

A Historical Repositioning of the Duchess of Atholl as an Influential Humanitarian During the Spanish Civil War



1

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Table of Contents

Page Numbers

¹ Walter Stoneman, *The Duchess of Atholl*, 1925, National Portrait Gallery.

Preface.....	4.
Chapter I: Female Humanitarians and the Duchess' Omission from History.....	6.
Chapter II: Atholl as an MP and the Combination of the Humanitarian and Political.....	16.
Chapter III: Did the Duchess of Atholl Achieve Tangible Success in her Humanitarian Efforts?.....	28.
Conclusion.....	41.
Bibliography.....	44.

Abbreviations

NJC- National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief

BCC- Basque Children's Committee

ICRC-International Committee of the Red Cross

Preface

This thesis attempts to reposition Katharine Stewart-Murray as a fundamental individual within the application of relief work during the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939. Katharine Stewart-Murray, otherwise known as the Duchess of Atholl, was a Conservative MP and humanitarian activist during the Spanish conflict. Often ignored from historiographical discussion due to a variety of political, cultural and sociological reasons, her relief work in Spain remains overlooked and understudied. As the Chairman of the National Joint Commission for Spanish Relief (NJC) and the Basque Children's Committee (BCC), the Duchess was responsible for coordinating, composing and implementing aid relief on a significant scale.² Many humanitarian achievements during the war have been attributed to such organisations, most notably the evacuation of 3,826 Basque children to the United Kingdom.³ Atholl presided over various relief operations that aided prisoners of war, Spanish civilians and refugees alike. Utilising her political position to advance awareness of the humanitarian crisis occurring in Spain; Atholl fundraised for the victims of war while ordaining over an umbrella organisation which coordinated 180 other relief bodies.⁴ Furthermore, Stewart-Murray raised concerns surrounding the conduct of nationalist forces and the perpetration of war crimes and attempted to use political means to prevent the continued violation of the Geneva convention.

Within historiography, the Duchess of Atholl's role as a humanitarian in Spain has been widely neglected. Apart from a succinct focus from Stuart Ball on the loss of the Kinross and West Perthshire by-election as a result of her involvement in the Spanish conflict, and a minority of others, her work has been largely ignored by historians.⁵ S.J. Hetherington's biography mentions Atholl's role in Spain, but only as a prelude to political downfall.⁶ Emily Mason's work on British support for Republican Spain and Angela Jackson's broader study of British women's participation in the Spanish Civil War briefly explores the role played by Atholl within

² G.E. Maguire, *Conservative Women: A History of Women and the Conservative Party, 1874-1997* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), p.89.

³ Adrian Bell, *Only for Three Months* (Norwich: Mousehold Press, 1996), p.19.

⁴ Tom Buchanan, 'Britain's Popular Front? Aid Spain and the British Labour Movement'. *History Workshop Journal*. 31 (2) (1991), pp. 60-72.

⁵ Stuart Ball, 'The Politics of Appeasement: The Fall of the Duchess of Atholl and the Kinross and West Perthshire By-Election, December 1938'. *Scottish Historical Review*. 69 (1) (1990), pp. 49-83.

⁶ S.J. Hetherington, *Katharine Atholl, 1874-1960: Against the Tide* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989).

the movement, but mainly focuses on the Duchess as a part of the NJC and the BCC.^{7,8} Resultantly, both historians fail to emphasise her importance as chairman of both organisations and a prolific humanitarian figure. As a consequence of such deficient research, Atholl has been undervalued within historical study. This thesis utilises extensive archival material from the National Archives at Blair Castle, the former home of the Duchess of Atholl, as well as archives at the Imperial War Museum in London and the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief's archives at the University of Warwick. Such research intends to advance previous understandings of the prominent role Atholl played as a humanitarian during the conflict.

The first chapter of this thesis focuses on Atholl's stance on politics, suffrage, feminism, humanitarianism and conflict in an attempt to consider why such a prominent figure has been historically neglected. This chapter identifies how far the Duchess' background and life's work correlates with other female humanitarians involved in the Spanish Civil War in order to explain her omission from historical research. The second chapter of this thesis addresses the extent to which Atholl utilised her position as a Member of Parliament and her political connections to further the plight of the victims of war. Thus, this chapter assesses how far Atholl combined the political and the humanitarian and considers whether the Duchess can be considered primarily a humanitarian activist or a politician. Lastly, the final chapter of this thesis examines the tangibility of humanitarian actions effected by the Duchess of Athol, both personally and within her role as chairman of the NJC and the BCC, in alleviating the suffering of the Spanish non-combatants. Overall, this thesis intends to overcome Atholl's omission from history in order to recognise and acknowledge the Duchess' work in aiding and providing relief to Spanish civilians and refugees during the war.

I

⁷ Emily Mason, *Democracy, Deeds and Dilemmas: Support for the Spanish Republic Within British Civil Society, 1936-1939* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2017).

⁸ Angela Jackson, *British Women and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

Female Humanitarians and the Duchess' Omission from History

'I failed to find her grave and was leaving in disappointment, but suddenly noticed the simple lettering which recorded her burial. Grass and Moss had almost obscured the inscription: perhaps a reflection of the way in which her life and activities have also been forgotten'- Hetherington.⁹

To enhance the understanding surrounding the Duchess of Atholl's exclusion from historiographical discussion and attempt to reposition her as a central humanitarian figure during the Spanish Civil War, it is essential to evaluate the historical context of the early twentieth century. Discourses surrounding the emergence of humanitarian action, the suffrage movement, female philanthropy and the role of female politicians are all admissible to the career of Katharine Stewart-Murray and hold a distinct relevance to her involvement in Spain. Such discourses clarify Atholl's position as a historical anomaly which explains the failure to fully recognise and celebrate her relief work during the conflict in Spain. This chapter explores the extent to which the Duchess' participation in Spain correlates with the historiography of female humanitarians involved in the war. Such analysis seeks to engage with the cause of the neglect of Stewart-Murray in post-Spanish Civil War discussion and enables a repositioning of the Atholl as a key figurehead of humanitarian relief.

Within the historiography of humanitarian relief during the conflict, Tom Buchanan and Jim Fyrth have deliberated over the nature of British philanthropic support for Spain during the conflict and discussed whether an 'aid Spain' movement existed. Fyrth emphasises the importance of wider social movements in impacting the Spanish humanitarian operation alleging that 'the extent of working-class involvement and the role of women characterised the campaigns'.¹⁰ Fyrth advocates for the existence of the 'Aid Spain campaign' which, the historian believes, constitutes 'the biggest movement of international solidarity in British

⁹ S.J. Hetherington, p. 225

¹⁰ J. Fyrth, *The Signal Was Spain*, p.22.

history'.¹¹ Humanitarian aid during the Spanish conflict is typified by the cohesion evoked through the political, social and cultural context of the early twentieth century. The growth of fascism and the anti-fascist response, the rise of feminism and the importance of class values all hold significance regarding the conflict itself as well as humanitarian action. Humanitarianism constituted a form of participation in the conflict and to varying extents, reflected socio-political viewpoints on the conflict.

On the other hand, Buchanan stresses that 'it is important to emphasise that there were genuine political divisions in the campaign for solidarity with Spain' and there was not one unified humanitarian movement.¹² Buchanan makes the valid complaint that Fyrth ignores the labour movement context, and in doing so, undermines the existence of organisations on a national and local level that supported the aid flow to Spain, independently of the broader campaign. Ultimately, the existence of an 'aid Spain' campaign can be evidenced to an extent, but it is important to consider the various divisions within the movement. The debate between unity and division situates the Duchess of Atholl within this context of humanitarian intervention as she polarised the humanitarian movement through her politics, gender, upbringing and actions, during the conflict.

Such a debate discussing the characteristics of the humanitarian campaign in Spain has developed beyond the initial Fyrth and Buchanan debates and holds specific significance in regard to Atholl and the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief. Susan Pederson has claimed that the 'NJC never achieved the coordinating role to which it aspired as Catholic and pro-Francoist relief organisations preferred to operate on their own, and the labour party insisted on autonomy'.¹³ Not only does Pederson's point contextualise the division within the Spanish conflict and the aid movement itself, but it also conveys a complex image of the Duchess, her role within the NJC and the humanitarian campaign in general. As chairman of the NJC, and later the BCC, Atholl played a fundamental role in attempting to unify the aid campaign yet she cannot be considered a typical and conventional individual within the relief effort. The political, social and religious divisions raised by the ongoing conflict in Spain has had a profound effect on discourses surrounding humanitarian aid. In this sense, such

¹¹ J. Fyrth, *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), p.19

¹² T. Buchanan, p.64.

¹³ Susan Pederson, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p.286

divisions have polarised the historical context, allowing those individuals who fit within traditional discourse to be remembered and those who do not, to be neglected.

Atholl represents an anomaly within the humanitarian movement to Spain for a variety of reasons. Firstly, she was a female, Conservative MP for the constituency of Kinross and West Perthshire, and was the first female, Conservative cabinet minister in history.¹⁴ By 1929, Atholl was placed on the Cabinet Policy Committee to deal with 'questions affecting the interests of women', and thus was the most senior, female Conservative presiding over domestic conditions for female voters.¹⁵ At this time, McCrillis argues, the Duchess was 'politically successful and respected by conservative party leaders'.¹⁶ The Duchess was seen as such an influential conservative politician that Brian Harrison, the historian and academic, ranked the Duchess of Atholl within the top eight of a list of top, female contributors to parliamentary debates.¹⁷ However, the breakout of the Spanish conflict emphasised Atholl's exceptionality and represented her downfall as a senior figure within the Conservative Party.

