

Eli Lotar and Jacques-André Boiffard aboard the *Exir Dallen*

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Article abstract

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une doctorante au congrès de l'AAUC de 2018

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1. Claude Santeul, "Galerie de la Pléiade. MM. Eli Lotar et J. A. Boiffard," *Photo-Illustration* 5 (1934): 11. Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.

The word document is not quite right here. We are dealing with two photographers who know their craft and understand the psychology of "photography." Caught unawares, all of these figures, a beggar in rags, porters carrying heavy loads, a sordid old man, a merchant at work, a mother breastfeeding her infant, were carefully studied and closely watched. None of these chanced-upon models had time before the shutter's release to strike a "pose" ... that silly, bored, or evasive forced attitude assumed by someone who finds themselves watched by the lens of a camera.¹

This was the critic and photographer Claude Santeul's response to an exhibition of travel photography at the Galerie de la Pléiade in Paris in the spring of 1934.² The two photographers he mentions, Jacques-André Boiffard (1902–1961) and Eli Lotar (1905–1969), had recently returned from a voyage aboard the *Exir Dallen*, a sailing vessel that belonged to a well-off Spanish industrial engineer named Fernando de Cárdenas. Assembling a party comprised of his wife and children, a dozen close acquaintances, and the two photographers, Cárdenas chartered a path from Valencia, Spain, to ports in Andalusia and Morocco. From there, the *Exir Dallen* would travel down the west coast of Africa, then around the tip of South America in a rough retracing of Magellan's voyage to find westward passage to Asia.³ Visiting Spain and Morocco with Cárdenas, Lotar and Boiffard returned to France after six months. Now preserved in Lotar's personal archives at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, the surviving negatives and prints are largely attributed to him, although they are undoubtedly the product of his close partnership with Boiffard.⁴

Near Málaga, Spain, Lotar and Boiffard photographed the impoverished communities who lived along the coast. A typical shot by Lotar presents the exterior of a fisherman's ramshackle dwelling framed by a smokestack and a steep hill, atop which one can make out the outline of a 14th century Moorish castle. | **fig. 1** | Two men, one slumped over in his chair, sit near an open door in front of the house. A child turns back to look at them, standing among the piles of thick rope and twisted net that fill the foreground. On the far right of the composition, more ropes and nets spill over the side of a small boat with two anthropomorphizing eyes painted on either side of its bow. With this careful composition, made using a medium-format camera like the Rollieflex and cropped from the square negative, Lotar conveys how the identity of the shack's inhabitants is inextricable from the tools of their livelihood and bound up in history of the coastal landscape. In addition to the Rollieflex, Lotar and Boiffard traveled with a single-lens reflex camera, probably a Leica, which they loaded with 35 mm Agfa Pankine film stock.⁵ Armed with

Figure 1. Eli Lotar, *Homes of Fishermen in Malaga*, ca. 1933–1935. Silver gelatin print, 29.9 × 39.6 cm. Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France. Photo: CNAC/MNAM/Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.



Figure 2. Eli Lotar, *Beggar Woman at Mazagan, Morocco*, ca. 1933–1935. Silver gelatin print, 18.2 × 12.9 cm. Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France. Photo: CNAC/MNAM/Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.





Figure 3. Eli Lotar, *On board of the vessel L'Exir Dallen*, ca. 1933–1935. Silver gelatin print, 29.2 × 39.2 cm. Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France. Photo: CNAC/MNAM/Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.



Figure 4. Eli Lotar, *Mazagan, Morocco. Loading and transportation of hemp*, ca. 1933–1935. Silver gelatin print, 29.9 × 39.8 cm. Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France. Photo: CNAC/MNAM/Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.

2. Founded in 1931 by Jacques Schiffrin, a Jewish émigré from Russia, the Galerie de la Pléiade was an outgrowth of his publishing outfit, the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. Founded in 1923, the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade became known for its small-scale editions of classic works of French literature and Russian literature in translation. In 1933, Schiffrin sold Pléiade to the publisher Gaston Gallimard, but remained the director of the series. Schiffrin entrusted the running of the gallery to Rose Sévèk, under whose direction the Galerie de la Pléiade began to specialize in exhibiting contemporary photography.

