

containing dangerous elements, can also serve as educative spaces” (p. 202). This chapter thus, at least implicitly, overcomes the more generally entrenched dichotomy of “culture” (“schooling”) vs. “nature” (“street” in this case as a symbol of nature, naturalness, unbridledness). However, Rosa could find more similar examples in linguistic contexts (e.g., literacy/illiteracy).

In summary, in his book based on long-term research at the New Northwest High School in Chicago, Rosa primarily points to the complex configurations of identities of local Latinx students who have to complete difficult tasks to meet often conflicting loyalties. Using the example of some students (e.g., Rigo), Rosa shows how often these identities are transient, as an originally high school gang member becomes a night school student and, after he drops school, a prominent artist, and a member of a Mexican folk ensemble. Although these apparent contradictions are structured into a discursive distinction between “school” and the “street”, cases such as Rigo’s show rather that these seemingly separate categories cannot be separated, because they are not permanent, but variable and constantly negotiated. Although the final analysis of the school vs. street dichotomy is rather brief, its importance is evident, as it points to a broader dimension of Latinx identity that is not only based on linguistic and racial differentials in different situations and places, but above all points to its more general socializing potential, which is, of course, also typical of other groups of the contemporary American population, in Chicago’s urban environment, for example, the black residents of the hyperghetto analyzed in a precise way by Loïc Wacquant.¹⁶ This is, after all, perhaps one of the main messages of Rosa’s book, which earned him the 2020 *Prose Award for Excellence in Language & Linguistics* from the *Association of American Publishers*. And as Arlene Dávila, a leading linguistic anthropologist dealing with Spanish and Hispanic-American identity in the United States, notes, Rosa’s raciolinguistic approach provides a welcomed pathway for understanding, and transforming, systems of domination and should serve

as model for all linguistic analyses and, I might add, socialization practices.

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(Written in English by the author)

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Carles Brasó, *Los médicos errantes. De las Brigadas Internacionales y la revolución china a la guerra fría* [The Wandering Doctors. From the International Brigades and the Chinese Revolution to the Cold War], Barcelona: Crítica, 2022, 415 pp. ISBN 978-84-9199-375-9.

This book aims primarily to preserve the memory of a group of International Brigade doctors and nurses who worked hard to save their dreams in times of war. Their odyssey begins in Europe around the time of the Great War (First World War), continues through the Spanish Civil War, the Sino-Japanese War, the Second World War, and ends in the Soviet purges.

It has been awarded with the 2023 International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) Book Prize in Spanish language.

Through specific events, we contemplate personal landscapes and their political horizon. The author’s discourse weaves through the threads of time, territory and geopolitics. It begins in the early twentieth century, with an emphasis on the 1930s, and continues until the 1970s. Geographically, it originates in Eastern Europe, continues in Spain and France, extends to the Far East, and returns to its starting point. In geopolitics, it commences with the great game of European imperialism, and ends in the bipolar world of the Cold War, exposing the different diplomatic scenarios: non-intervention, the bamboo curtain, and the iron curtain. The book develops themes of interest to specialists in the International Brigades, the Chinese aid organisations, and repression in the countries of the Soviet orbit. It is particularly novel in the biography of its main characters.

Brasó’s passion for history is backed by his academic background: he holds a PhD in Economic History from the *Universitat Pompeu Fabra* and a degree in Sociology and East Asian Studies from the same institution. His knowledge of the Chinese language and culture has made it easier for him

¹⁶ For example, Loïc WACQUANT, *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*, New York: Oxford University Press; idem, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2009, etc.

to analyse and explain in detail the history of the doctors of the International Brigades who went to China. His interest arose because he wanted “to know how my grandfather Moisès Broggi, who was a surgeon in the International Brigades, met the Canadian doctor Norman Bethune, a very famous historical figure in China”.¹⁷ But this book is not only about China. By describing and analysing the life trajectory of the medical personnel, it plunges us right into the main historical events of the twentieth century.

The structure of the book consists of a brief prologue, an introduction, and nine chapters which we have grouped into four parts.

The first part takes us, through the first chapter entitled “The Doctors from Nowhere”, back to the personal roots of the protagonists.

Part two finds us in Spain and France for three chapters: “The fight against death”, “From brigadistas to refugees” and “Escaping Europe”. We move through known references with unknown actors, presented to us in small doses. Obscure episodes come to light, while complicities and discouragements are interwoven. We live through the different war periods in the Republican front, with its infighting, right up to the hell of the French refugee camps.