Socio-political divisions exacerbated by the Spanish Civil War shaped Atholl's role within it as entirely unorthodox and unconventional. As Buchanan states, by July 1936 the Republican-elected government made Spain the 'centre of British left-wing attention'.¹⁸ The civil war split decisively along domestic and international class boundaries. While the British working classes supported the Popular Front government, the British upper-classes mostly viewed the civil war 'as the battleground against the invasion of Western Europe by Soviet revolution' and adopted prominent anti-Republican positions.¹⁹ Considering this context and the conventionality of her early career as a Conservative politician, her role within the pro-Republican NJC marked her as an anomaly amongst other humanitarians and the Conservative votership. Atholl's support for the Republican government, represented a divergence from her aristocratic roots and deeply 'offended orthodox conservatives'.²⁰ The

¹⁴ David Thackeray, *Conservatism for the Democratic Age* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p.28.

¹⁵ Neal McCrillis, *The British Conservative Party and in the Age of Universal Suffrage* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), p.80.

¹⁶ Neal McCrillis, p.79.

¹⁷ B. Harrison, 'Women in a Men's House: the Women MPs, 1919-1945', *Historical Journal*. 29 (3) (1986), p.631.

¹⁸ T. Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain: War, Loss and Memory* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2007), p.3.

¹⁹ Michael Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), p.10

²⁰ S. Hetherington, p. XV.

Duchess was 'a notable exception in the circles in which she moved', not least within the strong working-class foundations on which the aid campaign relied.²¹ Undoubtedly, Atholl's early career representing Conservative, domestic politics presents an antithesis to the Duchesses' later plight as a pro-Republican humanitarian and provides the context for her omission from history.

Furthermore, Atholl's position as a female humanitarian during the conflict both conformed with the majority of other women involved in some respects, and vastly diverged from the status quo in others. In Angela Jackson's study of British women's involvement in the conflict, the historian recognises the variety of incentives that influenced females to travel to Spain and attempts to avoid amalgamating various motivations into one hegemonic purpose.²² Jackson emphasises that 'the personal and the ideological were inextricably linked' and that most women, including the Duchess, were influenced by a variety of catalysts.²³ Alpert's suggestion that humanitarian aid 'sometimes reflected political concern and at others seemed independent of ideology' correlates with Atholl's experience of the conflict.²⁴

Concerned with the developing humanitarian crisis in Spain, Atholl became increasingly aware of the political context and how the non-intervention agreement adopted by European governments in 1936 unfairly affected the Spanish Republican government. Such a position has been advocated by Susan Cohen who emphasises that the Non-intervention agreement 'was another example of Britain abdicating its moral responsibility', avoiding involvement so as not to antagonise the Nazi powers of Europe.²⁵ In this sense, Atholl followed similar paths to influential female humanitarians such as Eleanor Rathbone, who was similarly concerned with international relations, activism politics and humanitarianism. Atholl and Rathbone had first worked together within the Committee for the protection of Coloured Women in the Colonies with the intention to 'campaign on behalf of the underprivileged and the politically downtrodden'.²⁶ Both Rathbone and Atholl continued such campaigns in regard to the

²¹ Academy of Sciences of the USSR, *International Solidarity with the Spanish Republic* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), p.138.

²² A. Jackson, p.11.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ M. Alpert, p.423.

²⁵ Susan Cohen, *Rescue the Perishing: Eleanor Rathbone and the Refugees* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2010), p.86.

²⁶ S. Hetherington, p.135.

Spanish crisis. Rathbone published 'War Can Be Averted' in 1938 concluding that Non-intervention constituted a disregard from the various European governments for the League of Nation's collective security strategy as well as the 'suffering and injustice' taking place across Spain.²⁷ In this sense, Atholl's similarity to figures such as Eleanor Rathbone correlates with discourses surrounding political activism and humanitarianism of the early twentieth century.

The developing importance of female philanthropy within early twentieth century British society lay the foundations for humanitarian participation in Spain. The emergence of humanitarianism as a concept in a time of war combined with previously existing notions of female philanthropy to create a new role for female involvement in conflict zones.²⁸ Jackson has highlighted the 'traditions of female philanthropy' as a catalyst in encouraging British women's involvement in the Spanish Civil War, again highlighting the mainly charitable nature of female participation in the conflict.²⁹ Such views are evidenced by Margot Heinemann, a female member of the British communist party, who heralded the 'compassionate solidarity of British women' in Spain.³⁰ The Duchess of Atholl's altruism conforms to the wider movement in Spain. Frida Stewart believed that her prominent humanitarianism during the Spanish conflict was a result of being raised with her mother's sense of philanthropy.³¹ Stewart stated that her mother 'was always doing good work' for refugees and those in poverty and such a philosophy led Stewart to set up 'Aid Spain' committees in Hull and York.³² Stuart Ball praised the 'philanthropic foundations of the Duchess of Atholl' and has contextualised Atholl's benevolence alongside other wealthy women such as Frida Stewart, claiming that her beneficence was typical of Victorian expectations of female members of the aristocracy.³³ Such evidence would correspond this element of Atholl's character with other female figures involved in humanitarianism during the Spanish conflict and would typify her later role as a prominent humanitarian.

²⁷ A. Jackson, p.144.

²⁸ A. Jackson, p.61.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ A. Jackson, p.56

³¹ A. Jackson, p.20.

³² Ibid.

³³ S. Ball, p.52.

The Duchess of Atholl's early philanthropic work correlates with discourses surrounding the female humanitarian and is indicative of Atholl's her involvement in Spain. As Ball alleges, Atholl's benevolence was 'a product of Victorian ideals of the role appropriate to women of her social station' and continued to develop throughout her life. While in Egypt in 1915, Atholl's altruism led to her organising concerts to entertain wounded troops from the Commonwealth; the Duchess organised 175 events in six weeks throughout Cairo, Alexandria and at various camps along the Suez Canal.³⁴ Furthermore, in response to a hospital shortage, Atholl began housing injured servicemen at a house she rented in Alexandria.³⁵ Such evidence is indicative of Atholl's philanthropic nature and the start of a career attempting to alleviate suffering in light of humanitarian crises. This also indicates that Atholl's humanitarianism correlated with the wider evolution of humanitarianism and the role expected of wealthy, females within British society.

Atholl's and other female relief workers' benevolence developed alongside the formation of humanitarian action in the early twentieth century. Academics such as Cabanes have alleged that 'World War One and its aftermath represent a decisive turning point in the redefinition of humanitarianism' highlighting an 'evolution of humanitarian practices'.³⁶ The destruction and devastation of the 1914-1918 conflict and the brutal nature of the Armenian genocide revolutionised previously religiously-driven humanitarianism and interacted with emerging social processes of the time to become a largely 'gendered practice'.³⁷ Stemming from the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, new relief organisations such as Save the Children were founded to deal with the humanitarian crisis unfolding across Europe and epitomised the revolution in humanitarian action that intended to reduce civilian's suffering during war. The scale of the global conflicts that emerged in the early twentieth century led to the formation of the League of Nations in 1920, and provided a new emphasis, for the 'internationalisation of charity' and growth of humanitarianism.³⁸

³⁴ S. Hetherington, p. 79.

³⁵ S. Hetherington, p.76.

³⁶ Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 3.

³⁷ Keith Watenpaugh, 'The League of Nations Rescue of Armenian Genocide Survivors and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism'. *The American Historical Review*. 115 (5) (2010), p.1320.

³⁸ Ibid.

Such enhancement of humanitarian practice coincided with the social processes of the early twentieth century and was embraced by ‘the Western, middle (and upper) class, female relief worker’ as an acceptable and invaluable role that women could undertake during war.³⁹ The development of modern humanitarianism brought about a ‘permanent, transnational, institutional, and secular regime for understanding and addressing the root causes of human suffering’.⁴⁰ Such a development was overtly supported by females because ‘women produce children, life and the means of living matter to them in a way that these things can never matter to a man’, as the voluntary nurse and pacifist Vera Brittain regarded.⁴¹ Indisputably, Atholl’s role as a humanitarian during the conflict correlates with the growth of female-led humanitarianism from the First World War onwards and also corresponds with the emergence of other female humanitarians who belonged to the middle and upper classes.

However, Atholl’s position on feminism and suffrage politics mark her as an anomaly amongst other female conflict-relief workers. Unlike Atholl’s colleagues in the NJC such as Eleanor Rathbone, who was a staunch supporter of women’s rights and was honorary secretary of the Liverpool Women’s Suffrage Society, Atholl was a prominent Anti-suffragette.⁴² Atholl was a member of the Women’s National Anti-Suffrage League (WNASL) as she believed the campaign too radical and unproductive in terms of gender relations.⁴³ Further, as late as the 1930s, Atholl ‘would outrage feminists by speaking against equal pay in the Civil Service’.⁴⁴ Atholl embodied the desired need of the Conservative party in the post-suffrage political sphere to accommodate the needs of the new female votership, while maintaining the status quo of unthreatened patriarchy. Such an ideology was not only oxymoronic to her position as a female member of parliament, but also presents an antithesis to her female peers involved in the humanitarian movement who were moderate to prominent feminists. Analysis surrounding Atholl’s perception of the feminist movement allows for an engagement with

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ K. Watenpaugh, p.1319.

⁴¹ Helen McCarthy, ‘Shut Against the Woman and Workman Alike’: Democratising Foreign Policy Between the Wars’ in *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender and Politics in Britain, 1918-1945*. Eds. J. Gottlieb and R. Toye (New York: Palgrave, 2013), p. 151.

⁴² Marij Van Helmond, *Votes for Women: the Events on Merseyside, 1870-1928* (Liverpool: National Museums and Galleries, 1992), p.26.