3. The progress of the *Exir Dallen* was covered in Spanish newspapers, most notably *La Libertad* and *El Heraldo de Madrid*. Many members of the party remained in Uruguay, returning to Spain only as Republican combatants in the Spanish Civil War.

4. Lotar and Boiffard met one another in 1928. They ran a photographic portrait studio together, the Studio Unis, in Paris from 1929 to 1932. Both Lotar and Boiffard have been the subject of recent retrospectives in Paris: Damarice Amao, Clément Chéroux, and Pia Viewing, eds., *Eli Lotar* (Arles: Éditions Photosynthèses; Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou; Paris: Jeu de Paume, 2017); Damarice Amao and Clément Chéroux, eds., *Jacques-André Boiffard, la parenthèse surréaliste* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou; Paris: Éditions Xavier Barral, 2014).

5. Damarice Amao has argued for the synthesis of photography and cinema in interwar France, and in Lotar's work in particular, in her excellent monograph: Damarice Amao, *Eli Lotar et le mouvement des images* (Paris: Éditions Textuel, 2017).

6. Casablanca and Mazagan were located in the region of Morocco under French protectorate. Tangier was in an international zone jointly administered by Spain, the United Kingdom, and France.

7. Santeul, "Galerie de la Pléiade. MM. Eli Lotar et J.A. Boiffard," 11.

8. "Extraños manejos de un velero anclado en la bahía," *La Epoca*, April 9, 1934, 6.

9. J.D., "Un navir communiste en tournée de propaganda," *L'Action française*, April 12, 1934, 3.

10. "La Asociación de Amigos de la Unión Soviética," *El Financiero*, April 22, 1933, 616.

11. See: L. Romero Largo, M. Suárez González, R. Martínez Barreiro, eds., *Una historia del exilio es-*

this smaller camera, Lotar weaved through the Moroccan cities of Casablanca, Mazagan, and Tangier, capturing scenes of bustling commerce and photographing the beggars along the margins of the marketplaces.⁶ In one such picture, a woman in layers of lightweight striped fabric sits cross-legged on the cobblestone sidewalk, holding a small child in her lap. | **fig. 2** | Her face, as well as her child's, is obscured by a scarf, embodying Santeul's evocation of the subject "caught unawares."

Santeul reacted to the exhibition with an eager orientalism, describing the "photographic exoticism" of the collection and the "African romanticism" of its subjects.⁷ The critic's reading of the *Exir Dallen* series, however, misses an important political dimension of the work. In this essay, I explore the broader political context that motivated Lotar and Boiffard to travel to Spain and Morocco to create these photographs. Although Lotar and Boiffard are best remembered for their contributions to Georges Bataille's dissident Surrealist journal *Documents*, by the time they set off aboard the *Exir Dallen* they were engaged with the cultural activities of the *Parti communiste français* (PCF) and the Communist International. Understood within this framework, the political message of the series begins to emerge. Far from offering a romantic glimpse of exotic subjects, upon closer inspection, the *Exir Dallen* photographs blend ethnography and journalistic *reportage*, presenting a trenchant and multi-layered condemnation of European imperialism.

In early 1934, the right-wing Spanish newspaper *La Epoca* hypothesized that Cárdenas and his party travelled with "sole purpose of propagating communist doctrine among the littoral populations," financed "by Soviet Embassy in Paris, where Mr. Cárdenas goes frequently."⁸ The far-right French newspaper *L'Action française* quoted *La Epoca* a few days later, adding an outraged description of life aboard the *Exir Dallen*: "Orthodox Communism of the most rigorous kind is practiced here: navigating, cooking, cleaning, everything is done without distinction of sex or class."⁹ Lotar and Boiffard photographed everyday scenes while they sailed between ports, but they do not necessarily emphasize the nonhierarchical spirit that shocked *L'Action française*. Often making use of the many vantage points afforded by the masts and decks, Lotar and Boiffard pictured men and women eating, writing, and navigating, or Cárdenas's children playing and reading. Many of them focus on the sailors at work maneuvering the ship and repairing the vessel's masts and sails. | **fig. 3** |

