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# Transnational Exchange in the Nazi New Order: The Spanish Blue Division and its Medical Services

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## Abstract

This article uses the case of the Spanish Blue Division to examine the history of transnational exchange and cooperation within the Nazi New Order. In particular, it explores the experiences of the Blue Division's medical services, which were required to engage most closely with the international environment of the Eastern Front. The Blue Division and its medical services shed new light on this topic in a number of different ways. Firstly, they show how the New Order was experienced by those from outside the core Axis states of Germany and Italy, and beyond the minority of ideologically-committed fascist fellow travellers. Secondly, volunteers within the medical corps help to illustrate how the New Order was perceived as a forum for scientific, intellectual and professional exchange, building on the traditional prestige of German science and pre-war practices of international scientific cooperation. Finally, integrating the perspectives of junior officers and rank-and-file troops helps to move beyond the political and cultural elites who dominate the literature on the New Order to show how cooperation and exchange worked on the ground. In particular, it demonstrates where the limits to this cooperation lay, and how individuals dealt with the tensions and conflicts between different national groups.

## Keywords

Eastern Front, Franco's Spain, fascism, medicine, Second World War

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Recounting his experience as a volunteer soldier on the Eastern Front during the Second World War, the Spanish journalist José Luis Gómez Tello described the exciting multinational atmosphere he encountered in the city of Riga, with its heady mix of '[b]eautiful women, shining uniforms, war wounded, Germans on leave, Spaniards, Italians, Belgians, Walloons, Swedes, Norwegians, Finns, French, Lithuanians.'<sup>1</sup> A member of the Spanish fascist party, the Falange, Gómez Tello formed part of the so-called 'Blue Division', the Spanish volunteer unit sent by the Franco regime to join the Axis war against the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> In the midst of the genocide, death and destruction taking place across Eastern Europe, what stuck in his memory, and in that of many of his colleagues, was the melting pot of different nationalities and cultures they encountered on the Eastern Front and the towns and cities of the rear. For them, the wartime environment of the Eastern Front was also a site of transnational encounter, exchange and cooperation.

This article uses the case study of the Blue Division to examine these forms of exchange and cooperation within the Nazi New Order. In particular, it explores the experiences of the Blue Division's medical services, which were required to engage most closely with the international environment of the region.<sup>3</sup> Not only were Spanish military hospitals dependent on German supplies and liaison officers, but many were staffed by mixed Spanish and German teams. Spanish doctors and nurses worked in German military units, while Spanish hospitals employed Polish, Estonian, Lithuanian, Russian and Jewish staff, and treated troops and civilians from a range of different countries. It was through medical services that rank-and-file troops also came into closest contact with the realities of the Nazi New Order. As patients, they were treated by the multinational staff in Spanish hospitals, and often received care within the German medical system. At the rear hospitals in Berlin, Königsberg, Riga and Vilnius, they lived and socialized alongside soldiers from across Europe, witnessed Nazi Germany and its territories at first hand, and experienced the strange cosmopolitanism of the occupied Baltic towns. Medical services were thus one of the key prisms through which the Blue Division's troops experienced the European society they were supposedly fighting to defend.

The Blue Division and its medical services shed new light on the phenomenon of cooperation and exchange in the New Order in a number of different ways. Firstly, they show how it was experienced by those from outside the core Axis states of Germany and Italy, and beyond the minority of ideologically-committed fascist fellow travellers. Although there were many enthusiastic fascists and philo-Nazis

1 J.L. Gómez Tello, *Canción de invierno en el este: crónicas de la División Azul* (Barcelona 1945), 27.

2 On the history of the Blue Division, see G.K. Kleinfeld and L.A. Tambs, *Hitler's Spanish Legion: The Blue Division in Russia* (Carbondale, IL 1979); X. Moreno Juliá, *La División Azul: sangre española en Rusia, 1941–1945* (Barcelona 2004); J.L. Rodríguez Jiménez, *De héroes e indeseables: la División Azul* (Madrid 2007); X.M. Núñez Seixas, *Camarada invierno: experiencia y memoria de la División Azul, 1941–1945* (Madrid 2016). The name of the division refers to the blue shirts worn by the Falange.

3 For specific works on the history of the Blue Division's medical services, see J. Bescós Torres, 'Misiones de la Sanidad Militar española en el extranjero: la Sanidad Militar en la División Azul', *Medicina Militar*, 51, 2 (1995), 184–93; J.M. Poyato, *Bajo el fuego y sobre el hielo: la sanidad en la campaña de la División Azul* (Madrid 2015).

within the Blue Division, volunteers came from across the Francoist political spectrum, and were often hostile to the Spanish fascism of the Falange and distrustful of elements of Nazi ideology. Secondly, volunteers within the medical corps help to illustrate how the New Order was perceived as a forum for scientific, intellectual and professional exchange, building on the traditional prestige of German science and pre-war practices of international scientific cooperation. Finally, integrating the perspectives of junior officers and rank-and-file troops helps to move beyond the political and cultural elites who dominate the literature on the New Order to show how cooperation and exchange worked on the ground. In particular, it demonstrates where the limits to this cooperation lay, and how individuals dealt with the tensions and conflicts between different national groups.

The German victory over France in the summer of 1940 and invasion of the Soviet Union a year later saw the bulk of mainland Europe fall under the control of Nazi Germany and its allies. For many fascists and fascist fellow-travellers across the continent, this moment represented the birth of a new system, a New Order for Europe, ushering in an era of political, economic and cultural cooperation under German, and to a lesser extent Italian, leadership. Plans for a radically re-ordered European system under Axis domination were never taken seriously by Hitler. But they were actively embraced by groups of officials, experts and intellectuals within the German system, particularly in the foreign, economic and propaganda ministries, and were mirrored by similar initiatives in Fascist Italy.<sup>4</sup>

The history of the New Order has traditionally been studied from German perspectives.<sup>5</sup> In the context of the wider Nazi war effort, the idea of the New Order primarily served as a tool of Nazi propaganda and diplomacy. The Europeanist veneer it provided to the hegemonic, imperialist reality of Axis rule proved useful for securing the acquiescence of foreign fascists and fellow-travellers.<sup>6</sup> Particularly after the military reversals of 1943, Nazi propaganda increasingly presented the conflict as a struggle to defend a shared European civilization from the threat of Soviet Asiatic barbarism. But recent work has sought to expand these perspectives, showing how many people across Europe engaged with the New Order as a genuine forum for transnational exchange and cooperation. In part, this cooperation built on the networks of transnational fascism which had been emerging from the 1920s, attracting those fascists and philo-Nazis driven by a

4 W. Lipgens (ed.), *Documents on the History of European Integration, Volume 1: Continental Plans for European Union, 1939–1945* (Berlin 1984).

5 Recent works on Nazi visions of the New Order include B. Kletz, *Europa aus Rasse und Raum: Die nationalsozialistische Idee der Neuen Ordnung* (Münster 2002); V. Conze, *Das Europa der Deutschen: Ideen von Europa in Deutschland zwischen Reichstradition und Westorientierung (1920–1970)* (Munich 2005); J. Elvert, 'The "New European Order" of National Socialism: Some Remarks on its Sources, Genesis and Nature', in D. Gosewinkel (ed.) *Anti-liberal Europe: A Neglected Story of Europeanization* (New York, NY and Oxford, 2015), 105–27; J. Dafinger, 'Show Solidarity, Live Solitarily: the Nazi "New Europe" as a "Family of Peoples"', *European Review of History*, 24, 6 (2017), 905–17.