The third part opens our eyes to a much wider theatre of operations: the Sino-Japanese war, the Second World War on the Asian mainland, and the changing relations between the Chinese Nationalists and the Communists. It includes the chapters: “The Chinese Front”, “The Burma Road” and “The Bamboo Curtain”. Institutional rigidity and corruption undermined the reforming attempts of some of the military doctors to prevent disease and famine, which caused more deaths than guns. The author attributes responsibility to the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) government. He then takes us to the epic Burma Road, and conveys the impression that the Kuomintang, despite massive US aid, failed to provide adequate medical care for its conscripts and also failed to restrain itself from making military decisions that resulted in the deaths of millions of civilians.

The fourth part, where the Cold War is the context for the last two chapters: “The Iron Curtain” and “Socialism with a Human Face”. A suture and convalescence in the old Europe, the one that evokes Churchill’s Iron Curtain speech, where the author narrates the last misadventures of professionals turned into cogs who find it hard to find their place.

The text continues with an acknowledgements section in which the author recalls almost a decade of wanderings through institutions, and obtaining help in translating documents. The work is accompanied by a lengthy notes section which helps the reader to follow his thorough research in linguistically diverse archives.

The author has used a variety of sources, which have involved a very extensive network of collaborators. He draws on primary sources such as the doctors’ personal archives and public archives, notably the following: the International Brigades section of the Russian Archive of Socio-Political History (Moscow) – whose medical services subsection had not been extensively researched – the archives of the Chinese Red Cross (Guiyang); and the Fredericka Martin Collection at the Tamiment Library (New York), which focuses mainly on the medical personnel of the International Brigades. In Poland, he used the Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance, and in the Czech Republic, the Military Historical Archive / Central Military Archives, the National Archive, the Literary Archive of the Memorial of National Literature, and the Security Services Archive. The author notes that he has only opened a window for researchers. At the end, we find a bibliography and a complete onomastic and conceptual index. The volume includes some twenty photographs, mostly previously unpublished, of good quality, relevant to the subject, and with captions that provide essential information.

This work tackles a multi-layered theme as deep as the ocean that seeks to challenge the idea of the need for healthcare in a society at war. The focus shifts from individual care – a wounded man at the front – to comprehensive health care, trained doctors and supplies.

The turbulence of Fascism in the early chapters leads to the totalitarianism of the Cold War in the later ones. Although he approaches this issue from the medical viewpoint, the author manages to convey the life of his main characters, and the decisions they had to make at the many crossroads of their lives.

¹⁷ José OLIVA, “Brasó Broggi, tras la huella de los médicos errantes de la Guerra española”, *La Vanguardia*, 3 July 2022.

No one had as many opportunities to observe the perverse links between poverty and mortality as they did, as wartime shows how power and money make the privilege of health a reflection of class membership.

It plunges us into disturbingly bellicose times, where a discourse of exclusion surfaces with the blatant prejudices his doctors endured, a prelude to the worst evils. Their lives are, as Walter Benjamin wrote, like that of “someone who has been shipwrecked, who carries on while drifting on the wreckage, by climbing to the peak of the mast that is already crumbling. But he has a chance of sending out an SOS from up there”.¹⁸

Carles Brasó’s study highlights the little-known links between Spain and China: “The fact that the Chinese cities of Wuhan, Canton (Guangzhou) and Chongqing suffered intense aerial bombardment at the same time as Madrid, Barcelona or Valencia.”¹⁹ In particular, the book analyses the process of integrating the management of military medicine during the war. Planning, management, training, and hierarchy come to the fore in each chapter, and the author has sought in each context to apply it to the thesis that the International Brigade doctors ushered in a phase of modern military medicine. They spared no effort to cure the sick, to disseminate basic medical knowledge, and to train future doctors in isolated populations. The Chinese war scene reflects the statistics of the soldier as cannon fodder. We learn that they suffered a high mortality rate, without battles being the main cause.

The author suggests that military medical administrators in the Nationalist Army, especially the charismatic Dr Robert Lim and nurse Zhou Meiyu, came closer to meeting international medical standards than their civilian colleagues. It is argued that political ideology and corruption hindered scientific and humanitarian reform in China. Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist administration did not make public health a priority.

I quote these extracts from the main periods as illustrations:

¹⁸ Walter BENJAMIN, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910–1940*, Chicago – London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 378.

¹⁹ OLIVA, “Brasó Broggi”.