Was there any truth to the assertions in *La Epoca* and echoed in *L'Action française*? While Cárdenas was a member of the Spanish Association of Friends of the Soviet Union, it is unlikely that there was any Soviet money financing the voyage.¹⁰ The suspicion toward Cárdenas stemmed from his prominence in leftist circles in Paris and Madrid, and the fact that in December 1931, he played a key role in the failed Jaca Insurrection, which sought to overthrow the Spanish Monarchy.¹¹ Even if the allegations levied against Cárdenas were overblown, it is significant that publications in both Spain and France accused the *Exir Dallen* of propagandistic intent. As the writers in *L'Action française* note, the *Exir Dallen* was registered in Valencia as a *tournée cinématographique* and two "appareils de prises de vues," or cameras, appeared on the ship's ledger.¹² Boiffard and Lotar were engaged with Communist politics during the 1930s, embarking alongside Cárdenas's party at a moment when they were

pañol en Uruguay (Madrid: Ediciones Endymion, 2009), 382–384.

12. A film purportedly made in Málaga is now lost. Some accounts of the ship in Spanish newspapers also refer to a German photographer on board, involved in the production of a documentary film. This could be a misattribution, or perhaps there was a third, unidentified photographer-filmmaker travelling with the party.

13. See: Dawn Ades and Simon Baker, eds., *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and DOCUMENTS* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; London: Hayward Gallery, 2006).

14. Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Formless: a user's guide* (New York: Zone Books; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 43.

15. Lotar and Krull met in 1926, at a salon held by a well-known opera singer, which she describes in her memoir: Germaine Krull, *La vie mène la danse* (Paris: Éditions Textuel, 2015), 196.

16. Eli Lotar, "Ici, on ne s'amuse pas," *Jazz* 11 (November 1929): 482–484.

17. See Michel Frizot and Cédric de Veigy's contribution to Damarice Amao, et. al., *Eli Lotar* (Arles: Éditions Photosynthèses; Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou; Paris: Jeu de Paume, 2017), 96.

18. The group was formed in response to criticism at the Second International Congress of Revolutionary Writers in Kharkov, Ukraine. On the AEAR, generally, see: Nicole Racine, "L'Association des Écrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires (A.E.A.R.). La revue *Commune* et la lutte idéologique contre le fascisme (1932–1936)," *Le Mouvement social* 54 (January–March, 1966): 29–47. On the photographic section of the AEAR in particular, see: Damarice Amao, ed., *Photographie. Arme de classe: La photographie sociale et documentaire en France, 1928–1936* (Paris: Éditions Textuel, 2018).

19. Paul Vaillant-Couturier, Henri Barbusse, André Gide, Romain Rolland, et. al., *Ceux qui ont choisi. Contre le fascisme en Allemagne. Contre l'impérialisme français* (Paris: AEAR, 1933), 1–2.

20. Jordana Mendelson argues that *Las Hurdes* demonstrates Lotar's influence in the way it employs close-ups, disruptive cuts and jarring juxtapositions, reminiscent of the use of photography in *Documents*. Jordana Mendelson, *Documenting Spain: Artists, Exhibition Culture, and the Modern Nation, 1929–1939* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2005), 78–85.

negotiating the best way to mobilize photography in service of revolutionary values. While the passengers on the *Exir Dallen* may not have been concerned with spreading propaganda, they may have been interested with making it.

Consider another picture from the series showing labourers in Mazagan. | **fig. 4** | A row of four barefooted workers carry bundles of hemp rope on their backs, their hunched forms moving cumbersomely toward the edge of the dock. Having reached the front of the line, a figure tosses his bundle onto a boat filled with rope and large barrels. In the center of the frame, a man who has just finished offloading his cargo walks towards the camera, his reflection in the dock's wet surface bisected by a triangular dry patch. As a depiction of strenuous labour, its content recalls Lotar's photographs of the La Villette slaughterhouse, which appeared in the sixth number of *Documents* in November 1929. But except for the central figure's severed reflection, the Mazagan photograph bears little resemblance to those which he and Boiffard contributed to *Documents*, which depicted objects and people from disorienting oblique angles or in jarring close-up.