6 On the imperialism of the New Order, see M. Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London 2008); R. Hofmann, 'The Fascist New-Old Order', *Journal of Global History*, 12, 2 (2017), 166–83.

sense of ideological and political affinity with the Axis cause.<sup>7</sup> But it also attracted a much wider range of Europeans, drawn to the myriad events and organizations established under the auspices of the New Order which brought together young people, women, students, artists, sportsmen, scientists and other groups.<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Martin, for example, has recently shown how both Germany and Italy sought to forge a ‘cultural New Order’, using music, film and literature to promote a new model of transnational cultural exchange.<sup>9</sup>

This article builds on these histories of transnational fascism and the New Order, but also shifts the focus away from elite initiatives taking place in Germany and Italy. Instead, it uses the case study of the Blue Division to foreground the site where the vast majority of transnational fascist interaction actually took place on the ground: the Eastern Front. The German-led war against the Soviet Union which began in June 1941 involved one of the largest multinational military forces in world history. Over the following four years over 4,000,000 non-German troops took part in the conflict, at their peak representing a third of the total fighting force.<sup>10</sup> As well as regular units from the states formally allied to Nazi Germany such as Italy, Hungary and Romania, they included volunteers from almost every European country, as well as some from beyond Europe, incorporated into both the Wehrmacht and the SS. Many of the keenest supporters of the New Order belonged to the core of European volunteers within the Waffen-SS, whose multinational officer corps represented a potential future European elite.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, if the New Order for Europe existed anywhere, it existed among this international melting pot of soldiers, volunteers and civilians brought together on the Eastern Front.

Although only a small fraction of the Axis forces fighting on the Eastern Front, the 47,000 Blue Division volunteers represented the largest cohort of Spaniards to come into direct contact with Nazi Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe.<sup>12</sup>

7 A. Bauerkämper and G. Rossolinski (eds), *Fascism without Borders* (New York, NY 2017).

8 E. Harvey, ‘International Networks and Cross-Border Cooperation: National Socialist Women and the Vision of the “New Order” in Europe’, *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 13 (2012), 141–58; B.G. Martin, ‘“European Literature” in the Nazi New Order: The Cultural Politics of the European Writer’s Union, 1942–3’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 48, 3 (2013), 486–508; D. Brydan, ‘Axis Internationalism: Spanish Health Experts and the Nazi “New Europe”, 1939–1945’, *Contemporary European History*, 25, 2 (2016), 291–311.

9 B.G. Martin, *The Nazi-Fascist New Order for European Culture* (Cambridge, MA 2016).

10 R.D. Müller, *The Unknown Eastern Front: The Wehrmacht and Hitler’s Foreign Soldiers* (New York, NY 2012).

11 J.L. Leleu, ‘From the Nazi Party’s Shock Troop to the “European” Mass Army: The Waffen-SS Volunteers’, in C.J. Krüger and C.G. Levsen (eds) *War Volunteering in Modern Times: From the French Revolution to the Second World War* (Basingstoke 2011), 231–47; J. Böhler and R. Gerwarth (eds), *The Waffen-SS: A European History* (Oxford 2016).

12 The largest, but by no means the only. Between 15,000 and 30,000 former Republicans were handed over the Nazi authorities following the German invasion of France, many of whom were imprisoned in concentration camps such as Mauthausen. Over 10,000 Spaniards were also sent to work in the Reich during the war. Many other political leaders, experts and activists also flocked to visit Nazi Germany during the war. See D. Winegate Pike, *Spaniards in the Holocaust: Mauthausen, The Horror on the Danube* (London 2000); W.H. Bowen, *Spaniards and Nazi Germany: Collaboration in the New Order* (Columbia, NY 2000); J.L. Rodríguez Jiménez, *Los esclavos españoles de Hitler* (Barcelona 2002).

Many of the Spanish volunteers believed that they were fighting for a common European cause, defending the continent and its civilization against the threat of Asiatic Bolshevism, as both Spanish and Nazi propaganda constantly reminded them. But they also gained direct experience of life within the European New Order they were supposedly fighting for. The journey to the frontline took them through France, Germany, Poland and the Baltic states. For most, it was the first time in their lives they had left Spain. Often travelling on foot, it brought them into contact with German military and civilian authorities, local populations displaying varying degrees of enthusiasm or hostility, and camps and columns of Soviet prisoners. At the front itself they fought alongside their German comrades and lived among Russian civilians. In the rear areas they experienced the multinational environment of towns such as Riga, Vilnius and Königsberg, where displaced civilians from across the region and mobilised soldiers from the four corners of Europe rubbed shoulders with cosmopolitan pre-war populations disrupted by the effects of war, occupation and extermination.

Drawing on divisional records, contemporary press reports, and veterans' memoirs, this article uses the prism of the Blue Division's medical services to map Spanish responses to this of this violent, multinational environment. Section one deals with the relationship between Blue Division volunteers and their German counterparts, showing how medical services were at the heart of the Blue Division's engagement with the Wehrmacht and Nazi authorities. Section two focuses on the Spanish response to the wider international environment of the Eastern Front. For many Spanish medical professionals, the Blue Division represented an opportunity to engage in the kind of international professional exchange which had been denied them since the start of the Spanish Civil War. Their reactions to the Eastern Front were conditioned by their enthusiasm for scientific cooperation as much as their ideological affinity with the Axis cause. Spanish troops, meanwhile, saw the towns in the rear as exciting cosmopolitan sites of socialising and entertainment. The final section explores the tensions these contacts produced, particularly the significant levels of conflict with German troops, showing how Spanish volunteers responded by reducing contact with other national groups and emphasising cultural particularities.

The Axis invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 had been met with widespread enthusiasm in Spain, both from within the Falange and from across the Francoist political spectrum. Franco, although refusing to formally join the Axis war effort in the absence of German economic and territorial concessions, quickly agreed to dispatch a volunteer division to the Eastern Front.<sup>13</sup> The large number of Falangist leaders, students and activists who initially signed up were joined by

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13 On the wider relationship between the Franco regime and Nazi Germany, see P. Preston, 'Franco and Hitler: The Myth of Hendaye 1940', *Contemporary European History*, 1, 1 (1992), 1–16; X. Moreno Juliá, *Hitler y Franco: diplomacia en tiempos de guerra* (Barcelona 2007); S. Payne, *Franco and Hitler: Spain, Germany, and World War II* (New Haven, CT 2008).

members of the armed forces and the foreign legion, and were placed under the command of experienced army officers led by General Agustín Muñoz Grandes.

The Division was first deployed in October 1941 near the city of Novgorod, around 150km south of Leningrad. This was one of the more stable sections of the Eastern Front, although Spanish troops faced heavy fighting around the river Volkhov during the first six months. New battalions began to arrive to replace the first cohort of troops in April 1942, and in September the Division was redeployed to the siege of Leningrad. In February 1943 it was involved in its largest single battle at Krasny Bor, which saw over 3000 Spanish troops killed or wounded. The combination of high losses and pressure from the USA prompted the Spanish government to withdraw the Division in July 1943, leaving a much smaller volunteer contingent known as the Blue Legion. This group would finally be withdrawn at the start of 1944, although a small number of Spanish volunteers continued to fight alongside German troops until the end of the war.

