

The Spanish Civil War, (Un)Grievable Lives, and Mnemonic Solidarity in 21st-Century Canadian Fiction

The aim of the project is to collect materials, interpret and analyse the representations of the Spanish Civil War in 21st-century Canadian fiction, published in English Canada and Quebec. The selected novels depict Canadian volunteers in Spain and/or the fratricidal violence of the civil war and its aftermath. At the same time, they echo other traumatic events in Canada and other parts of the world. The project therefore aims to prove that the selected fiction (1) reclaims from oblivion lives erased by the war, the Franco regime and other histories of violence and discrimination in Canada and beyond; (2) proposes a vision of mnemonic solidarity in dialogue with various communities of memory in the world; (3) the common ground for this productive conversation is an in-depth exploration of vulnerability as a general human condition and a means of resistance. This generates a number of questions: How does the fiction under consideration convey a critique of the war while expressing support for the Republican cause? How do the Canadian writers under consideration address the tension between the rhetoric of international solidarity and inclusion among the Republicans and the International Brigades and such factors of exclusion as ideology, gender, sexuality, race and religion? How does this perspective help expose similar problems in Canada? How are different communities of memory brought into a productive dialogue? What does it mean to be *solidaire* in remembrance?

The list of fiction selected so far consists of twelve novels in English and French: *The Blind Assassin* (2000) by Margaret Atwood; *Slow Lightning* (2001) by Mark Frutkin; *The Communist's Daughter* (2006) by Dennis Bock; *Underground* (2009) by June Hutton; *Not in My Father's Footsteps* (2011) by Terrence Rundle West; *Come from Afar* (2011) by Gayla Reid; *The Red Album* (2013) by Stephen Collis; *Matadora* (2013) by Elizabeth Ruth; *Makarius* (2014) by Sergio Kokis; *Les gens du sud n'aiment pas la pluie* (2014) by Patricia Portella Bricka; *Dehors les chiens* (2016) by Jacques Folch-Ribas; *Et l'avenir était radieux* (2017) by Bernard Dionne. This fiction has attracted little critical attention and it is timely to assess this body of literature.

Among the International Brigades who fought on the side of the Spanish Republicans there were 1,700 Canadian volunteers, approximately 400 of whom lost their lives in Spain. Many of them were recent immigrants and victims of the Great Depression; they believed that the war in Spain reflected the injustices they had suffered from, and offered them an opportunity to fight back. Initially, most Canadians fought with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, but also in Polish, Yugoslav, Bulgarian and other European units. However, the substantial number of Canadian volunteers eventually led to the formation of a separate unit, the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, which was named after two leaders of the unsuccessful Canadian rebellions against the British Crown in 1837-1838. This topic is particularly important today, in the context of new conflicts, and more specifically foreign volunteering in support of Ukraine's struggle for democracy.

Rooted in historical research about Canadian volunteers in Spain, the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath, this research project will draw on memory studies, political philosophy and postcolonial studies. Such a perspective will make it possible to situate the Spanish Civil War as the beginning of the "antifascist crusade", but also as a vehicle to understand other histories of violence (military, political, social, colonial, patriarchal) in Europe, North America, Africa, Asia and Latin America. Accordingly, the project aims to alert the readers to the multiple exclusions of General Franco's dictatorship, as well as other regimes of oppression and control, in Canada and beyond. The project will show how memories are entangled and negotiated across national borders, sometimes creating unexpected solidarities between victims and perpetrators of violence and/or unobvious connections between subjects of very different histories which, at first sight, have little in common.

The project aims to offer the first complex study of 21st-century Anglophone and Francophone Canadian fiction about the Spanish Civil War. It brings together diverse histories of (un)forgetting, and thus contributes to a better understanding of the ethics and aesthetics of remembrance. The PI plans to disseminate the results of the project in several research articles in English, which will be published in collections of essays and prestigious peer-reviewed journals. The results of the project should be interesting to academics and students working in the field of Canadian studies, war studies, postcolonial studies, as well as readers interested in cultural memory and legacies of violence.