⁴³ Phillippe Vervaecke, ‘Doing Great Public Work Privately’-Female Antis in the Interwar Years’ in *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender and Politics in Britain, 1918-1945*. Eds. J. Gottlieb and R. Toye (New York: Palgrave, 2013), p. 106.

⁴⁴ S. Hetherington, p.65.

how far Atholl conforms to the mass female humanitarian movement. As Phillipe Vervaecke conveys, 'interwar paths like that of Atholl's are exceptional', and such exceptionalism is seen most prolifically within Atholl's disregard for feminism. Such an anomaly emphasises Atholl's nonconformity with other female humanitarians and helps to explain the Duchess' omission from discourses surrounding humanitarianism during the civil war.

However, the scale of humanitarian distress caused by the Spanish conflict was the most significant unifying factor amongst the Duchess and other female humanitarians. As was the case with the Duchess, many female volunteers were drawn into humanitarian participation during the conflict due to the scale of destruction and suffering occurring in Spain. Fatal military campaigns, widespread mob violence and large numbers of civilian casualties had been recorded in Spain and had attracted worldwide attention. Kanty Cooper noted as early as 1937, 'towns and villages were being subjected to heavy bombing and the food situation was critical'.⁴⁵ Due to the fact that 'suffering was so acute in Spain... foreign organisations (and individuals) felt impelled to undertake relief work, especially for children'.⁴⁶ The scale of such a crisis evoked a mass humanitarian movement and captured the attention of Atholl and others.⁴⁷ As Michael Alpert notes, the Spanish Joint Committee for humanitarian relief was formed following the parliamentary delegation's visit to Spain in November 1936 and constituted a response to the 'immense and growing problems of Spanish refugees'.⁴⁸ The Duke of Atholl justified his wife's concerns for the plight of the Spanish civilian in a 1937 letter writing that 'there is no excuse for an aeroplane...to machine gun women and children in flight in open country as they fly from a burning town'.⁴⁹ Such evidence highlights that whilst the Duchess varied to large degrees from the typical working class, feminist, humanitarian working on behalf of Spanish civilians and refugees; Atholl was primarily concerned with alleviating human suffering and aiding those in need.

Ultimately, the Duchess of Atholl has been historically neglected due to her non-conformity with traditional discourses. As Hetherington aptly summarises, the Duchess consistently

⁴⁵ Kanty Cooper, *The Uprooted* (London: Quartet Books, 1979), p.1

⁴⁶ Howard Kershner, *Quaker Service in Modern War* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1950), p. XV

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Michael Alpert, 'Humanitarianism and Politics in the British Response to the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939', *European History Quarterly*. 14 (4) (1984), p. 427.

⁴⁹ Blair Atholl, Blair Castle Archive (BCA), Atholl Family Archive, Duke and Duchess of Atholl, 2137, 22/6, Mr Dickson to the Duke of Atholl, 15/11/1937.

swam 'against the tide' of popular beliefs, movements, her upbringing and her political identity encouraging historical and contemporary figures to misconstrue Atholl's integrity and importance.⁵⁰ Charles Sarolea, a Belgian academic, alleged in his response to Atholl's book 'Searchlight on Spain', that the Duchess is a 'destructive intellectual and a rebel aristocrat'.⁵¹ As an overt Francoist supporter, Sarolea represents the contraposition to Atholl in terms of attitudes to the Spanish conflict, but also misaligns Atholl's political actions with rebellion. As was the case when Atholl resigned the Conservative party whip in 1935 in protest against the passing of the India Bill, Atholl was cast as a problematic 'die-hard'.⁵² Atholl objected to the extension of autonomy to areas which would fail to prevent the ill-treatment of women and girls and protect Muslim and Sikh minorities, and resultantly showed 'her courage where matters of principle were involved'.⁵³ Ball's assertion that she was 'a forceful advocate of her case thoroughly briefed, determined and stubborn' is partly valid, but fails to acknowledge the Duchess' integrity and commitment to countering injustice.⁵⁴ Atholl, to her demise, 'opposed cruelty with a consistency which bred indifference to the political colour of its perpetrators'.⁵⁵ Mary Stocks's statement summarises the plight of Atholl as a politician, humanitarian and historical figure and marks the Duchess' omission from traditional discourse due to her non-conformity.

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⁵⁰ K. Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain*, p.1

⁵¹ C. Sarolea, p.34.

⁵² S. Hetherington, p.145.

⁵³ S. Hetherington, p.138.

⁵⁴ S. Ball, p.79.

⁵⁵ S. Hetherington, p.XIII

Atholl as a Member of Parliament and the Combination of the Humanitarian and the Political

‘The writing of this book is my own idea alone, born of the desire which I hope may be forgiven in the daughter of a historian, to try and get at the facts; and of my conviction that it is the duty of members of parliament both to do this, and when some facts, at least, appear to have been ascertained, to make them known’ -Atholl.⁵⁶

This chapter situates the Duchess of Atholl within the humanitarian and political context of the early twentieth century and the embittered conflict continuing in Spain. Atholl’s role within the Spanish Civil War and the Duchess’ obligation to her political duties raise a variety of questions regarding her priorities and motivations. The Duchess, on the one hand, was an anti-fascist activist and member of parliament who passionately advocated the League of Nations’ collective security strategy.⁵⁷ The Duchess was extremely concerned with the strategic implications of appeasing Hitler, Mussolini and Franco and the weak global position Britain would face following the continuation of the non-intervention agreement and a nationalist victory in Spain. On the other hand, however, Atholl has been viewed fundamentally as a humanitarian activist. Following her visit to Spain in April 1937, Hetherington has regarded that for Atholl, ‘the pitiable condition of the children came before political considerations’.⁵⁸ Hetherington continues, alleging that ‘the appalling accounts of the suffering of the Spanish people drew (Atholl) and Rathbone to set up the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief’.⁵⁹ The amalgamation of the political and the humanitarian define the Duchess of Atholl as an influential figure during the Spanish conflict.

Atholl recognised a personal obligation to aid the victims of war and frequently attempted to relieve the suffering of Spanish citizens and refugees. Her concerns for non-combatants in conflict areas was not limited to Spain however, with Atholl becoming involved with the Red Cross and housing Blitz refugees from Glasgow on her estate after the outbreak of World War

⁵⁶ K. Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain* (London: Penguin, 1938), p. XII.

⁵⁷ K. Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain*, p.317.

⁵⁸S. Hetherington, p.187.

⁵⁹ S. Hetherington, p.175.

Two in 1939.⁶⁰ In this respect, Atholl held a fundamental motivation 'to assuage human distress', which constitutes one of the 'general principles' of humanitarianism as defined by the twentieth-century diplomat, Max Huber.⁶¹ Nonetheless, Ball's assertion that Atholl's 'concern thus evolved from the charitable to the political and from the particular case of Spain to the wider issue of the appeasement of the dictators in general' effectively conveys the way in which the Spanish conflict catalysed Atholl's fears surrounding international relations and the rise of Nazism.⁶² The Duchess balanced humanitarian and political roles alike and combined them to further the situation of Spanish civilians and refugees in need as well as attempt to ensure national security.

The divisive nature of the Spanish Civil War transgressed into the broader context of international and domestic politics of the time as well as humanitarian work. As Tom Buchanan argues, the fighting 'caused division, but did not divide cleanly'.⁶³ As a result, 'relief work became an extension of politics'.⁶⁴ Buchanan is correct in refusing to omit the political from the humanitarian in Spain. In terms of British involvement in aid on a personal and institutional level, 'it would be wrong to see these campaigns as purely humanitarian in their objectives'.⁶⁵ Such a statement would present a contrary argument to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and threaten the organisation's understanding of humanitarianism as a neutral and impartial act of relief.⁶⁶ The ICRC identifies politics as 'a moral pollutant' and stresses the need for relief work to be 'apolitical'.⁶⁷ However, Barnett and Weiss recognise the problematic nature of such principles alleging that 'it is neither possible nor desirable to separate humanitarianism and politics', especially when considering the polarised political context of the Spanish conflict.⁶⁸ Humanitarian organisations need the support of state functions and resources to implement humanitarian action; without such

⁶⁰ S. Hetherington, 219.

⁶¹ M. Huber, 'Introduction' in *Warrior Without Weapons*. Ed. M. Junod (London: The Non-Fiction Book Club, 1951), p. 8.

⁶² S. Ball, p.56.

⁶³ T. Buchanan, p.63.

⁶⁴ T. Buchanan, p.93.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Michael Barnett and Thomas Weiss, *Humanitarianism in Question* (London: Cornell University Press, 2008), p.4.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ M. Barnett and T. Weiss, p.4.

dynamism, relief efforts would be extremely limited in capability and success.⁶⁹ It is within this context that the Duchess' political and relief work must be understood.

During the Spanish conflict, Atholl immersed herself in the crisis unfolding in Spain, the plight of the Republican Government, as well as broader political issues that concerned domestic and international policy such as appeasement and the threat of fascism. While NJC secretary and member of parliament Wilfrid Roberts has been hailed the 'MP for Spain', Atholl's concerns for, and attempts to further the position of Spanish republicans and civilians, the British public and the victims of European fascism has been forgotten.⁷⁰ Such factors constitute Atholl's political priorities between 1936 and 1939. In this sense, the Duchess effectively combined the humanitarian and the political. Organisations such as the BCC and NJC as well as individuals suffering the consequences of war benefitted from Atholl's position as an MP and her role within the political sphere. This chapter analyses the way in which Atholl immersed the humanitarian into the political field and acknowledges the successes and failures that came as a result.