Spanish volunteers saw themselves as participants in a Europe-wide struggle against the threat of communism. But contemporary publications and propaganda emphasized the idea that it was a *German-dominated* Europe that the Blue Division was fighting for, and within which Spain would be able to recapture its former glory. A key moment in the incorporation of the Blue Division into the German military hierarchy and the German war effort came during its initial training camp in the Bavarian town of Grafenwöhr, where the new troops swore an oath of loyalty to Hitler. Colonel José Martínez Esparza, a military veteran with a background fighting in the foreign legion in North Africa, described the moment in his memoirs:

In that instant, we all felt the intimate pride of knowing ourselves Spaniards by the grace of God. And all of us recognised the importance to our *Patria* of the fact that we were at the heart of Europe receiving the backing of the German army, which had just welcomed us into its ranks. Spain once again belonged to Europe.<sup>14</sup>

The Division's subordination to German authority, rather than being resented, was seen as a way for Spain to regain its historical role at the heart of Europe. German dominance was generally presented in a positive light. Blue Division volunteers often described German attitudes as 'fraternal', particularly during the Division's first arrival in the country when troops were greeted at German train stations by flag-waving crowds and Red Cross volunteers providing food and drink, in stark contrast to the aggression and hostility that had marked their progress through occupied France.<sup>15</sup> Spanish volunteers presented Germany as the comradely, humane and socially advanced heart of Europe.<sup>16</sup> In Grafenwöhr, Martínez

14 J. Martínez Esparza, *Con la División Azul en Rusia* (Madrid 1943), 74.

15 Archivo General Militar, Ávila (AGM), División Española de Voluntarios (DEV), C.2005,2,2, 'Cuenta sobre incidencias de las expediciones de la División durante el trayecto', 19 August 1941.

16 On the wider history of these positive Spanish responses to Nazi Germany, both within the Blue Division and among Spanish visitors in general, see X.M. Núñez Seixas, 'Wishful Thinking in Wartime? Spanish Blue Division's Soldiers and Their Views of Nazi Germany, 1941-44', *Journal of War & Culture*

Esparza claimed, the accommodation and food provided to Russian forced labourers working in local industries was almost as good as that provided to German troops themselves, and the inmates, like the French prisoners of war working in the local agricultural sector, were happy to be there.<sup>17</sup>

Medical services played an important part in the positive relationship between Spanish volunteers and their German comrades. The Division's Military Health Group was made up of over 500 personnel drawn from a wide range of backgrounds, including experienced military health professionals and civilian volunteers. Among them were volunteer nurses from the Falange's Women's Section, the Army nursing corps, and the Spanish Red Cross, as well as senior figures from the Falangist health sections.<sup>18</sup> The first Spanish hospitals were established in October 1941 around the city of Novgorod close to the front. From the end of 1941, the Division established a network of dedicated Spanish hospitals in the rear, with new facilities opening in Riga and Vilnius. A small hospital in Berlin was supplemented by a much larger facility in Königsberg, as well as a new convalescent hospital in the German town of Hof. These facilities were largely, although not solely, staffed by Spanish personnel, and provided over 2000 beds.<sup>19</sup> The Inspectorate of Spanish Military Hospitals established an office in Berlin to coordinate their work. These facilities would remain operational for the duration of the Division's deployment, although the front-line hospitals were moved when the Division was re-deployed to the Leningrad front. After its withdrawal in 1943, the majority of medical personnel were recalled and the hospitals turned over the German authorities, although the Blue Legion retained a medical corps numbering close to 100.<sup>20</sup>

For the most ideologically-committed volunteers of the Blue Division, some of the best opportunities to develop their understanding of and links with the Nazi regime came during their time recuperating in hospital. Health services in the rear, particularly the Spanish hospitals in Berlin and Königsberg, were central to the efforts of groups on both sides to promote Hispano-German solidarity. The local Nazi Party, the Hitler Youth, and the local Ibero-American Institute all worked closely with the Spanish hospital in Berlin.<sup>21</sup> The regional Nazi parties in both

*Studies*, 11, 2 (2018), 99–116; X.M. Núñez Seixas, 'Spanish Views of Nazi Germany, 1933–45: A Fascist Hybridization?', *Journal of Contemporary History*, (2018), available at <https://www.doi.org/10.1177/0022009417739366> (accessed 10 May 2018).

17 Esparza, *Con la División Azul*, 95.

18 Centro de Documentación de Cruz Roja Española, Madrid (CDCRE), box 657, file 14, Mercedes Milá to Marquesa de Valdeiglesias, 9 December 1941, and Mauel Martínez de Tena to Valdeiglesias, 19 December 1941; L. Suárez Fernández, *Cronica de la Sección Femenina y su tiempo* (Madrid 1995), 140–2; Poyato, *Bajo el fuego*, 67–73. Among the high-profile Falangists in the unit were the Falange's National Inspector of Health, Armando Muñoz Calero, who served as a front-line surgeon, and José María Gutiérrez del Castillo, the National Secretary of the *Sindicato Español Universitario*. Agustín Aznar, Falangist 'old shirt' and National Delegate for Health, also served in the Division but was attached to an anti-tank unit rather than a medical team.

19 Bescós Torres, 'Misiones de la sanidad militar'.

20 *Ibid.*, 192.

21 On German cultural diplomacy and attempts to strengthen Hispano-German relations, see M. Janué i Miret, 'La cultura como instrumento de la influencia alemana en España: la Sociedad Germano-Española de Berlín (1930-1945)', *Ayer*, 69 (2008), 21–45.



Berlin and Königsberg were particularly active in providing theatre and sporting tickets for Spanish patients, arranging parties and social events around particular anniversaries and festivals, and delivering food parcels.<sup>22</sup> Invitations for Spanish patients to convalesce in sanatoria across the continent alongside German and other European troops were used to forge a sense of European solidarity among diverse national groups. In October 1942 four injured Blue Division soldiers belonging to the Falangist student organization, the SEU (*Sindicato Español Universitario*), were invited to a sanatorium in Cracow to recuperate alongside a group of European students injured fighting against the Soviet Union.<sup>23</sup> In December, another four were sent to convalesce in German-occupied Crimea alongside soldiers from various other European states, with a suggestion that it would form the basis of an ongoing exchange.<sup>24</sup> All of these activities were supported by local Falangist officials in the Berlin embassy, keen to promote Hispano-German unity and to strengthen the ideological commitment of Blue Division soldiers.

But political beliefs were not the only factor shaping the positive reaction of Spanish volunteers to Nazi Germany. Within the Blue Division's medical corps, these ideological factors were combined with a strong professional desire to build close relations with German colleagues. In keeping with the Division's incorporation into the Wehrmacht, the Military Health Group worked extremely closely with German military medical services. This process began when the Division first arrived at its training camp in Grafenwöhr, where German authorities provided instruction to Spanish military health teams on German evacuation procedures, use of medical equipment, and rules for vaccination and disinfection.<sup>25</sup> Divisional regulations stipulated that military health personnel should form close ties with their German counterparts to ensure that they were working in accordance with German procedures. A special order was sent from the captain of the Military Health Group to all his officers in March 1942 emphasizing the importance of reflecting the 'intimate unity' of the Hispano-German alliance in relations with their German counterparts and of dealing appropriately with any disagreements.<sup>26</sup> Once the Division's medical services were fully established, Spanish hospitals were inspected regularly by German authorities, and German and Spanish officers formed a joint discharge commission to assess the cases of Spanish troops presented for medical discharge. Spanish hospital regulations were amended to reflect German procedures, including rules concerning patient discipline, maintaining cleanliness and order in the hospitals, requests for leave, time of lights out and the use of regulation pyjamas.<sup>27</sup> Spanish hospitals were particularly dependent on