Established in 1929, *Documents* was an intellectual, philosophical, and aesthetic alternative to what Bataille perceived as the idealism of André Breton and his affiliates. Eschewing the elevated status of painting and poetry within mainstream Surrealism, *Documents* privileged photography as a means to illustrate the violence of human desire and the baseness of human thought.¹³ Lotar and Boiffard's photographs were critical to this project. Describing Lotar's pictures of La Villette, art historian Yves Alain-Bois writes that his views of dead animals and bloody animal hides offer "a climax, within the journal, of the iconography of horror."¹⁴ In the same issue, Boiffard's *Le Gros Orteil* (1929) accompanied a text by Bataille of the same name. The large toe, which emerges grotesquely from a stark black background, fulfils the journal's imperative to make even the most banal, familiar body parts seem strange and monstrous.

Standing back from his subjects, Lotar takes in the scene on the dock in Mazagan in its entirety. He had developed this keenly journalistic approach to photography working for the illustrated press and with the documentary filmmaker Joris Ivens, the husband of Lotar's mentor and former lover, Germaine Krull.¹⁵ In 1929, shortly before he photographed La Villette, Lotar travelled to the Netherlands to film the construction of Zuiderzee dam with Ivens. Upon his return from the region, Lotar authored an article in the journal *Jazz*, in which he describes life in Zuiderzee as "reduced to exhausting work."¹⁶ To accompany his text, Lotar chose four photographs, which depict the bleak industrial landscape and fatigued labourers splayed out on the edges of the construction site. Whereas Bataille's selection of pictures in *Documents* mirror his interest in ritual and horror, the spread in *Jazz* reflects Lotar's own editorial impulse to illustrate the labor conditions in Zuiderzee as straightforwardly as possible. The title of the article, "Ici, on ne s'amuse pas" ("We are not here to have fun"), succinctly communicates Lotar's philosophy of photography. Taking on a double meaning, the "we" might refer to the workers constructing the dam and locks, but also to the solemn task of the photographer who is there to bear witness.¹⁷

This conjunction of the photographer and worker drew Lotar to the activities of the *Association des écrivains et artistes révolutionnaires* (AEAR), a group

21. On the history of the PCF's publishing houses, see: Marie-Cécile Bouju, *Lire en communiste: Les Maisons d'édition du Parti communiste français, 1920–1968* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010).

22. This includes a review by Santeul. A copy of an invitation is also preserved in the archives of David Seymour, better known as Chim, in Bethesda, Maryland. It was recently reproduced in Amao, *Photographie. Arme de classe*, 28.

23. Louis Aragon, "Un salon photographique," *Commune* 22 (June 1935): 1192.

24. Founded in 1928 by Babette Gross, the wife of Willi Münzenberg, as a French version of the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* (Worker's Illustrated Magazine), *Regards* was closely affiliated with the French Communist Party. See: Simon Dell, "The Difficult Conjunction of 'Worker' and 'Photographer' in France" in *The Worker Photography Movement, 1926–1939: Essays and Documents*, ed. Jorge Ribalta (Madrid: Museo Centro de Arte Reina Sofía; TF Editores, 2011), 354–362; Gaëlle Morel, "Du peuple au populisme: Les couvertures du magazine communiste *Regards* (1932–1939)," *Études photographiques* 9 (May 2001): 44–63; Christian Joschke, "L'histoire de la photographie sociale et documentaire dans l'entre-deux-guerres. Paris dans le contexte transnational," *Perspective* 1 (June 2017): 113–128.