Atholl utilised her political connections, her stature as a member of parliament and her voice in parliament to further the position of Spanish civilians and refugees until the end of the conflict.⁷¹ Following the parliamentary subcommittee's visit to Spain in 1937, Atholl stated that 'it is the duty of Members of Parliament' to 'get at the facts...and make them known'.⁷² Atholl embodied this role wholeheartedly. Atholl frequently voiced her concerns surrounding the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Spain and publicised the condition of the civilian population to the British public and the British government in an attempt to improve the situation. Her book 'Searchlight on Spain', published in June of 1938, sold 100,000 copies within the first week and revealed the 'facts' of the political and humanitarian situation to the masses.⁷³

Atholl utilised such platforms to detail and address the experiences of Spanish civilians, the negative propaganda endured by the Republican government and the violation of the Geneva Convention during the conflict. As an MP in parliament and within her literary works such as

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ A. Jackson, p.264.

⁷¹ S. Ball, p.1.

⁷² K. Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain*, p.XII

⁷³ K. Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain*, p.1.

'Searchlight on Spain' and 'My Impressions of Spain', Atholl stressed the plight of Spanish Republicans who had been machine-gunned and bombed at Madrid, Durango, Guernica, and Barcelona.^{74,75} Atholl's role within this context is significant as not only did she raise awareness of human suffering but challenged Francoist propaganda that denied responsibility for such atrocities. Such a point is evidenced by Atholl's critique of the Official Report by the Commission to Investigate the Destruction of Guernica's findings that the town was burnt down by the Basque government.⁷⁶ Within 'Searchlight on Spain', Atholl exposed the lack of 'impartiality' of the commission, evidenced reports confirming the presence of fascist aircraft above the town of Guernica as well as attempts to remove bomb fragments once the area had been taken by Francoist troops, to a vast readership.⁷⁷ She continued to expose nationalist propaganda and emphasise factual events as a means of drawing international attention to the conditions within Republican Spain. In a letter dated the 28th August 1937, she assured General Miaja that she was doing everything she could to 'stem the terrible tide of false statements' against Loyalist Spain.⁷⁸

Atholl also attempted to further the humanitarian within the political sphere in regard to the perpetration of war crimes during the Spanish conflict. As a result of historiographical neglect of the Duchess of Atholl's role in the Spanish Civil War, and the narrow focus of those who have written about her, Atholl's attempts to alert the British public and government to evidence confirming the occurrence of war crimes have gone unnoticed. Atholl frequently raised such issues in Parliament. Atholl reported allegations of attacks on children with 'Chocolate bombs' being dropped in Catalonia in 1939.⁷⁹ The Duchess sent reports to the House of Commons detailing the existence of explosives covered in chocolate paper wrappings and injuries to children's faces and arms that would correlate with the use of such weapons.⁸⁰ Such efforts led to enquiries being made to the British government's representative in Barcelona and an investigation being conducted by British government representatives.⁸¹ Furthermore, in August 1937 Atholl alerted Anthony Eden to 'deliberate

⁷⁴ K. Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain*, p.194.

⁷⁵ BCA, 44/3, K. Atholl, 'My Impressions of Spain', p.8, 1/5/1937.

⁷⁶ K. Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain*, p.194.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ BCA, 44/1, K. Atholl to General Miaja, 28/8/1937.

⁷⁹ BCA, 45/1, Minutes from House of Commons Meeting, 27/2/1939.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ BCA, 45/1, Mr Butler to K. Atholl, 6/3/1939.

and methodical' attacks on Red Cross ambulances by nationalist aircraft, to the extent to which non-combatant medical vehicles had to remove any neutral Red Cross markings.⁸² Such attacks constituted a violation of the Geneva Convention and again led Atholl to utilise the political to further humanitarian objectives. Atholl alleged in a letter that 'the granting of belligerent rights is supposed to be dependent on the observance of the rules of warfare' and urged Eden to consider the evidence against Francoist troops breaching the Geneva Convention.⁸³ Atholl's pressure led to Eden taking the information into 'serious consciousness' and discussing the matter with the prime minister.⁸⁴

Furthermore, Atholl continued to inform and urged action to prevent atrocities against the Spanish population. Atholl cabled President Roosevelt, Neville Chamberlain and the prime minister of the dominions to see 'if they could obtain a guarantee from General Franco for the safety of non-combatants' during the siege of Madrid in 1936 and 1937.⁸⁵ Atholl herself recognised in the coming weeks that 'she has not heard whether any steps have been taken' due to the political limitations of non-intervention and foreign involvement in a civil war. Further, in January of 1939, Atholl sent Chamberlain a letter urging him to 'send landing parties to Barcelona in order to prevent possible disturbances' to the civilian population there, following the imminent arrival of Francoist troops.⁸⁶ Although ultimately such action was deemed by the prime minister to be 'impractical', such evidence is exemplary of the way in which Atholl pushed for humanitarian action through political means. Although no tangible changes were made in limiting the perpetration of nationalist war crimes, such efforts increased international pressure on Francoist forces and shows how influential the Duchess' efforts were in raising awareness of such issues.

In spite of limited success in raising humanitarian issues within the political sphere, Atholl brought international attention to the plight of prisoners of war and political prisoners throughout the conflict. Atholl acted as a figurehead of communication between the British government and civilians with political connections in the Basque country during the repression that emerged there following the nationalist advance in 1937. Atholl frequently

⁸² BCA, 45/1, Report from the Scottish Ambulance Unit in Spain, 28/8/1937.

⁸³ BCA, 45/1, K. Atholl to Unnamed Member of Spanish Medical Aid, 1/8/1937.

⁸⁴ BCA, 46/3, Anthony Eden to K. Atholl, 30/12/1937.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ BCA, 22/1, K. Atholl to Neville Chamberlain, 27/1/1939.

liaised with the President of the Basque Government, Jose Aguirre, and Leviola Lizaso of the Basque Government contingency based in London to monitor the treatment of POW's and Basque politicians interned at Francoist prisons.⁸⁷ In December of 1937, Lizaso notified Atholl of Basque loyalist prisoners being sent to work iron ore mines 'under conditions which amount to slavery'.⁸⁸ Atholl subsequently reported to members of parliament and raised the issue with Eden, which again was investigated.

Atholl's position as a mediator between British and Spanish politicians surrounding humanitarian concerns continued until the end of the conflict in 1939. Following correspondence with Lizaso, Atholl pressured Eden to act in regard to the plight of 400 Basque prisoners under arrest by order of Franco.⁸⁹ Such action culminated in 'an agreement being made in principle' between Spanish and British authorities.⁹⁰ Through the Chetwode Commission, exchanges for these prisoners were agreed; although ultimately negotiations broke down. Such failures were due to the fact that, fundamentally, 'the insurgent high command displayed little concern for humanitarian issues', as Anderson argues, and thus should not undermine the Duchess' efforts to encourage negotiations on behalf of prisoners of war.⁹¹ Similarly, Lizaso telegraphed Atholl on the 25th January 1938 to urge her to call on her political contacts in the British government in order to prevent the executions of senior Basque politicians who were to be 'shot at any moment'.⁹² Atholl then went on to inform the press association, Prime Minister Chamberlain and the Foreign Office.⁹³ Such evidence demonstrates Atholl's determination to bridge communications between the British and Spanish local and national governments in order to raise awareness of humanitarian concerns in an attempt to prevent such executions.

Due to political restrictions, the relative failure of the Chetwode commission and the simple objective of Francoist forces to 'keep up appearances' rather than actively pursue humanitarian policy and abide by the Geneva convention, the Basque prisoners Atholl pushed

⁸⁷ BCA, 44/3, Communications with Basque Government, 12/7/1937-3/8/1939.

⁸⁸ BCA, 44/3, Leviola Lizaso to K. Atholl, 30/11/1937.

⁸⁹ BCA, 44/3, A. Eden to K. Atholl, 30/12/1937.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Peter Anderson, 'The Chetwode Commission and British Diplomatic Responses to Violence Behind the Lines in the Spanish Civil War', *European History Quarterly*, 42 (2) (2012), p. 242.

⁹² BCA, 44/3, L. Lizaso to K. Atholl, 25/1/1938.

⁹³ BCA, 44/3, K. Atholl to L. Lizaso, 26/1/1938.

to save, were executed.⁹⁴ Much like humanitarian involvement in the conflict in general, achievements were limited in relation to the scale of destruction and violence that occurred. Nonetheless, Atholl's actions here should not be undermined due to factors outside of her control. The Duchess' efforts are indicative of her self-recognised obligation to raise awareness of the events unfolding in Spain and attempts to prevent the occurrence of atrocities. Unlike most other humanitarians working during this period, Atholl adopted a unique style of balancing political and humanitarian considerations and utilising each one to enhance the other. Although, limited by wider political turbulence, Atholl was significantly more effective than many in highlighting the plight of civilians and refugees in Spain.

However, it is important to consider that while Atholl's humanitarianism benefitted from her political influence, her political influence declined as a result. As Lovenduski and Norris regard, 'the Duchess' support for the Spanish Republic and opposition to appeasement finished her career'.⁹⁵ Atholl's association with the Spanish Republican cause and her working relationships with known communists such as Ellen Wilkinson and Dolores Ibarri, led to her being dubbed as 'the Red Duchess'.⁹⁶ Accusations initially began from within Atholl's constituency by Colonel Dawson but then began to spread.⁹⁷ Charles Sarolea, a Belgian academic, published a response in 1938 to Stewart-Murray's 'Searchlight on Spain' and claimed that the Duchess was 'an invaluable asset to the Moscow comintern'.⁹⁸ Such hyperbole reinforces Buchanan's point surrounding the divisive nature of the Spanish conflict and situates the Duchess at the centre of such dissension. Another member of Atholl's constituency council, Captain Heilgers publicly alleged that Atholl had been 'involved in the recruitment of volunteers for the International Brigades' through the International Brigades Dependents and Wounded Aid Committee, of which she was chair.⁹⁹ As a result, 'the impression was now 'firmly established in the minds of the party, the local association and the general public that [Atholl] had gone communist'.¹⁰⁰ Such links tended to be exaggerated as Atholl herself had stated on many occasions stated that she had 'no sympathy with the

⁹⁴ P. Anderson, p. 245.

