempts to deport refugees to Spain in order for the *Commission* to try to prevent them. Thus, in March of 1940, they informed that Palmira Pla Pechovierto, treasurer to the Socialist Aragonese Federation “has been invited by the prefect of the Department” where she lived, to return to Spain, entailing a serious danger for her. They also demanded assistance through Huici to solve the problem of those sent to family camps, who up to that point, had lived freely and self-sufficiently in French villages³⁸.

In February 1940, new governmental regulations divided refugees into three categories: those who could benefit from the right to be one; the dangerous, who needed to stay locked up; and those who could neither work nor contribute anything to the country, so they had to be expelled. Therefore, shelters were closed in March and the only individuals allowed to remain in the country were the relatives of those employed, in the Legion, in the battalions, in Workers’ companies, or those whose lives would be threatened were they to return to Spain. Facing this new situation, Huici was contacted by friends and acquaintances requesting her mediation to obtain help from the *Commission*. Such was the case of Manuel J. Cluet, school teacher in Madrid, supporter of Freinet’s pedagogy and the use of the printing press in schools³⁹,

35 In the letter she explained “that the circumstances provided Spanish refugee women in France with the opportunity to work to support the country that had received them”. Letter dated in September 1939. Box 20010221/2: NAF.

36 Box 20010221/2: NAF.

37 Box 20010221/7: NAF.

38 *Ibid.*

39 He designed his own model of printing press, the “Cluet” press (Hernández and Sánchez, 2012). Cluet traveled to the Dominican Republic, and he was a professor at the Normal School of San Juan de la Maguana. In 1969 he was professor of the Normal of Ciudad Trujillo and professor of the School of Diplomatic and Consular of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

who sent a letter to Matilde from the preventorium of the *Chateau the Bassine* (Lacaune, Tarn) in October of 1939. In his missive, he explained that the only solution to him and his family (with which he had finally managed to reunite three months earlier after a month and a half trying to find them, and more than five to regroup in the preventorium) was to go to America, because the refuge would be closing and their only alternative was their internment in concentration camps (in Le Bacarres for men, and Rieucros for women and children). They, however, seemed unlikely to be accepted because of the existing overwhelming number of refugees. Furthermore, they were not able to move to a French location, because the preventorium was very far away from other settlements, and the family almost did not have any contacts. Finally, in his letter, he asked for help to pay for the trip to America since the SERE only contributed with a portion of the expenses, and his family could not afford the rest⁴⁰. It is well known the role played by the SERE and the JARW for the reception in Latin American countries; equally well-known are the political affiliation and professional requirements that they considered at the moment of processing the evacuations, as well as the conflicts between both associations.

The confrontation between the SERE and JARE was notorious. Federica Montseny, anarchist leader and former Minister of Health and Social Welfare of the republican government during the Spanish Civil War⁴¹, wrote to Matilde Huci asking for her mediation on this issue for the *Commission* to receive SERE funds to be able to continue her work, but this organization was reticent arguing that the *Commission* already received funding from the JARE⁴². By Huci's reply, it can be concluded that up to this moment (January 1940), the financing was coming from the International Commission, and this Commission in addition had covered the demands from SERE but, now the help of this service was becoming essential to continue to work. She explained that she had even contacted Julio de Jauregui in August of the previous year in case he could somehow speed up the process⁴³.

40 Box 20010221/4: NAF.

41 Member of the CNT (National Confederation of Labour) and the first woman to hold such a position in Europe, between November 1936 and March 1937, under the government of F. Largo Caballero, she promoted a bill to legalize abortion. Her responsibilities also covered the attention of refugees. In 1939, she left to exile in France with her family and remained hidden during the Nazi occupation, under the name of Fanny Germain. In 1942, she was imprisoned, two years later, she was eventually freed and settled in Toulouse, where she reorganized the libertarian movement of opposition to Francoism. Along with her political work, her role as a writer and speaker stood out, contributing to anarchist publications such as *Solidaridad Obrera* (Rodrigo, 2014).

42 Box 20010221/7: NAF.

43 *Ibidem*.

Huici received endless requests for help, many of them to be an intermediary before the *Commission*. As an instance in her role of agent mediator, the letter she wrote on behalf of Constancio Bernaldo de Quiros can be mentioned. He was a Criminology professor at the *Instituto de Estudios Penales* in Madrid, and it is possible that they interacted throughout their academic and professional activity both, in the Institute, and in the Minors' Tutelary Court.