On the Spanish Civil War:

“David Iancu left Campdevàdol for La Garriga, where he joined an Austro-German battalion as a doctor [...] They fought on the outskirts of Granollers. At one point in the battle, Iancu ran out of medicine and bandages and decided to enter the town accompanied by an armed man to look for supplies. He came across a completely empty town, as the population had shut themselves in their houses to await the entry of Franco’s troops. The Romanian doctor found a pharmacy where he was supplied with dressings and other materials, after which he left the town again to rejoin the battalion. However, as he left the town along the road, he realized that his battalion had already left the area and that Franco’s tanks were parading in the opposite direction to him. Luckily, Iancu was able to hide in a forest and avoid being shot dead. After walking north for half a day, he was reunited with his battalion.”²⁰

About the Second World War on the Asian continent: “Doctors Becker and Jensen were commissioned to travel to Hong Kong and Macau, and return to the Chinese-controlled zone with several tons of medical cargo, across Japanese enemy lines. Becker and Jensen had the double advantage of being of friendly nationality to the Japanese (an Austrian and a German), as well as being recognized in Hong Kong as refugees from the UK. The transport took place in junks. [...] The junks did not come under attack from the Japanese, but were raided several times by pirates armed with machine guns, who took the money they were carrying. Fortunately, the medicines and medical supplies were of no interest to the pirates and arrived safely in Tuyunguan.”²¹

On the Cold War:

“During the Kafkaesque process involving Flato, an even more surreal situation arose when Zhou Enlai paid an official visit to Poland at the end of July 1948. On landing in Warsaw, the Chinese leader asked for the Polish friend he had met in Chongqing. Flato was hurriedly taken out of his cell, elegantly dressed and brought into the presence of the Chinese leader so that he could greet him. During those years, the Chinese ambassador in the Polish capital was Wang Bingnan, an old

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 101–102.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 153.

acquaintance of Flato's from the Chongqing meetings, so Zhou Enlai must have been well informed of Flato's fate and the accusations against him."²²

It is appropriate to name the main characters, although it is not a work of a biographical nature, nor does it attempt to develop the medical advances made, but rather provide an analysis of the times in which the doctors lived. It focuses on the nineteen *brigadists* who went to China in two expeditions, in May and August 1939. The first consisted of Dr Fritz Jensen (Austrian), Dr Rolf Becker (German) and Dr Friedrich Kisch (Czech). The second, which departed from London, was composed of doctors Herbert Baer (German), Walter Freudmann (Austrian), Ianto Kaneti (Bulgarian) and David Iancu (Romanian); and stopped in Marseille where it picked up doctors Heinrich Kent (Austrian), František Kriegel (Czech), György Schön (Hungarian); Szmul Flato, Leon Kamieniecki, Władysław Jungermann and Wiktor Taubenfligel (Polish); Jacob Kranzdorf (Romanian) and Alex Volokhine (Russian). Also on board were X-ray assistant Edith Kent (German) and laboratory assistant Mania Kamieniecka (Polish).

Most of them have in common that they were International Brigade members, were interned in French refugee camps, came from Central and Eastern European countries, averaged thirty-two years of age, were of Jewish origin and had Communist ideology.

The most captivating personality for the author is Dr Kriegel, who also serves as the book's closing character. The author devotes considerable attention to Dr Jensen and Dr Flato. Many secondary characters are on parade. Highlights among them are: Erika Glaser, André Marty, Robert Lim, Joseph Needham, Zhou Meiyu, Agnes Smedley and the three Song sisters: Ziwen, Qingling and Meiling.

The author strikes a good balance between the passion of the researcher and the reflection he provides. Throughout the book, he gathers specific data, especially biographical details, which act as political analysis. The main stumbling block can be found in his placement of a range of characters who, although they are the main protagonists, are unknown. Although he makes them known, framing them within a context, it can be difficult

to follow them. This way of telling their story generates the suspense of a novel in the reader.

First, in its origins, it takes us to the many border changes in Central and Eastern Europe. Set in the Spanish Civil War, it describes through anecdotes the lives of the doctors in the main battles in which the International Brigades took part, from the defence of Madrid to the retreat from Catalonia. It then follows their lives in the French internment camps of Saint Cyprien, Argelès-sur-Mer and Gurs.

Later, as we enter the Asian continent, the reader is faced with challenges such as how to locate oneself in a vast territory, references to numerous secondary characters, and a word search puzzle of organizations. In addition, it can be difficult to keep track of the tenuous differences between the American, British and Soviet diplomatic games and the possibilist politics of the Kuomintang Republic of China, itself at odds with the Communist Party of China.

These are difficulties that are overcome because the analyses and adventures of these wandering doctors become more and more convincing and interesting. Their chosen lives have led them down dark paths. They are characters following a candle of light in an ideological minefield.

The last two chapters are more enjoyable to read. They take us into the universe of the Cold War where the narrative moves more fluidly. A finale in which the author shows the defects of real socialism, and the successes by which Chinese communism has survived. This last chapter and approach give the volume a lasting depth because it is based on verifiable facts and avoids simplifications and ideological schemes.

Hanna Arendt's phrase "For memory and depth are the same, or rather, depth cannot be reached by man except through remembrance"²³ is projected in Carles Brasó's work. Their lives, now less anonymous, are more than just the leftover crumbs served on the table of history.

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²² BRASÓ, *Los médicos*, p. 251.

²³ Hannah ARENDT, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*, Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1961, p. 94.