⁹⁵ Joni Lovenduski and Pippa Norris, *Gender and Party Politics* (London: Sage, 1993), p.3

⁹⁶ S. Hetherington, p.188.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Charles Sarolea, *Daylight on Spain: the Answer to the Duchess of Atholl* (London: Hutchinson, 1938), p.30.

⁹⁹ BCA, 45/2, Captain Heilgers to Atholl, 7/8/1938.

¹⁰⁰ S. Hetherington, p. 188.

principles of the communist party' and had frequently denounced the policies of the soviet union.¹⁰¹ However, such evidence is indicative of the way in which Atholl's position as a politician deteriorated as a result of involvement in Spain while her humanitarianism was enhanced through her role as an MP.

Suspicious around Atholl's connection to communism developed alongside disquiet against her opposition to Conservative Party policy and threatened her ability to bring about humanitarian change in Parliament. Ball's summary that by 1938 the Duchess was 'swimming against the tide of conservative sentiment' is fitting.¹⁰² Atholl recognised the 'crowning injustice' of the non-intervention agreement of 1936 which by this time had become wholly superficial.¹⁰³ The Duchess objected to Chamberlain's appeasement policy which, she believed, combined with the non-intervention agreement to effectively permit German and Italian involvement in the Spanish Civil War, while Britain and France remained idle.¹⁰⁴ However, the Duchess' protestations were not limited to injustice. Atholl was aggrieved at the 'terribly destructive power' of Italian and German bombs targeting the Spanish population and international failures to protect a 'democratically elected government'.¹⁰⁵ Atholl's politics were firmly rooted in the international context of the rise of fascism. The Duchess felt that the importance of a collective security policy as advocated by the League of Nations was increasingly important, most especially in light of limited British military capability as a result of a global disarmament policy enacted throughout the 1930s.¹⁰⁶

Discussing the nature of General Franco's alliance with Hitler and Mussolini, Atholl emphasised in 'Searchlight on Spain' that 'the danger to us is no less real and deadly'.¹⁰⁷ As Pearce and Stewart regard, 'After 1936, fear and a sense of inadequacy were heavily influencing British official thinking' and thus, Basil Liddell-Hart and Winston Churchill were of the minority of those who supported Atholl's beliefs.¹⁰⁸ As Liddell-Hart, the World War One

¹⁰¹ BCA, 22/7, Election Pamphlet, 'Opposition Misstatements: A Reply', 12/1938.

¹⁰² S. Ball, p.57.

¹⁰³ K. Atholl, *Searchlight on the Spain*, p.316

¹⁰⁴ Buchanan, p.159.

¹⁰⁵ K. Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain*, p.301.

¹⁰⁶ J.P.D Dunbabin, 'British Rearmament in the 1930s: A Chronology and Review'. *The Historical Review*. 18 (3) (1975), p.589.

¹⁰⁷ K. Atholl, *Searchlight in Spain*, p.319.

¹⁰⁸ Malcolm Pearce and Geoffrey Stewart, *British Political History, 1867-2001: Democracy and Decline* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.180.

veteran and *The Times* military correspondent, wrote Atholl in December of 1938, 'I regard your attitude towards foreign intervention in the Spanish War as a stand for sound strategic principles on the observance of which this country depends'.¹⁰⁹ Although such a statement validates Atholl's foreign policy position by a military expert, Atholl's position was ultimately unpopular, and as a result her political position was undermined.

Atholl resigned as Conservative Party whip in April 1938 as a response to Neville Chamberlain's appeasement policy and the continuation of the non-intervention agreement.¹¹⁰ In an open letter sent to her constituents in July 1938, Atholl explains that she 'cannot support the government's foreign policy' due the detrimental effect the non-intervention agreement has on British security interests and the fact that it permits the destruction of the 'civilian population' in Spain.¹¹¹ Within her resignation of the whip and her loss of the Kinross and West Perthshire by-election in 1938, the importance of the political and the humanitarian are evident within Atholl's ideology. The Duchess' failure to support the Munich agreement and the government's foreign policy became increasingly problematic within her local constituency. As stated in the Kinross and West Perthshire Executive Council report in 1938, it has 'become evident that there is no other alternative but to recommend that another candidate be adopted'.¹¹² Colonel Dawson, the leader of opposition towards Atholl within the constituency council, stressed that 'no one has the slightest objection to your work for the relief of the women and children'.¹¹³ However, Atholl's association with the Spanish government's cause and pro-Republican humanitarian relief undeniably agitated the constituency and the Conservative Party in general, and thus jeopardised her political position.

Consequently, Atholl lost the by-election of December 1938, at which she stood as an independent. Such events suggest that Atholl's political and humanitarian stance on Spain and events conspiring within Europe in the late 1930s finished her career as an MP. Such events led Takayanagi to stipulate that Atholl 'would lose her by-election because she

¹⁰⁹ BCA, 22/7, Basil Liddell-Hart to K. Atholl, 1/12/1938.

¹¹⁰ BCA, 45/5, K. Atholl to N. Chamberlain, 26/4/1938.

¹¹¹ BCA, 22/6, Open Letter from K. Atholl to Constituents, July 1938.

¹¹² BCA, 22/7, Kinross and West Perthshire Executive Council Report, 1938.

¹¹³ BCA, 22/18, James Paton to K. Atholl, Blair Castle Archives, 22/6/1937.

identified herself exclusively with foreign policy and thus, by extension, with war'.¹¹⁴ Takayanagi recognises the socio-political context that encouraged support for appeasement as a result of public opinion advocating for global peace. However, Hetherington's assertion that Atholl was 'wrong when she was right' following Hitler's annexation of Czechoslovakia and invasion of Poland in 1939, justifies Atholl's political stance in regard to the policy of appeasement.¹¹⁵ Hetherington stresses the post-war opinion shared by many in Atholl's constituency that ultimately is valid; 'the Duchess was right, she was right. And there's millions of dead that shouldn't be dead; and they knew she was right'.¹¹⁶ Nonetheless, Atholl's involvement in Spain was ultimately detrimental to the Duchess' political position.

In addressing the political side of Atholl's humanitarian work, it is important to consider the question of neutrality and make a considered judgement on Atholl's identification as the 'Red Duchess'. Undeniably, the Duchess was a supporter of the Republican government and a vehement anti-fascist. The Duchess dedicated 'Searchlight on Spain' 'to all those Spaniards who are fighting or toiling for national independence and democratic government against tremendous odds'.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, in a letter to General Miaja, Minister of War for the Republic, Atholl wrote 'please believe how keenly I follow the splendid deeds of your army...the spirit shown by Loyalist Spain in this terrible crisis has made an ineffaceable impression on me'.¹¹⁸ Such evidence would suggest that Atholl cannot be considered a neutral observer during the Spanish conflict. Historians such as Ball have asserted that as a result of such compassion, Atholl's 'exposed position was partly self-imposed'.¹¹⁹ Although partly valid in recognising Atholl's vulnerability in the face of pro-Franco public opinion, Ball ignores the intention of the aid organisations under Atholl's chairmanship to remain neutral. The National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief aimed 'at helping wherever the need is greatest' irrespective of political, religious and socio-economic ties.¹²⁰ During Atholl's trip to Spain in 1937, she attempted to visit General Franco's territory in an attempt to extend aid into

¹¹⁴ Mari Takayanagi, 'They Have Made Their Mark Entirely Out of Proportion to Their Numbers- Women and Parliamentary Committees, 1918-1943'. Eds. J. Gottlieb and R. Toye. *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender and Politics in Britain, 1918-1943* (New York: Palgrave, 2013), p 163.

¹¹⁵ S. Hetherington, p.202.

¹¹⁶ S. Hetherington, p.217

¹¹⁷ K. Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain*, p.1.

¹¹⁸ BCA, 44/1, Atholl to Miaja, 28/8/1937.

¹¹⁹ S. Ball, p.57.

¹²⁰ BCA, 44/3, K. Atholl, 'My Impressions of Spain', p.2, 1/5/1937.

nationalist areas 'as the committee aims at helping wherever the need is greatest', but failed to obtain a permit to do so.¹²¹ Further, the BCC selected the 3,826 children to be evacuated to the UK in 1937 on the basis that the evacuees had connections to a broad political spectrum.¹²² Such evidence would suggest that whilst Atholl was openly pro-Republican, she and the senior leadership of the NJC and the BCC endeavoured to aid the victims of war regardless of political affiliation, as providing aid to those in need was Atholl's fundamental priority.

The Duchess of Atholl was a prolific figure during the Spanish conflict who brought concerns around international politics and humanitarianism to the forefront of public consciousness. Until the loss of the by-election of 1938, the Duchess utilised her platform within Parliament to raise awareness of the hardships faced by civilians, refugees and prisoners of war and urged measures to be taken to limit human suffering. Even after she lost her place as a Member of Parliament, she continued to utilise her political connections to further her humanitarian objectives, reporting allegations of explosive devices injuring children in Catalonia in 1939.¹²³ However, the Duchess did not solely pursue humanitarian concerns as a politician and attempted to address the security threat posed to Britain following the rise of fascism in Germany, Italy and Spain and the failures of the appeasement policy. Although her political position ultimately deteriorated as a result of opposing government foreign policy, her efforts to address both the political and the humanitarian mark Atholl as an exceptional twentieth-century figure and MP. Ultimately Atholl lost her place as a Member of Parliament in 1938, but continued to utilise political networks and connections to further the position of the refugee. Atholl refused to allow her pro-Republican stance to limit her professional capacity as a humanitarian and attempted to provide aid relief to those suffering, regardless of their political affiliation. Ultimately, Atholl immersed herself in the idea that 'substantial aid was needed for hapless Spanish children who were the victims of war'.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² James Cable, *The Royal Navy and the Siege of Bilbao* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p.138.