22 AGM, DEV, C.2021,1,1, 'Berlin Diario de Operaciones', 1942.

23 AGM, DEV, C.2021,1,1, 'Berlin Diario de Operaciones', 20 October 1942.

24 AGM, DEV, C.2021,1,1, 'Berlin Diario de Operaciones', 1 December 1942.

25 Bescós Torres, 'Misiones de la sanidad militar'.

26 AGM, DEV, C.2029,8,3, and C.2023,4,1, circular from the Head of Military Health, 30 March 1942.

27 AGM, DEV, C.3805,C, 'Orden Interior de las Clínicas (de acuerdo con las instrucciones alemanes)'.

German authorities for supplies of medication, which clinical directors had to request from the German Pharmaceutical Corps every month.<sup>28</sup>

Below Divisional level, Spanish medical personnel on both the front line and in rear areas worked closely with their German counterparts. During its first months at the front the Division relied on German hospitals until it could establish its own services. Where this caused problems with translation and coordination, Spanish medics were sent to treat Spanish troops in German hospitals.<sup>29</sup> Some Spanish doctors and nurses also spent time working in German hospitals, studying Wehrmacht procedures and acclimatizing to work in a combat environment. As the conflict progressed and the respective medical services became more intertwined, Spanish medical units on the front line supported German attacks where extra personnel were needed, and sent German troops to be treated in Spanish hospitals. Across the network of hospitals in rear areas, Spanish medics worked hand in hand with their German counterparts. The two main hospitals in Berlin and Riga were staffed by a mix of Spanish and German doctors, with the staff at the Berlin hospital in 1942 made up of 13 Spaniards (including three nurses) and 10 Germans.<sup>30</sup> German specialists were also brought in to treat Spanish troops with specific needs that could not be met by Spanish personnel.<sup>31</sup> The Division's medical services were thus tightly interwoven with those of their German allies.

One outcome of the coordination between the Division's medical services and the Wehrmacht was that a large number of Spanish troops received care from German doctors and German hospitals. Wounded Spanish troops were often sent first to German front-line hospitals, with German medical personnel later in attendance during transfer to Spanish facilities in the rear.<sup>32</sup> Before the network of Spanish hospitals in rear areas was fully up and running, large numbers of wounded Spanish troops were sent across the Reich and occupied territories for treatment. By the end of 1941 equal numbers of Spanish troops were receiving care in Spanish and German hospitals.<sup>33</sup> In Cologne over the course of 1942, for example, over 500 Spanish troops were treated in 20 separate locations.<sup>34</sup> Memoirs and autobiographies often presented the quality of this treatment in a positive light, with soldiers praising the professional skill of German medical personnel and the cleanliness and efficiency of their hospitals.<sup>35</sup> In contrast, both Spanish troops and Spanish medical personnel frequently complained that the Division's own medical services were poorly managed, dirty and underequipped. These impressions fed

28 AGM, DEV, C.3805,C

29 Bescós Torres, 'Misiones de la sanidad militar', 190.

30 AGM, DEV, C.1984,14,3

31 The Blue Division veteran Serafín Pardo Martínez, for example, describes in his memoirs how a German specialist was brought in to the hospital at Königsberg to treat a soldier with an aneurism. S. Pardo Martínez, *Un año en la División Azul* (Valladolid 2005), 192.

32 See for example Alvarez Esteban, *Agonia de Europa*, 371; Pardo Martínez, *Un año en la División Azul*, 179.

33 Poyato, *Bajo el fuego*, 365.

34 Moreno Juliá, *La División Azul: sangre española en Rusia, 1941-1945*, 317.

35 J.M. Sánchez Diana, *Cabeza de puente: diario de un soldado de Hitler* (Alicante 1993), 158. Further examples are cited in Núñez Seixas, 'Wishful Thinking in Wartime?', 102.

into a wider admiration for the Wehrmacht among Spanish troops, who saw the German army as much more fair and efficient than the neglectful and hierarchical Spanish military system.<sup>36</sup>

The Division worked hard to maintain good relations between Spanish medical personnel and their German colleagues. The monthly reports submitted by Spanish hospital directors contained standard sections on relations with foreign personnel and between wounded Spanish troops and their German counterparts. In general these reports painted a positive picture of the relationship between Spanish and German medics. The hospital in Riga described its German nurses in November 1942 as 'excellent in all aspects, intelligent, active, orderly and disciplined'.<sup>37</sup> The director of the Königsberg hospital described a 'current of extraordinary camaraderie' between Spanish doctors and their counterparts at the nearby German hospital, who frequently organized joint scientific, cultural and social events, and made their facilities and resources available to each other whenever necessary.<sup>38</sup> These positive attitudes were often reciprocated by German health officers. Towards the end of 1941 the German military surgeon, Hans Killian, visited the Spanish front-line hospital in Grigorowo and spent time with the two Spanish surgeons working there, later describing them as 'cheerful, friendly and helpful', and speaking positively about their experience and their knowledge of modern techniques for treating wounds.<sup>39</sup>

On both sides, these positive relations were underpinned by a shared professional identity and sense of scientific community. Spanish medics were particularly motivated by the opportunity to work with colleagues from the prestigious world of German medicine. Spanish health experts had been studying in Germany since the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>40</sup> Many of Spain's leading doctors and medical researchers had spent time studying or working in Germany, including figures such as Gregorio Marañón, Carlos Jiménez Díaz and Juan Negrín.<sup>41</sup> On the Spanish side, these exchanges were facilitated and supported by the *Junta para la Ampliación de Estudios* (JAE), established by the Spanish government in 1907 to promote Spanish science, often through support for study abroad.<sup>42</sup> The German state supported foreign students through a range of organizations and programmes

36 Núñez Seixas, *Camarada invierno*, 118–26.

37 AGM, DEV, C.2024,18,5, General Hospital Report, Riga, Dec 1942.

38 AGM, DEV, C.2024,19,1, Annual Report of the Commander of the Spanish Hospital in Vilnius, 26.

39 H. Killian, *In Schatten der Siege: Chirurg am Ilmensee, 1941–1942–1943* (Munich 1972), 149–50.

40 S. Rebok (ed.), *Traspasar fronteras: un siglo de intercambio científico entre España y Alemania* (Madrid 2010).

41 Gregorio Marañón (1887–1960) was a physician and historian of medicine who played an important role in the development of medical pathology and biological research in twentieth century Spain. Carlos Jiménez Díaz (1898–1967) was an internationally renowned physician and researcher, the founder and director of the Institute of Medical Research in Madrid and vice-president of the International Society of Internal Medicine. Juan Negrín (1892–1956) was a Spanish doctor and politician who became Prime Minister during the second half of the Spanish Civil War. Both Marañón and Negrín had studied under the neurologist and Nobel laureate Santiago Ramón y Cajal.

42 L. Delgado Gómez-Escalonilla, *Imperio de papel: acción cultural y política exterior durante el primer franquismo* (Madrid 1992), 14.

including Humboldt scholarships and the Academic Exchange Service. These initiatives had helped to create a generation of Spanish medical professionals who regarded Germany as the centre of European science and medicine. From a professional standpoint, the Blue Division's medical officers were thus predisposed to establishing positive relationships with their German counterparts.

For Spanish volunteers, as for many of the other Europeans, cooperation within the New Order often meant cooperation with Germans and Germany. For some, that meant cooperation with *Nazi* Germany, motivated by shared ideological values and the appeal of a political system many regarded as the vanguard of a new global movement. But for others this ideological appeal was bound up with, and in some cases superseded by, other motivations for strengthening ties with German counterparts. For those with a scientific background like the Blue Division's medical officers, the appeal of Germany also lay in its prestigious scientific history and traditions, or in the long-term professional opportunities which good relations with German colleagues might bring. Similar motivations were evident among those Europeans who embraced the cultural New Order, which emphasized German and Italian cultural traditions as much as the distinctive fascist approach to cultural production.<sup>43</sup> Many engaged with the New Order, not just as a *fascist* project, but as a *German* project, with all of the cultural and historical associations which went along with that idea.