Quiros wished to contact a teacher of his same field of expertise at the Sorbonne, and the specialist of police science, in order to apply for a job⁴⁴. He was not the only person at her workplace that she tried to help find employment. Likewise, she helped allocate Spanish teachers in the French child art institution *Elai Alai*⁴⁵.

It has already been pointed out that Matilde Huici spent this first part of exile between Paris and Switzerland. This is probably the reason why many letters addressed to Huici were answered by the general-secretary of the *Comission*, Renee de Monbrison⁴⁶. The work carried out by Monbrison was also fundamental in aiding the refugees, not only Spanish ones. According to Angel Garcia-Sanz, the Huici-San Martin marriage paid several visits to Azana on their way to the colony where his son lived. This colony was maintained by a Rothschild, quite possibly Yvone's husband (García-Sanz, 2010, p. 272). This is a clear example of the good relationship Matilde Huici enjoyed with the general-secretary of the *Commission*⁴⁷. Finally, because of the advance of the Second World War, the Huici-San Martin family relocated to Chile in 1940. Luis San Martin travelled first with a nephew of Matilde's, and she followed with their adopted son on the "Orduna", a ship of

44 Box 20010221/6: NAF.

45 Box 20010221/6: NAF.

46 Born as Renee Marie Louise Cahen de Monbrison, of Jewish family, she married the count de Monbrison, acquiring this way her surname and the corresponding title. During the Civil War the Monbrison supported in his Castle a colony of refugee children, many of them Spanish. Jewish children joined afterwards too. Her sister, Lydia Louise Yvone, married a member of the Rothschild family. The United States Holocaust Memorial preserves a film of the colony installed in the Castle Monbrison in 1939. In The United States Holocaust Memorial, 1939. Quincy 39 – Hubert Conquere de Monbrison – amateur. Hubert Conquere de Monbrison Collection. Available at <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn1004611> [Accessed 18 July 2017].

47 When the Armistice in June of 1940 was signed, France had to hand the requested people over to the Gestapo, including members of the resistance, communists, trade unionists, and Jewish. Because of this situation, Renee de Monbrison and her family went into hiding in the Aquitaine region with the help of a married couple managing a hotel. The *Comité Français pour Yad Vashem*, provides this information, and the *Comité* bestowed this couple the title of the *Righteous among the Nations*. In: *Comité Français pour Yad Vashem. Righteous Among the Nations*. Ongaro Louis. Ongaro Yvonne. Available at <https://yadvashem-france.org/les-justes-parmi-les-nations/les-justes-de-france/dossier-8619a/> [Accessed 17 July 2016].

the British Pacific Steamship Navigation Company, which transported European refugees to America, many Jews among them. In Chile, not being her Law degree valid, Huici worked on translations from French, this time for the publishing company *Espasa Calpe*. Rapidly, she regained her educator's role, establishing in 1944 the Educational School of Preschoolers at the University of Chile, and being its headmaster until 1962. She died three years later, passing an important pedagogic legacy down to Chilean society.

Conclusion

Matilde Huici, before going to exile, worked to alleviate the suffering of Spanish refugees, first as an organizer for international aid agencies, and afterwards from her position at the League of Nations. In France- working for the *Commission d'aide aux enfants espagnols réfugiés*, she tried to relieve the plight of exiles, who found themselves in serious need, unemployed, and unable to speak French. In this task, she did not forget the infancy. Unfortunately, the Second World War aggravated the situation of the Spanish republicans, sending many more to exile. The advance of the German troops throughout Europe increased the instability and problems for the Spaniards. Many of them were part of the companies or battalions that had been employed to build up fortifications at the frontier lines. When the Maginot line fell in June of 1940, and the German soldiers rapidly conquered France, the deportation of Spaniards to the camps of prisoners of Germany began. At the end of June, the neighboring country would be divided into two areas: "free France" and "Vichy France". The camps of internment for the Spaniards were recovered, and the systems of forced labor for the State continued. As a result, many republicans were sent to Germany as workforce.

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- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: <https://www.ushmm.org/>
- Comité Français pour Yad Vashem: <https://yadvashem-france.org/>