¹²³ BCA, 45/1, Minutes from House of Commons Meeting, 27/2/1939.

¹²⁴ S. Hetherington, p.185.

III

Did the Duchess of Atholl Achieve Tangible Success in her Humanitarian Efforts?

‘If war is the scourge of humanity; the killing of the helpless is its worst manifestation’-
Grimsley and Rogers.¹²⁵

In order to re-position the Duchess of Atholl as a fundamental humanitarian figure during the Spanish Civil War, an assessment must be made of how effective Atholl’s work was in relieving and supporting Spanish civilians and victims of the conflict. As alleged by the Core Humanitarian Standard, humanitarian action is defined as ‘action taken with the objective of saving lives, alleviating suffering and maintaining human dignity during and after human-induced crises and natural disasters, as well as action to prevent and prepare for them’.¹²⁶

This chapter analyses the successes and failures of Atholl, as chairman of the NJC and the BCC and in a personal capacity, in alleviating personal suffering during the conflict. This will incorporate an assessment of aspects of the humanitarian operation including the organisation and coordination of the relief campaign, fundraising and support for civilians, prisoners of war and refugees, and raising awareness of the human suffering in order to affect change.

As Trim and Simms argue ‘the problem of how to protect human rights and safeguard human security is one of the most persistent’ and ambiguous issues facing humanitarian activists.¹²⁷ Such ambiguity regarding the relief effort has been reflected in the historiography of the war. The ‘Aid Spain’ debate is not limited to the discussion of the socio-cultural nature of the relief effort. The ‘Aid Spain’ debates incorporate an assessment of the success of the humanitarian

¹²⁵ Mark Grimsley and Clifford Rogers, *Civilians in the Path of War* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), p. XI

¹²⁶ Core Humanitarian Standard, (2014)
<<https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/files/files/Core%20Humanitarian%20Standard%20-%20English.pdf>>
[Accessed 10th February 2018].

¹²⁷ D.J.B. Trim and Brendan Simms, *Humanitarian Intervention: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.1

campaign during the civil war, and therefore the role played by central organisations such as the NJC and BCC and Atholl herself. Fyrth emphasises the NJC's role as an umbrella organisation to over 180 bodies as indicative of the 'widespread' humanitarian movement and alleges that such a wide range of support provided a comprehensive level of relief for the victims of the civil war.¹²⁸ Fyrth lists tangible achievements in terms of medical aid, the transport of foodstuffs and the evacuation of the Basque children and highlights the importance of such successes.¹²⁹

Emily Mason's recent work on the support for the Republic from British civil society has attempted to reconsider the political and societal divisions within Britain that dictated support, humanitarian or otherwise, for those involved in the war.¹³⁰ Mason has alleged that within aid organisations such as the NJC, there was a 'fragile alliance of progressive opinion' within the humanitarian movement that brought together 'a broad range of non-party political, civil, voluntary, social and cultural organisations across 1930s Britain'.¹³¹ Much like Buchanan, Mason recognises the divides that influenced the aid movement, but also acknowledges the significance of collective solidarity in developing the humanitarian campaign. Such historiography emphasises the complex nature of the aid campaign and highlights the fragility of the humanitarian effort that was led by senior figures such as Atholl.

Mates expands on this argument alleging that humanitarian support for the Republic was ultimately detrimental; the Republic 'needed weapons not bandages to mount its defence'.¹³² Such a viewpoint, while valid in a wider view of the conflict, undermines the importance and necessity of the relief work undertaken by the NJC and the Basque Children's Committee. As written in an NJC document, the National Joint Committee was established following the visit of a parliamentary commission which recognised the 'calamity which has overtaken the Spanish people' and recognised the need for 'a great effort' in orchestrating a relief campaign.¹³³ The committee's function, according to a statement it released was to 'prevent

¹²⁸ J. Fyrth, *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), p. 19.

¹²⁹ J. Fyrth, 'The Aid Spain Movement in Britain, 1936-1939'. *History Workshop Journal*. 35 (1) (1993), p.154.

¹³⁰ E. Mason, p.5.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Lewis Mates, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Left: Political Activism and the Popular Front* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), p. 161.

¹³³ Warwick, Warwick University Digital Collections (WUDC), Archives of the Trade Union Congress, 292/946/18b/26, NJC Booklet, p.2, 2/1937, <<https://warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/explorefurther/digital/scw/more/aid/>>

the overlapping of many different appeals' already in existence, 'facilitate the efficient collection and allocation of funds' and distribute other necessary materials to Spain.¹³⁴ The primary obligations of the committee centred on the protection of refugees, evacuations of civilians and the provision of medical support. As stated in an NJC bulletin 'our appeal is to relieve the suffering of children, of civilians, helpless in the face of modern war, of the sick and the wounded...the physical suffering in Spain can be eased by practical help'.¹³⁵ Such evidence highlights the humanitarian role embodied by the NJC in unifying British aid to Spain and relieving civilians and refugees where possible.

The credit attributed to the Duchess of Atholl's relief work has been limited to her role in the evacuation of the Basque children and the organisation and delivery of NJC foodships to Spain. Such efforts have been deemed by historians such as Susan Pederson as two of the NJC's 'most memorable campaigns', emphasising the zenith of not just the NJC's role in the conflict, but the British humanitarian effort as a whole.¹³⁶ Even within this context, Atholl's role as Chairman has been typically obscured in a place of a more generalised view of the NJC itself. Historians such as Michael Alpert have celebrated the NJC's functionality as a relief organisation alleging that the NJC was a 'vivid example of efficient and devoted committee work'.¹³⁷ Pederson's recognition of Atholl and Rathbone as 'much more than figureheads' within the NJC and acknowledgement of the fundamental roles played by both female MPs is unique within civil war historiography.¹³⁸ Pederson highlights the importance of Atholl and Rathbone's contribution to committee policy, the deliverance of influential speeches at fundraising events and ability to negotiate difficult relations with UK government.¹³⁹ Such an analysis of the inner-workings of the NJC provides a unique viewpoint as to the cohesion and durability of the committee itself. Yet Pederson examines Rathbone and Atholl together and fails to accredit the Duchess with the integral role she played within the organisation as chairman.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ L. Palfreeman, *Salud: British Volunteers in the Republican Medical Service During the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2012), p.11.

¹³⁵ WUDC, 292/946/16a/47, NJC Archives, NJC Bulletin No. 5, p.3, 9/4/1937.

¹³⁶ Susan Pederson, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 286.

¹³⁷ M. Alpert, p.431.

¹³⁸ S. Pederson, p.286.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

Throughout the Spanish Civil War, the NJC achieved significant humanitarian successes while under the leadership of the Duchess of Atholl. Recognised by Alpert as ‘the first achievements of the organisation’, the evacuation of Madrid in 1937 constitutes a major feat for the NJC in the beginnings of the civil war.¹⁴¹ British buses driven by British volunteers were involved in a substantial campaign to evacuate children from the besieged areas of the city during the battle of Madrid. As reported in a press release by the Spanish Press agency in February 1937, buses donated by, and driven by volunteers from the NJC, ‘engaged in the merciful work of transporting the children of Madrid away from the grim scenes of death and destruction which now surround them’.¹⁴² Atholl herself expands on such reports in her pamphlet ‘My Impressions of Spain’, hailing the ‘well-coordinated system by which children were being evacuated from Madrid’ by ‘omnibuses and lorries sent out by our committee’.¹⁴³ Having witnessed the evacuation in action, the Duchess recognised the need to support the continuity of the operation. Atholl allocated two more Bedford buses to be sent out in March 1937 and arranged for another bus to be bought by the committee by April 1937 to further the relief effort.¹⁴⁴ Such support is indicative of the prominent role Atholl undertook in NJC policy decisions and the way in which senior figures within the NJC prioritised the evacuation of children in Madrid. ‘Evacuation of children’ permits belonging to Leonard Muscroft, one of seven NJC bus drivers, would suggest that orphans were transported away from Madrid by NJC buses in their hundreds.¹⁴⁵

In addition, the NJC dispatched food and clothing to Spanish civilians and refugees on a large scale, through the ‘foodship’ operation. As recognised by Atholl on her visit to Spain, by January 1937 there was ‘a great shortage of food in Bilbao’, and the supplies in the rest of the Basque country were severely limited.¹⁴⁶ Although geo-politically restricted by the non-intervention agreement and the blockade of the Basque country by the nationalist navy, plans were put in place to implement the foodship operation. Recognising the necessity for urgent action, donations of foodstuffs and clothes were gathered until aid ships could bypass the

¹⁴¹ M. Alpert, p.431.

¹⁴² London, Imperial War Museum Archive (IWMA), 15799, Private Papers, Spanish Press Agency Press Release. 6/2/1937.

¹⁴³ BCA, 44/3, K. Athol, ‘My Impressions of Spain’, p. 2. 29/4/1937.

¹⁴⁴ WUDC, 292/946/16a/36(i), NJC Archives, NJC Bulletin No.4, p.1, (19/3/1937), p.1

¹⁴⁵ IWMA, 15799, Private Papers, Evacuation Permit, 16/2/1937.