The organizations, projects and events established within the rubric of the New Order were under German leadership. But they also brought participants from countries across Europe into contact with each other, providing a forum for cooperation and exchange between different national groups. Indeed, many of the projects and networks established within the New Order echoed the language and practices of pre-war internationalism, despite the very different ideological context in which they emerged and the fascist hostility towards the League of Nations system.<sup>44</sup> The European, transnational nature of the New Order was particularly evident on the Eastern Front, and the experiences of Spanish volunteers suggests that there were two particularly important dimensions to the transnational cooperation taking place there. The first was a particular form of scientific and professional exchange, moving beyond the cooperation we have already seen between Spanish and German officers to embrace a wider form of scientific internationalism. The second, evident among rank-and-file troops rather than just medical officers, was an embrace of the social opportunities provided by the cosmopolitan environment in rear areas.

From the very start the Blue Division's anti-communist mission, which was bound up with the principles of the Francoist 'New State' and the ideological conflicts of the Spanish Civil War, was also promoted as part of a wider European struggle. Speaking at Madrid's *Estación del Norte* in July 1941, the

43 Martin, *The Nazi-Fascist New Order*.

44 Brydan, 'Axis Internationalism'.

falangist Minister of Foreign Affairs, Serrano Suñer, told departing troops that:

... you go to defend the destiny of a civilization which cannot die; because you go to destroy the inhuman, barbarous, and criminal system of Russian Communism. You go to contribute to the foundation of European unity and also to repay blood for blood, friendship for friendship, to the great countries which helped us in our Civil War.<sup>45</sup>

This message was echoed both in the Spanish press, and in the Division's own journal, *Hoja de Campaña*, which carried regular articles on European brotherhood, the cultural and spiritual future of the continent, and the historical defence of European civilization against the allied threats of Bolshevism, Judaism and freemasonry.<sup>46</sup> According to one Falangist journalist, the war against the Soviet Union was the 'most important fight since the Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century, even more than when the Turks were at the gates of Vienna'.<sup>47</sup> Other writers drew a thread between the early modern Crusades, the *reconquista*, the Spanish Civil War's 'crusade' against Bolshevism, and the Blue Division's new 'crusade against Communists, Russians and Jews'.<sup>48</sup> Whereas medieval and early modern Europe had been united in its defence against the Mongol and the Muslim, today it was the struggle against communism which drew the continent together. Anti-communism would provide the basis for the new European order which would emerge after the defeat of the Soviet Union, overcoming forever the divisions which had plagued Europe in the past. In 1942 another Falangist journal published an article on the history of anti-communist struggle which argued that 'the Europe of tomorrow will have, in the spiritual, moral and political identity born against communism, the best guarantee of homogeneity and of peace'.<sup>49</sup>

The nature of the Nazi military occupation and the demography of both front and rear areas meant that Spanish medical services incorporated workers and patients from a wide range of national and ethnic backgrounds. Russians, Poles, Latvians and Lithuanians all worked in various capacities for Spanish military health services, particularly at hospitals in the rear. A number of these hospitals also 'employed' Jewish orderlies and assistants.<sup>50</sup> Russian prisoners of war were

45 Quoted in Kleinfeld and Tambs, *Hitler's Spanish Legion: The Blue Division in Russia*, 24.

46 See for example, 'Hermandad', *Hoja de Campaña* (7 July 1942), 1; 'La División Española en la Confraternidad Europea', *Hoja de Campaña*, (25 December 1942),; 'España Defiende Europa', *Hoja de Campaña*, (15 December 1943), 4.

47 J. Juste, 'De la guerra en Rusia depende el porvenir de Europa', *Si*, 37, 13 (13 September 1942), 15.

48 'El verdadero enemigo', *Hoja de Campaña*, 26,4 (4 May 1942), 1.

49 F. Aguirre de Cárcer, 'Veinticinco años de lucha contra la Internacional Comunista', *Si* (13 September 1942).

50 The question of the Blue Division's knowledge of, and involvement in, the Holocaust is central to recent historiography, but is not addressed explicitly in this article beyond a brief discussion of Jewish involvement in Spanish medical services and of Spanish antisemitism. For the fullest treatment of the issue see the various works by Núñez Seixas, particularly X.M. Núñez Seixas, 'Testigos o encubridores? La División Azul y el Holocausto de los judíos europeos: entre historia y memoria', *Historia y Política*, 26 (2011), 259–90.

used extensively by the Division to carry out menial tasks, including cleaning and orderly duties in hospitals, and on occasions Spanish front line hospitals also treated Russian civilians.<sup>51</sup> The hospital in Königsberg, for instance, employed Polish, Russian and Jewish civilians, the majority of whom were women working in nursing and medical auxiliary roles. Other women held more senior posts elsewhere. A female Russian pharmacist, for example, worked at the hospital in Grigorowo, and the lab at the Vilnius hospital was run by a female Polish doctor.<sup>52</sup>

For many Spanish medical personnel, this working environment represented a valued opportunity to pursue the kind of international professional development which had been largely unavailable to them since the start of the Spanish Civil War. A military orthodontist, Alfonso Ribera Sanchis, published a number of accounts of his time of the Eastern Front in Spanish medical journals which emphasized the benefits of working within a team comprised of Spanish, German and Russian practitioners, and with patients from multiple countries. 'In his professional life,' he wrote in 1942, 'the orthodontist has few occasions to deepen his understanding of areas that can only be grasped by leaving the *Patria*.'<sup>53</sup> The Spanish army journal, *Ejército*, published an article by a military health colonel in June 1942 examining the medical corps in both the German and Soviet armies. The unprecedented scale of the coming conflict between the two largest mechanized armies the world had ever seen, the colonel argued, 'provides ample motives for us as military professionals to try and learn, each within his own sphere, how the pieces of these great war machines function'.<sup>54</sup> The diary of the Blue Division medical captain, Manuel de Cárdenas Rodríguez, recounted his work alongside German, Polish and Russian doctors, including a renowned Polish surgeon who had been dismissed from his university post by the Germans, and a female Russian doctor who taught him about the development and treatment of typhus.<sup>55</sup> For Spanish medics in the Blue Division, working alongside colleagues from the prestigious world of German medicine could represent both a positive social experience and an opportunity for professional development. Such opportunities, however, were not just connected to the chance to work alongside German colleagues, but also reflected a positive attitude towards the wider international experience the Blue Division provided, including the opportunity to work with doctors, nurses and patients from across the region.

This attitude reflected the fact that many of the leading medical figures within the Blue Division had substantial pre-war experience of international health, in both military and civilian fields. Mariano Gómez Ulla, for example, was the Spanish army's head of surgery who travelled to Berlin and the Eastern Front in

51 AGM, DEV, C.1988,10,2.

52 J. Alvarez Esteban, *Agonia de Europa* (Madrid 1947), 371–6.

53 A. Ribera Sanchis, 'Odontología de Campaña en la División Azul', *Ser*, 9 (October 1942), 89. See also Poyato, *Bajo el fuego*, 258.

54 S. Monserrat, 'Sanidad de Campaña en el Reich y la U.R.S.S.', *Ejército*, 30 (July 1942), 51.

55 Archivo particular de D. José Manuel de Cárdenas, San Sebastián, 'Diario de Manuel de Cárdenas Rodríguez, Capitán médico de la División Azul (febrero 1942-noviembre 1943)'.