25. Henri Tracol, "Photographie, arme de classe," *Cahier Rouge* 1 (1933): 6. Translated and published in Jorge Ribalta, ed., *The Worker Photography Movement, 1926–1939: Essays and Documents* (Madrid: Museo Centro de Arte Reina Sofía; TF Editores, 2011), 363.

26. This was in line with the official policy of the Communist International, which had adopted "socialist realism" as its official policy. In 1933, "socialist realism" was still inchoate, not yet codified into the archetypal style associated with Stalinist Russia. Debate was still open about the proper mode of realism, as exemplified in the Soviet Union by the fissure between Rodchenko's constructivist October Group, and the intelligible presentation of reality advocated by photographers like Arkaii Shai-khet. See, Margarita Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph, 1924–1937* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 66–98.

27. Georg Lukács, "Reportage or Portrayal," in *Essays on Realism*, ed. Rodney Livingstone, trans. David Fernbach (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 50.

established by representatives of the PCF and the Communist International in December 1931.¹⁸ Organized into sections dedicated to literature, painting and sculpture, architecture, music, theater, film, and photography, the AEAR sought to mobilize artists against the bourgeoisie in service of the proletarian revolution. Boiffard, who became a member of the Communist Party in 1927, was one of the earliest adherents to the AEAR, with his former mentor, Man Ray.¹⁹ By the middle of 1933, Lotar had assumed the role of secretary and spokesperson of the photographic section of the organization. In this new period of political engagement, Lotar joined the filmmaker (and fellow member of the AEAR) Luis Buñuel in Spain, serving as the director of photography for Buñuel's avant-garde quasi-documentary *Las Hurdes, Tierra sin pan* (1933).²⁰ During this same period, Boiffard became involved with ex-Surrealist Jacques Prévert's agit-prop theatre troupe, *Groupe Octobre*, which was part of a Communist network of organizations promoting working-class theatre. While Lotar was in Spain with Buñuel, Boiffard was travelling in the Soviet Union with *Groupe Octobre*.

In November 1933, the AEAR held its first photographic exhibition at the offices of the *Éditions sociales internationales*, a Communist publishing house in Paris's Latin Quarter that specialized in French translations of Marxist writings.²¹ Roughly twenty photographers contributed to the exhibition, including Boiffard and Lotar, but also Germaine Krull, Man Ray, Henri Cartier-Bresson, and André Kertész. While it is possible that Lotar and Boiffard sent negatives from Spain and Morocco back to Paris for the exhibition at the *esi*, no record of the exhibition survives outside of a few mentions in the contemporary press.²² Images from the *Exir Dallen* series did, however, appear in the AEAR's second group exhibition, "Documents of Social Life," held at the Galerie de la Pléiade in the spring of 1935. In one review, the former Surrealist Louis Aragon notes Lotar's images of "hard labour in one of Algeria's ports (surely?), [and] dreadful shacks of the Seville area."²³ A reproduction of a photograph by Boiffard showing two Andalusian peasants appeared in the Communist illustrated magazine, *Regards*, alongside a review by the novelist Eugène Dabit.²⁴

In a 1933 statement entitled "Photography, Class Weapon," the journalist and photographer Henri Tracol articulated the goals of the photography section of the AEAR, calling on photographers to use the medium in order to "serve the interests of the exploited against the exploiters."²⁵ The photography section would assemble and maintain an archive of revolutionary images, which depicted subjects like homelessness, poverty, unemployment, protests, and state violence, in order to support the Communist and working-class press. Privileging revolutionary content over experimental form, the AEAR favored the method of documentary *reportage*, adopting a model of realism influenced by the Hungarian-born Marxist theorist Georg Lukács.²⁶ In his 1932 article "Reportage or Portrayal," Lukács writes that "good" reportage "embraces a large and well-organized body of facts and presents its examples clearly" in order to reflect reality as a social totality.²⁷ Appealing to the reader's—or viewer's—intellect rather than his or her emotion, good reportage "makes the right connection between the general and the particular" in order to present "connections, disclose causes, and propose consequences."²⁸ In turn, he

criticizes bad reportage as “recognizing only certain isolated facts,” obscuring class relations through a “fetishistic dismemberment of reality.”²⁹