¹⁴⁶ K. Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain*, p. 201

blockades around Bilbao and Santander. Overall, the NJC committee coordinated, organised, filled and dispatched 29 aid ships from 1938 until the end of the conflict.¹⁴⁷

The NJC campaign incorporated 'foodship committees' across the United Kingdom and effectively utilised local and national partnerships to enable the foodship operation to proceed. The backing from localised committees contributing towards the national movement has encouraged Mason to estimate that between £1200 and £5000 worth of goods were transported on each ship.¹⁴⁸ As a result of Atholl and other senior leaders of the NJC publishing a list of towns that had no previously established local aid committee in October 1937, an all-London Spanish aid committee was founded. This committee grew to contain over 6,000 members and became the 'focus for the provisioning of foodships', as well as a hub for NJC fundraising.¹⁴⁹ Such evidence would again highlight the ability of the committee to coordinate and manage aid on both a local and national level.

However, Atholl's role within the NJC was not limited to organisational work. Atholl played a prominent role in fundraising, both within Britain and abroad. As Hetherington regards, Atholl returned from the parliamentary committee's visit to Spain with a determination 'to devote her energies towards raising massive aid for the victims of war'.¹⁵⁰ Such energies encouraged the Duchess to undertake the responsibility for raising funds to support the Basque children in the UK as well as civilians in Spain itself and Spanish refugees in France. It has been estimated that total funds raised by the National Joint Committee in modern-day terms equate to between £2,000,000 and £100,000,000.¹⁵¹ The Duchess of Atholl campaigned both nationally and internationally in order to generate significant funds for the Spanish campaign. As Isabel Brown commented in 1972, Atholl effectively utilised her aristocratic position and networks to attract 'the rich to packed speeches up and down the country'.¹⁵² Such evidence demonstrates the Duchess' role in raising funds for Spanish civilians and refugees and highlights the success to which Atholl utilised political and aristocratic networks to fund humanitarian campaigns.

¹⁴⁷ J. Fyrth, 'The Aid Spain Movement', p.156.

¹⁴⁸ E. Mason, p.12.

¹⁴⁹ W.H. Brown, *Dictionary of Labour Biography*. Eds. J. Bellamy and J. Saville (London: Macmillan, 1993), p.27.

¹⁵⁰ S. Hetherington, p.186.

¹⁵¹ A. Jackson, p.52.

¹⁵² IWMA, Audio File 844, Isobel Brown, 1977.

During the summer of 1937, Atholl partly organised and addressed a 'hugely successful rally' at the Albert Hall which was backed by Virginia Woolf, Henry Matisse and Pablo Picasso.¹⁵³ 6,000 people were in attendance, and over £1000 was raised for the Basque Children's committee.¹⁵⁴ In addition, Atholl spoke on the introduction of a music book by the young Basque refugees, 'Songs of the Basque Children' and the subsequent tour of Swiss ski resorts, embarked upon by the children, raised over £300 pounds for the cause.¹⁵⁵ Such substantial efforts were advanced with Atholl's two-month tour through Canada and the United States during the summer months of 1938.¹⁵⁶ Atholl spoke at various meetings and even met with President Roosevelt, which has led Hetherington to allege that 'money and foodstuffs poured in for the children's cause'.¹⁵⁷ Such evidence would validate claims that Atholl can be considered a significant figure in the relief effort during the Spanish Civil War.

In addition, the evacuation of the Basque children was one of the most tangible and distinguished achievements effected by the NJC during the war. The Duchess of Atholl undertook a prominent role within the relief operation, yet remains largely ignored. Historians such as Bruley justifiably centre praise of the NJC backed evacuation on Leah Manning's efforts from within Bilbao, however, as a result, Atholl's domestic labours have been left largely unconsidered.¹⁵⁸ Atholl, alongside Rathbone and Roberts, facilitated the safe evacuation of the Basque children with a naval escort and enabled their refuge for a substantial period due to 'skilled' negotiations with the British government.¹⁵⁹ Following the bombing of Guernica on the 26th April 1937, the senior leadership of the NJC including the Duchess, 'formally proposed' to the Home Office the next day that refugees be granted asylum in Britain.¹⁶⁰ The NJC utilised the 'the emotional impact of Guernica' to prompt urgent evacuations and the Duchess was one of a number of NJC signatories of *The Times* campaign which rapidly appealed for funds to assist the evacuation of Basque refugees.¹⁶¹

¹⁵³ S. Hetherington, p.187.

¹⁵⁴ E. Mason, p.45.

¹⁵⁵ A. Jackson, p.68.

¹⁵⁶ S. Hetherington, p.201.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ S. Bruley, 'Women Against War and Fascism and the People's Front', in *Britain, Fascism and the Popular Front*. Ed. Jim Fyrth (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), p.146.

¹⁵⁹ S. Pederson, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Consciousness* (London: Yale University Press, 2004), p.287.

¹⁶⁰ J. Cable. *The Royal Navy and the Siege of Bilbao* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p.102

¹⁶¹ J. Cable, p.113,123.

While the Duchess up until this point had been acting in conjunction with her committee; she undertook an assertive role in negotiations. Atholl compelled the government further, asking Anthony Eden to increase the intake of refugees to 4,000 with a specific inclusion of 'girls (of) about 15 to save them from terrible fate if Moors enter'.¹⁶² Cable regards such efforts as a 'blatant colour' exploitation of prejudice which not only ignores the record of Franco's foreign legion during the conflict, but undermines Atholl's efforts in permitting for the children's evacuation to Britain.¹⁶³ The Duchess' influence on the evacuation continued with a meeting between the NJC and the Ministerial Committee on Foreign Policy on the 19th May which resulted in ministers being 'reluctantly convinced' to accept the refugees and grant the Habana a British naval escort.¹⁶⁴ Such evidence is indicative of the considerable role played by Atholl in regard to effectively organising the NJC's response to Guernica, chairing an efficient and functional committee and utilising political negotiation successfully. Pederson's argument that the successful evacuation was even more 'significant in light of the British government's opposition to the admission...of Spanish refugees' and the Non-intervention agreement, is extremely valid.¹⁶⁵ Atholl and the NJC successfully compelled a British Government which had been determined to avoid interaction with the Republican government, to accept 4,000 Basque refugees being safely escorted to Britain by naval destroyers.

Furthermore, Atholl's role in safeguarding the Basque children was not limited to political negotiation in ensuring their escape from the conflict zone. As the British government refused to permit the arrival of the evacuees unless their maintenance was paid for by public donations, the NJC committee's ability to raise substantial funds was pivotal to asylum being granted.¹⁶⁶ By early May the NJC had received over £10,000 in public donations for the campaign to develop the Basque Children's Committee, of which Atholl became Chairman, and received £5,000 from the Trades Union Congress.¹⁶⁷ Such expansive fundraising was extremely significant considering the 'Committee for the Evacuation of the Basque Children'

¹⁶² J. Cable, p.125.

¹⁶³ J. Cable, p.125.

¹⁶⁴ J. Cable, p.127.

¹⁶⁵ S. Pederson, p.287.

¹⁶⁶ S. Pederson, p.286.

¹⁶⁷ WUDC, 292/946/39/112, NJC Archives, Minutes of Meeting of the Committee for the Evacuation of Basque Children, 5/1937.

had estimated costings at five-/ per head per day.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, Atholl herself played a fundamental role in attracting donations and volunteers to aid the supervision of the children at the camp in Stoneham, Eastleigh. In a BBC radio broadcast aired on the 13th May 1937, while appealing for donations, the Duchess praised the 'good will' of the general public and said that 'it had been wonderful and really inspiring to see so many voluntary workers here in Southampton'.¹⁶⁹ As well as personal involvement in 'frantically erecting tents and preparing the camp the night before' alongside other volunteers, the Duchess' call for supplies had resulted in over two tonnes of onions, 40,000 oranges and milk being donated to the camp.¹⁷⁰

As a result of public generosity, effective fundraising and functional organisation by Atholl and her peers, 3,889 children were safely removed from a conflict zone. The BCC effectively utilised the NJC's umbrella to form networks with local committees and organisations to house the refugees across the country.¹⁷¹ Although 4,000 refugees may be a low figure in regard to the refugees and civilians affected by the Spanish conflict, the NJC and BCC overcame the divisive political climate induced by the civil war and the non-intervention agreement to evacuate the Basque children to safety. Such an achievement should emphasise the important role played by the NJC and the Duchess of Atholl in achieving fundamental humanitarian aims.

Atholl continued to support the evacuation of the refugees from Spain in both a personal capacity and as a representative of the NJC until the end of the conflict. After the landmark achievement in securing the evacuation of the Basque children to Britain in May 1937, Atholl pushed for the British government to assist in the evacuation of Santander and the rest of the Basque country.¹⁷² Atholl applied pressure on the government by writing to Samuel Hoare, the First Lord of the Admiralty, to provide 'effective protection to British vessels carrying refugees'.¹⁷³ As communication to Atholl from Commander Pursey, the NJC representative in Santander, conveys, 'unless protection from British ships inside and outside the 3-mile limit,

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ IWMA, Audio File 3777, BBC: Katharine Atholl Speech, 13/5/1937.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ A. Jackson, p.65.