1942 to help reorganize the Division's health services.<sup>56</sup> His first visit to Germany had come during the First World War, when he had helped inspect prisoner of war camps on behalf of the Red Cross. After serving in the Spanish colonial wars in Morocco he had established himself as one of the leaders of the international surgical community, spending time studying in the USA and holding a Rockefeller fellowship, one of the most prestigious international health awards available during the interwar period.<sup>57</sup> His counterpart as head of the Spanish army's nursing unit, Mercedes Milá Nolla, also travelled to the Eastern Front in 1943 to visit the Spanish nurses serving with the Division. Her international experience was in the field of civilian nursing, an alumna of the Red Cross international nursing school in London (a group referred to as the 'Old Internationals'), also a Rockefeller fellow, and a frequent participant in international nursing conferences and organizations.<sup>58</sup> The first leader of the Blue Division's medical group from 1941 until July 1942, Alberto Blanco Rodríguez, was also an active member of the international military medicine community, and was involved with the International Conference of Military Medicine both before and after the Second World War. He was particularly active in Spanish efforts to study German military medical procedures and techniques after the outbreak of war.<sup>59</sup>

For these and other leaders of the Blue Division's medical services, their experiences within the Nazi New Order represented just another example of the international medical exchange they engaged in both before and after the war. They formed part of a transnational community of medical professionals, united by a shared commitment to the scientific values in modern medicine. Working in the international environment of the Eastern Front during the war was not a new or unique experience, but a familiar example of the kind of cross-border work and intercultural exchange which they had carried out with organizations such as the Rockefeller Foundation in earlier years. Figures such as Gómez Ulla and Mercedes Milá came from conservative monarchist backgrounds and were often in conflict with Falangist forces at home. But their degree of ideological affinity with fascism was not necessarily any more relevant when it came to their work on the Eastern Front than their professional roles within the Spanish armed forces and the prestige they enjoyed thanks to their international careers. Rather than reflecting a straightforward ideological enthusiasm for the Axis cause, therefore, part of the positive

56 Poyato, *Bajo el fuego*, 403–4.

57 J.M. Gómez Ulla y Lea, *Mariano Gómez Ulla: un hombre, un cirujano, un militar* (Madrid 1981), 155–61; R. Navarro Suay and J.F. Plaza Torres, 'Una "hazaña prácticamente desconocida": la participación de médicos militares españoles en la Primera Guerra Mundial', *Sanidad Militar*, 70 (2014), 51–7. On the history of the Rockefeller Foundation and its important role in international health during the interwar period, see J. Farley, *To Cast Out Disease: A History of the International Health Division of the Rockefeller Foundation, 1913–1951* (Oxford 2004).

58 M. Milá Nolla, 'La mujer en la guerra: enfermeras', in D. García-Sabell (ed.), *Los médicos y la medicina en la Guerra Civil Española* (Madrid 1986); 'Entrevista con Mercedes Milá', *Revista de Cruz Roja Española* (October 1984), 44.

59 A. Blanco and M. Gómez Durán, *Memoria resumen de una misión de estudios al extranjero* (Madrid 1941); *XI Congrès International de Médecine et de Pharmacie Militaires, Basel, du 2 au 7 Juin 1947* (Basel 1947); Palayo, *Bajo el fuego*, 384.

response to the New Order within the Blue Division's medical corps was underpinned by a professional commitment to scientific exchange.

Beyond the Division's medical officers, the reaction to the multinational European environment of the Eastern Front was driven by different concerns. The most positive responses focused on the personal, social, and romantic or sexual possibilities the international environment of the Eastern Front was perceived to offer. Both contemporary accounts and later memoirs, for example, lingered on the care provided by foreign women in Spanish hospitals. German nurses were particularly well regarded by Spanish troops, representing a bewitching combination of political solidarity, maternal care and romantic possibility. An article on the German Red Cross nurses in the Division's newspaper *Hoja de Campaña* eulogized 'the girl who cared for your comrade, your brother, perhaps for you... [who] also plays an important role in the balance of war'. The German nurse, it argued, was a sister more than a comrade, encapsulating the highest spiritual values of Europe for which the Division's soldiers were fighting, all combined within the figure of 'a beautiful blonde girl'.<sup>60</sup> The treatment provided by Russian, Polish, Baltic and Jewish workers in Spanish hospitals was also regarded favourably by Spanish troops. As with the case of German nurses, however, the focus of most accounts in memoirs and autobiographies was on the foreign women working as nurses and medical assistants in Spanish hospitals, who were often described as well dressed, friendly, flirtatious, and well-disposed towards Spanish soldiers.<sup>61</sup>

This formed part of a wider narrative which characterized accounts of Blue Division troops published both during and after the war, particularly evident in descriptions of cities in the rear such as Riga, Vilnius and Königsberg where Spanish hospitals were located. These accounts seemed to embrace the towns in the rear as sites of dissolute cosmopolitanism, drawing together individuals and cultures from across the continent in a uniquely multinational environment full of social and romantic possibilities. For the Blue Division veteran and Falangist journalist José Luis Gómez Tello, quoted at the beginning of this article, Riga had:

everything you could want to have fun: drama, winter sports, beach sports, circus, markets, stalls selling flowers, furs, diamonds, amber, cafes with champagne, restaurants, vodka at 80 marks a bottle. Beautiful women, shining uniforms, war wounded, Germans on leave, Spaniards, Italians, Belgians, Walloons, Swedes, Norwegians, Finns, French, Lithuanians.<sup>62</sup>

For other Spanish troops, a period spent in the hospitals of Riga or Vilnius was often best remembered for the social opportunities it provided. The accounts of visits to these cities in articles, memoirs and autobiographies revolved around the bars, cafes and cabarets frequented by the Division's soldiers, around drinking,

60 'Las Hermanas de la Cruz Roja', *Hoja de Campaña* (24 February 1943). For more on Spanish attitudes towards German women, see Núñez Seixas, 'Wishful Thinking in Wartime?', 108–10.

61 See for example Alvarez Esteban, *Agonía de Europa*, 376.

62 J.L. Gómez Tello, *Canción de invierno en el este: crónicas de la División Azul* (Barcelona 1945), 27.



music and women. Many accounts lingered on the heady ‘cocktail’ of languages and the efforts of Spanish troops to talk to the Russian, Lithuanian, Polish and Estonian women working in the cafes and bars.<sup>63</sup> On his journey to the front, the Blue Division officer Victor José Jiménez described Spanish volunteers forming part of a ‘little International’ comprised of Spanish, German and Lithuanian troops, as well as Polish locals, speaking together in German, Polish, Russian, Lithuanian and Spanish, and the shared languages of French and English.<sup>64</sup>

This embrace of the cosmopolitan environment found in the rear areas of the Eastern Front was largely presented in apolitical terms, reflecting the enthusiasm of young men for the social opportunities available during their brief time away from the front-line. But it also seemed to echo some of the attempts by the intellectuals and elites grappling with the idea of the New Order to square the circle of an international project comprised of ultra-nationalists and nationalist movements. As Benjamin Martin has argued, writers and artists involved in the New Order’s cultural programmes sought to promote the idea of a Europe of Nations distinct from the de-nationalized cosmopolitan internationalism they so loathed, with new forms of ‘inter-national’ cooperation celebrating the diversity of European national traditions.<sup>65</sup> In a similar way, Spanish volunteers celebrated the particular local and national cultural traditions which conformed to their own ideas of European identity. In Germany they admired the orderly and prosperous towns they passed through, while lauding the Catholic faith of their Bavarian neighbours around Grafenwöhr.<sup>66</sup> On their march through Poland they also admired the piety of the Polish population, dining with priests and comparing their own experiences in the Spanish Civil War with Poland’s struggle against Soviet Russia.<sup>67</sup> In 1943, the Blue Division soldier Fernando Torres wrote an article for the newspaper *ABC* describing his recent convalescence in a front-line hospital, during which the facility had been visited by a *Kraft durch Freude* group sent to entertain the injured troops. The group included a German accordionist, an Italian dancer, a Swedish magician and a Greek guitarist, a colourful and exciting apparition amid the drab soldiers. But for Torres, this diverse display of national cultures, distinct but working in harmony, was bound up with the vision of Europe the Division’s troops were fighting for. ‘For a few hours’, Torres wrote, ‘we completely forgot that a few metres away there was a trench which marked the border of Europe’.<sup>68</sup>

There were, however, clear limits to the transnational cooperation and exchange which took place on the Eastern Front. In the case of the Blue Division these limits were evident both in relations with the volunteer’s German counterparts, and with

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63 *Ibid.*, 28.

64 V. José Jiménez, *De España a Rusia*, 46.

65 Martin, *The Nazi-Fascist New Order*, 109–48. A similar idea is discussed in J. Dafinger, ‘Show Solidarity, Live Solitarily’.

66 Gómez Tello, *Canción de invierno*, 16–19.

67 Martínez Esparza, *Con la División Azul*, 153.

68 Fernando Torres, ‘Teatro de campaña’, *ABC* (2 May 1943).

the other national groups they came into contact with. The region in which the Blue Division's soldiers lived, fought and travelled, part of the 'bloodlands' of the Second World War, were sites of violence and extermination.<sup>69</sup> Although not direct witnesses or participants in the Holocaust, many Spanish soldiers were aware of what was happening to the Jewish population they came into contact with, and of German treatment of Soviet prisoners and other non-Aryan groups.<sup>70</sup> Thanks to the relatively low level of partisan activity in their region they were not directly implicated in large-scale civilian reprisals, but were certainly involved in cases of violence, rape and theft. Despite the good relations they maintained with many of the Russian communities behind the frontline, they were ultimately part of an occupying force that brought starvation and misery to local civilian populations.<sup>71</sup>

Spanish volunteers were aware that the Eastern Front was not a positive international environment conducive to professional exchange and development, but one in which the local people working in Spanish hospitals were doing so in the context of occupation and violence. The Division's medical staff showed some signs of understanding the coercion which underlay their relations with local civilians both inside and outside hospital grounds. This was particularly the case with the Jews who worked in Spanish hospitals, most notably in Vilnius and Riga, where Spanish troops had some awareness of the treatment of the city's Jewish inhabitants and the limited protection provided by hospital work.<sup>72</sup> Aside from the Russian prisoners, neither divisional records nor the memoir literature make clear how Jewish and other local civilian staff were recruited and the degree of coercion involved in their employment. Hospital reports, however, showed a consistent concern with the levels of discipline among foreign staff members. While their behaviour was generally described as good, the annual report of the director of the Vilnius hospital in 1942 suggested this was 'due to their [the foreign workers'] political situation, which perhaps more from fear than anything else obliges them to behave in this way'.<sup>73</sup> Even if the employment of local civilians did not constitute forced labour, it was almost certainly backed up by fear of punishment or penury if discipline was not maintained. The persistent interest in the discipline of foreign staff in the Military Health Group suggests that, while they generally posed no problems, divisional commanders were conscious of the potential risks posed by local staff in occupied regions treating Spanish troops.

If relations with non-German personnel were coloured by Spanish awareness of their position as occupiers, their relationship with German colleagues was also affected by negative and hierarchical German attitudes towards their Spanish comrades, and by Spanish awareness of and reaction to these attitudes. Spanish medical

69 T. Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (London 2011).

70 X.M. Núñez Seixas, 'Testigos o encubridores? La División Azul y el Holocausto de los judíos europeos: entre historia y memoria', *Historia y Política*, 26 (2011), 259–90'.

71 X.M. Núñez Seixas, 'Russia and the Russians in the Eyes of the Spanish Blue Division Soldiers, 1941–4', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 52, 2 (2017), 352–74.

72 Núñez Seixas, 'Testigos'.

73 AGM, DEV, C.2024,19,1, Annual Report of the Commander of the Spanish Hospital in Vilnius, 26.

officers, for example, often struggled to assert their authority in front of German troops. One particular report described a military health lieutenant at the Königsberg hospital who was doused in water by a German soldier while sunbathing. The soldier refused to give his name, as did a passing German officer who witnessed the incident, forcing the hospital authorities to report the matter to the German liaison office.<sup>74</sup> German officers made continued complaints about the failure of Spanish troops to follow basic standards of dress and behaviour, and Spanish authorities often responded by bemoaning the German obsession with what they saw as petty regulations. Within the Military Health Group, Spanish personnel were frustrated by the approach of German military administrators who were responsible for overseeing the running of Spanish hospitals and ensuring they were appropriately supplied. One report from the Berlin hospital asked for these duties to be transferred to Spanish officials on the grounds that German officers spent less time on procuring adequate supplies than they did on complaining about breaches of regulations. 'Due to their psychology, their discipline and their character', the hospital's director wrote, 'they [the Germans] consider things of no consequence important'.<sup>75</sup> The focus on relations with German colleagues in monthly reports and the official reminders to ensure disagreements were handled appropriately reflected the extent of the tensions between German and Spanish teams, and the concerns these tensions caused among divisional commanders.

Hispano-German tensions, however, were not confined to medical officers or driven solely by Spanish political divisions. Admiration for the quality of German medical care and the pro-Nazi sympathy of some Falangist volunteers did not translate into an enthusiastic pro-German sentiment among the majority of Blue Division soldiers. Significant tensions existed between injured Spanish soldiers and their German comrades, particularly in and around Spanish hospitals in the rear where conflict and disciplinary problems were at their highest.<sup>76</sup> As with the case of the medical personnel, many of these problems stemmed from poor German treatment of and attitude towards Spanish troops, and Spanish responses to this behaviour. A persistent source of tension came from relationships between Spanish troops and German women, which often led to conflict with German troops, particularly in Königsberg.<sup>77</sup> As with the case with Spanish civilians working in Nazi Germany, these issues reflected the tensions between Nazi racial hierarchies, particularly relevant in the case of relationships between German women and foreign men, and the theoretical equality of troops fighting on the Eastern Front.<sup>78</sup> The situation in Königsberg became so bad that in April 1943 the city's military commander, Albrecht Brand, was forced to issue a reminder to German troops, to be

74 AGM, DEV, C.2027,7.2, 25

75 AGM, DEV, C.2027,13.3, General Hospital Report, June 1943.

76 Núñez Seixas, *Camarada invierno*, 146–7; Núñez Seixas, 'Wishful Thinking in Wartime?'

77 AGM, DEV, C.2026,6.1.

78 Brydan, 'Axis Internationalism'.

repeated to all units on a monthly basis, that

for all of us it is a natural duty to treat our Spanish comrades who fight alongside us shoulder to shoulder against Bolshevism with amiability, and to help them in the rear where we come across them often as our guests.<sup>79</sup>