¹⁷² BCA, 44/3, K. Atholl to Unspecified Recipient. 14/7/1937.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

no ship can enter and the evacuation of refugees already greatly delayed must cease'.¹⁷⁴ From late May to September 1937, Atholl petitioned British government support to evacuate refugees and deliver supplies to civilians in the Basque country but was ultimately unsuccessful due to the non-intervention policy and the 'ignoble' behaviour of Anthony Eden and other British politicians.¹⁷⁵ Refusal of the British government to violate the terms of the non-intervention agreement after the initial evacuation, the naval blockade around the Basque country as well as the 'loss of public interest since the Bilbao crisis', were all factors that significantly limited the scope for humanitarian evacuations.¹⁷⁶

Such political restrictions meant that the NJC's humanitarian aims shifted to evacuating the ever-increasing number of refugees to French camps and then onwards to other areas of the world. The NJC played a prolific role in alleviating the ever-increasing refugee problem, which by Spring 1939 had resulted in over 500,000 Spanish refugees crossing the border into France.¹⁷⁷ As early as August 1937, Atholl herself ordered a significant proportion of NJC funds to be diverted 'to Bayonne for the refugees', expanding the relief effort in to French territory.¹⁷⁸ Further, the NJC committee sent representatives to internment camps across France, most notably at Bayonne and Argelès, where NJC volunteers led by Isobel Brown and Francesca Wilson engaged in supply and food distribution and camp allocation roles.¹⁷⁹ The Duchess travelled to various camps herself to examine the refugee situation first hand and worked prolifically with the other female volunteers to improve camp conditions.¹⁸⁰ The working relationship between Brown and Atholl was so productive, that Jackson has regarded that their 'spirit of cooperation' was a 'fundamental factor in the successes' of the NJC.¹⁸¹ Such interpretations would suggest that not only did Atholl's chairmanship provide tangible results for the NJC, but her ability to form effective relationships with others enhanced the organisation's capability to help those in need.

¹⁷⁴ BCA, 44/3, Commander Pursey to K. Atholl, 12/7/1937.

¹⁷⁵ S. Cohen, p. 90.

¹⁷⁶ S. Cohen, p. 87.

¹⁷⁷ Howard Kershner, *Quaker Service in Modern War* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1950), p. XV.

¹⁷⁸ BCA, 44/1, Atholl to General Miaja, 28/8/1937.

¹⁷⁹ A. Jackson, p. 165.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ A. Jackson, p.48.

The Duchess also played a prominent role in evacuating 1800 refugees from French refugee camps to Mexico, aboard the S.S. Sinaia.¹⁸² Atholl worked with General Molesworth and Pablo Azcarate, fundraising substantial amounts to permit the evacuation.¹⁸³ Indicative of the role the NJC played in selecting the refugees eligible to travel and fundraising, Atholl was pictured with a Mexican diplomat and his wife aboard the ship, celebrating the evacuation.¹⁸⁴ Such a successful venture has been hailed by Frida Stewart as ‘the most moving experience of a lifetime’, and a product of effective co-operation between English, French, Spanish and Mexican authorities and aid organisations working together.

In conclusion, the Duchess played a fundamental role in the humanitarian campaign and ultimately achieved many humanitarian objectives. The Duchess of Atholl effectively organised, managed and coordinated an organisation that included over 180 bodies and was involved in fundamental humanitarian achievements such as the evacuation of the Basque children and the success of the foodship campaign. Within the scale of destruction of the Spanish conflict, Atholl played an important role in alleviating the suffering of a significant minority. Undeniably, many specific campaigns had varying levels of success, most specifically in regard to failures to evacuate refugees from Santander to Britain with a naval escort. However, such shortcomings must be contextualised within the political dynamics of the broader conflict and should not be attributed to Atholl or the organisations that she chaired, as such decisions were ultimately made outside of the organisation’s control. In addition, as a result of such issues, resources were diverted to aid refugees elsewhere, with the Bayonne and Argelés camps in France receiving donations from the NJC. As previously discussed humanitarian action is defined as ‘action taken with the objective of saving lives, alleviating suffering and maintaining human dignity’ and the Duchess was an undeniably significant contributor to saving human life and ‘alleviating suffering’. In her role overseeing successful NJC and BCC campaigns and in a personal capacity fundraising substantial sums to benefit the victims of war, Atholl’s efforts during the war justifies recognition and acclaim.

¹⁸² A. Jackson, p. 170.

¹⁸³ Hamilton Armstrong, ‘Spanish ‘Army’ in France’, *Life Magazine*, (1939), p. 67.

¹⁸⁴ A. Jackson, p. 70.

Conclusion

The historiography of the Spanish conflict, and the specific research conducted in regard to the humanitarian campaign, has failed to recognise the Duchess of Atholl as a central figure within the aid movement. Scholarship on Atholl has focused on her role as an MP and only a minority of historians have briefly mentioned Atholl's work during the conflict. Even within such concise analyses, historians such as Ball have tended to dwell on her loss of the Kinross and West Perthshire by-election rather than accredit the Duchess for her humanitarian actions during the Spanish conflict. Mason and Jackson have examined Atholl's work in more depth, but only within the context of the Duchess as a part of the senior leadership of the NJC and the BCC. Thus, these historians have neglected the role she played within, and independently of, those organisations. For these reasons, this thesis has repositioned the Duchess of Atholl as an influential individual within the humanitarian aid campaign during the Spanish Civil War.

In order to centre Atholl as an influential figure within this period, an analysis of the reasons for the historical neglect of Atholl is required. The first chapter of this thesis discussed the extent to which Atholl's background and life's work correlated with other female humanitarians involved in the Spanish conflict. This highlighted how Atholl can, and cannot, be considered a typical female humanitarian. In some ways, Atholl is a classic representative. She shared the compassion of the quintessential female aid worker involved in Spain, ultimately concerned with the massacre of innocent civilians, the treatment of refugees, the condition of prisoners of war and the failures of the international community to offer substantial support or initiative in ending the conflict. However, compared to figures such as Isobel Brown and Eleanor Rathbone, Atholl is undoubtedly an exceptional figure. An anti-feminist, a prominent conservative MP and a member of the aristocracy, suggestions that she can be considered an anomaly amongst the mainly working class, feminist humanitarians involved in Spain are valid. Such evidence is extremely important in understanding her omission from historical research as Atholl does not conform to discourses surrounding the political and social catalysts for involvement in the Spanish Civil War. In this sense, it is

fundamental to identify such reasons in order to bring to light the Duchess' role within the conflict. Due to the Duchess' exceptional nature within the general context of female humanitarians, this thesis's specific focus on Atholl alone has allowed for her repositioning as an influential figure within the aid campaign.

As a result of historical neglect, Atholl's incorporation of the political into the humanitarian has not been sufficiently explored. The Duchess utilised political networks, political platforms and inter-governmental relations to impact the war-time conditions faced by Spanish civilians. The Duchess developed lines of communication between senior figures in international governments in order to raise awareness of the conditions of Spanish non-combatants. The Duchess passed such information to senior members of the British government and spoke in Parliament about the perpetration of war crimes such as the execution of POWs and the violation of the Geneva condition. Atholl actively set out to publish the 'facts' of the war as she felt was her 'duty as a Member of Parliament'.¹⁸⁵ In this sense, she used political platforms to publicise the targeting of civilians in bombing raids and the targeting of aid agencies such as Red Cross ambulances in an attempt to exert international pressure on General Franco to preserve the rules of the Geneva convention. In addition, Atholl utilised the political to further the humanitarian in the evacuation of the Basque children, urging political figures such as Eden and Chamberlain to not only allow for the evacuation of 3,879 Basque children to Britain but provide for a naval warship escort into British territorial waters. Even after the Duchess lost her position as a politician in 1938, she continued to use political networks to inform and advance conditions for non-combatants and refugees as well as insist on the dangers of appeasing the fascists of Europe. Her drive to further the humanitarian, both politically and pragmatically, constitutes a campaign on two fronts to protect the plight of Spanish civilians and refugees, as well as raise awareness of global political threats.

Furthermore, the third chapter of this thesis provides a critical analysis of the role played by Atholl in effecting humanitarian action during the conflict and examines the extent to which the Duchess achieved tangible success within the aid campaign. Indeed, Atholl played a pivotal role in creating, developing and implementing NJC and BCC policy. Atholl effectively

¹⁸⁵ K. Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain*, p. 193.

managed and coordinated the NJC which was an umbrella organisation to over 180 different bodies and the largest aid organisation working in Spain, as well as the BCC. Such action allowed for substantial humanitarian successes, such as the foodship and evacuation of the Basque children campaigns, to be accomplished. Furthermore, Atholl was involved in the NJC campaign to evacuate children from Madrid using donated British buses driven by volunteers. Atholl played a fundamental role in fundraising, both as a part of the NJC and as an independent individual on tours around the United States, for example, raising funds that were integral to the continuation of aid distribution and relief. In terms of refugees, Atholl directed aid flows to camps across France to support Spanish non-combatants there and was a significant contributor to organising evacuations, not just to Britain, but other areas of Europe, Mexico and South America. Some humanitarian initiatives administered by Atholl and the NJC faced political complications, such as the British government denying naval escorts to refugees from Santander in May in 1937, due to fears exacerbated by the non-intervention agreement. However, such initiatives ultimately led to the pursuit of alternative measures, such as NJC support for refugees in camps across France and efforts to evacuate non-combatants to the Americas.

In conclusion, this thesis has repositioned the Duchess of Atholl as a prolific figure within the humanitarian aid movement during the Spanish Civil War. Due to the individualised nature of this study, this thesis has isolated the traditional discourses surrounding the typical humanitarian and relocated Atholl as a central figure within the Spanish conflict. Thus, Atholl's incorporation of the humanitarian into the political and the tangible achievements made by Atholl in this period can now be considered within the historical debate surrounding humanitarianism during the conflict. While this thesis has uncovered and acknowledged the role of an influential figure within this period, further research should address the Duchess of Atholl's humanitarian role dealing with European refugees and human rights in India and Kenya across the early twentieth century. Such research would undoubtedly expand understandings of the significance of the Duchess of Atholl, and provide the recognition and acclaim that she deserves in spite of years of historical neglect.

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