One way in which Spanish medical personnel responded to such problems was by separating German and Spanish medical facilities, on the grounds that the treatment of Spanish troops by Germans or in German-run hospitals caused both practical and cultural difficulties. In part this reflected genuine problems that the Division faced in keeping track of those wounded troops sent to hospitals across the Reich, even if they recognized the treatment troops were receiving was of good quality. There were also suggestions, however, that cultural and linguistic barriers made Spanish troops uncomfortable with aspects of the care provided in German hospitals. The Spanish hospital in Hof, for example, had originally been a German hospital which began to receive large numbers of Spanish troops sent from across the Reich in early 1942. The Blue Division agreed with German authorities to transform it into a purely Spanish hospital, transferring out German patients and staff and bringing in a group of Spanish nurses. The result of this, the hospital director claimed was 'the disappearance of language problems in questions as delicate as those relating to the economic situation of patients, removal of psychological differences, and improvement in food.'<sup>80</sup> Indeed the quality of food was an ongoing complaint from Spanish hospitals reliant on German supplies, with frequent reports claiming that German food was unsuited to Spanish troops and considerable efforts made to send certain key food supplies from Spain.<sup>81</sup> Military health officers appreciated the professional opportunities provided by working alongside their German colleagues. But the problems stemming from the unequal power relations between the two groups prompted many to use the idea of insurmountable cultural differences to achieve the practical separation of German and Spanish medical services.

Another common response to these problems, evident both in divisional records discussing cultural differences and in the later memoir literature, was to emphasize and exaggerate the idea of a unique Spanish character that distinguished the Division's troops from their European (particularly German) comrades. In a medical setting, it was this response which underlay complaints about the unsuitability of German food for Spanish troops, arguments about adherence to regulations, and tensions resulting from relationships between convalescing Spanish troops and local women. More generally, it involved highlighting the friendliness, optimism and good humour of the Spanish soldiers, even in difficult circumstances such as the long march to the front in 1941. In contrast to the serious German troops,

<sup>79</sup> AGM, DEV, C.2025, 6,1, 'Inspección de Hospitales, informe mensual', April 1943.

<sup>80</sup> AGM, DEV, C.2024,19,1, Report on the Functioning of the Spanish Hospital at Hof/Saale during 1942.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

according to these accounts, the Blue Division painted names and faces on their vehicles and formed good relationships with local civilians.<sup>82</sup> Although some of these locals ‘must have thought that soldiers so friendly and free from cruelty would not make good warriors’, Blue Division soldiers argued, this positivity was part of what made Spanish troops so strong in battle and firm in the face of the enemy, their constant jokes and laughter ‘demonstrating the spirit of sacrifice of the [Spanish] Race’.<sup>83</sup> Their combination of bravery and good humour was often framed as part of a quixotic mission, with Spain riding out to defend the world against the Bolshevik threat. Central to this vision of Spanish identity was the trope, almost universal across the memoirs of the Division’s veterans, of Spanish *donjuanismo*, the preternatural ‘gift’ with women that the troops possessed. This was presented as a specifically Spanish trait, combining masculinity and virility with a romanticism and a chivalrous respect for women supposedly characteristic of Spanish history and culture.<sup>84</sup> This idea lay at the heart of many of the positive responses to the Division’s international environment, confined as they were to a celebration of female German nurses, Jewish hospital orderlies or Estonian waitresses.

The limits to exchange and cooperation evident in the case of the Blue Division’s volunteers highlight the failures of the New Order’s ‘inter-nationalism’ as it was experienced on the ground. The idea of a Europe of nations united by its distinctive national cultures never gained a wide enough purchase to truly influence the attitudes or actions of the soldiers who were, in theory at least, fighting to defend it. Relations between Germans and their allies were ultimately defined by Germany’s military and political hegemony. And the idea of international cooperation, however attractive from a scientific, professional or social point of view, was still, within the ultra-nationalist culture of Franco’s Spain, tainted by the association of international and cosmopolitan identities with the scourges of liberalism and ‘Judaeo-Masonic-Bolshevism’. Even Gómez Tello, one of the most effusive about the multinationalism of Riga, revealed the enduring strength of these negative associations in his encounters with occupied Eastern Europe, and particular with its Jewish populations. The Jews of the region were dismissed in his account as ‘the international Jew, without local colour’.<sup>85</sup> And the Soviet architecture in Minsk was denounced similarly for its cosmopolitanism, ‘the Greek interpreted by the North American with a frenzied mentality of the communist Jew’.<sup>86</sup> The deeply ingrained antisemitism, anti-communism and anti-cosmopolitanism of the Spanish

82 Jiménez, *De España a Rusia: 5000 kms. con la División Azul*, 122.

83 J. Martínez Tessier, ‘Estampas Soviéticas’, *Sí* (13 September 1942), and Gómez Tello, *Canción de invierno*, 31.

84 This idea appears in many, if not most, of the memoirs published by the Division’s veterans, including José Jiménez, *De España a Rusia*; A. Crespo, *De las memorias de un combatiente sentimental* (Madrid 1945); Hernández Navarro, *Ida y vuelta*. For a discussion of the idea of *donjuanismo* and the contemporary debate surrounding it in Spain, see N. Aresti, *Médicos, donjuanes y mujeres modernas: los ideales de feminidad y masculinidad en el primer tercio del siglo XX* (Bilbao 2001), 115–62.

85 Gómez Tello, *Canción de invierno*, 64.

86 *Ibid.*, 48.

right, as in many other European countries, indelibly coloured attitudes to the very idea of international exchange and cooperation.<sup>87</sup>

The New Order for Europe was a failed project. But its military failure does not mean it should be dismissed as politically or ideologically incoherent. There were certainly real contradictions between the reality of Nazi hegemony and the Europeanist rhetoric of New Order propaganda. And there were obvious tensions between the ultranationalism of those states, political groups and individuals involved in the New Order, and the principles of cooperation and coexistence its propaganda espoused. All of these issues were evident in the reactions of Spanish volunteers to their German counterparts and to the international environment they encountered on the Eastern Front.

But the extent to which Spanish volunteers embraced the opportunities for cooperation and exchange, both with their German allies and with the other nationalities they encountered, should caution us against dismissing the idea of the New Order as one doomed to failure by its inherent contradictions. After all, many international projects of the twentieth-century faced similar tensions between national and international loyalties, or between the rhetoric of equality and the reality of political power and hierarchy.<sup>88</sup> Many Spanish volunteers, like their fascist counterparts elsewhere in Europe, embraced the New Order because of their ideological affinity with the Nazi project. But the evidence from the Blue Division's medical services suggests this was not the overriding concern for many others. Rather, their reactions were shaped by the traditional prestige of German science and culture, by professional or social interests, or by pre-existing enthusiasm for other European nationalities and cultures. It was this diversity of interests which underpinned such a widespread Spanish engagement with the ideas and experiences of the New Order.

The experiences of the Blue Division suggest that where the New Order was successful at attracting supporters and participants from across Europe, its success was not solely due to ideological motives and inter-fascist solidarity, and was not confined to the relatively small number of European fascist true-believers. Instead, it succeeded in those cases where it could build on pre-existing patterns of international or European cooperation, and on the historical reputation of and attitudes towards Germany and German culture. It was these factors which helped to encourage such a range of individuals from across the European right to engage with the New Order, often motivated by professional or personal opportunism. In the same way that fascist regimes were built around national myths, histories and traditions while presenting themselves as modern and revolutionary movements, so the idea of the New Order rested on Germany's history and cultural prestige at the

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87 On the history of antisemitism in Spain, see G. Alvarez Chillida, *El antisemitismo en España: la imagen del judío, 1812–2002* (Madrid 2002).

88 G. Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia, PA 2013).

same time as it was promoted as a new model of European cooperation adapted to the realities of the modern world.


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