The fragment was a central concept in the so-called “ethnographic surrealism” of *Documents*. As James Clifford argued in *The Predicament of Culture*, the journal’s method was to combine fragmentary representations together into “fortuitous or ironic collage.”³⁰ Unexpected juxtapositions—European folk art alongside African masks, Lotar’s images of the slaughterhouse in dialogue with Hollywood film stills, Boiffard’s big toe paired with photographs of ancient catacombs—were meant to “defamiliarize cultural reality” and critique Western bourgeois culture by “perturbing commonplace symbols.”³¹ Analogizing the high and the low, the Occidental and the Oriental, *Documents* called into question naturalized social hierarchies and relationships. Trading fragmentary collage for a serial approach closer to Lukács’s ideal reportage, the *Exir Dallen* photographs attempted to adapt the ethnographic orientation of *Documents* to suit the ideological position of the AEAR.

Lotar and Boiffard remained close with members of Bataille’s circle, including Georges-Henri Rivière, an ethnographic museologist and member of the editorial board of *Documents*.³² With ethnologist Paul Rivet, Rivière ran the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro, which would become the Musée de l’Homme. In 1933, Rivière and Rivet were redesigning the museum, hoping to organize its incoherent collection of exotic miscellany into a *musée-laboratoire*, with a scholarly library and active research program, in addition to the exhibition space for the general public. Among the research initiatives was a spate of ethnographic expeditions, or missions, to amass both scholarly knowledge and physical artifacts. The most famous of these was the well-known Dakar-Djibouti Mission (1931–1933), which brought back thousands of artifacts and over 6000 photographs.³³ Writing in his capacity as the assistant director of the Trocadéro, Rivière furnished Boiffard with a general letter of introduction in August 1933, which states that Boiffard travelled with Cárdenas under the auspices of providing “photographic documentation” for the museum.³⁴ None of the images from the *Exir Dallen* voyage, however, made it into the collection, despite Rivière’s privileging of photography in the reorganization.³⁵

This is perhaps because the pedagogical goals of the Trocadéro were at odds with the political goals of the AEAR. Rivet, a prominent socialist intellectual and pacifist, was key to the development of humanist ethnography, which stressed the common humanity of Western and “primitive” cultures. But while Rivet challenged France’s treatment of subjugated peoples, he never called for the abolition of colonial rule. The fieldwork expeditions and exhibitions organized by the Trocadéro were, ultimately, uncritical of France’s colonial position.³⁶ The AEAR, in contrast, adopted a radically anti-imperialist position. Many of its members had participated in the 1931 anti-colonial exhibition “The Truth about the Colonies,” organized by the PCF and members of the Surrealist group, while the Trocadéro participated in the official Colonial Exhibition.³⁷ Following the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany, the AEAR condemned French imperialism as a key factor fueling the development of fascism. In their contribution to the AEAR’s 1933 manifesto, the militant Surrealists Paul Éluard and René Crevel wrote, for example: “We call on all

28. *Ibid.*, 49.

29. *Ibid.*, 48.

30. Clifford, “On Ethnographic Surrealism,” in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 132.

31. *Ibid.*, 132–133.

32. It is worth noting that Boiffard would abandon the AEAR in 1936, joining Breton and Bataille’s group *Contre attaque*.

33. Led by ethnographer Marcel Griaule, the Dakar-Djibouti Mission travelled to central Africa, collecting over 3500 artifacts, 200 sound recordings, and more than 6000 photographs. Published in a special issue of the quasi-Surrealist journal *Minotaure* in 1933 and displayed at the Trocadéro, the photographs taken during the Dakar-Djibouti expedition were intended as documentation, and to provide context for the looted artifacts. On photography’s role within the expedition and its reception, see: Ian Walker, “Phantom Africa: Photography between Surrealism and Ethnography,” *Cahiers d’études africaines* 36, no. 147 (1997): 635–655.

34. Georges-Henri Rivière on behalf of Jacques-André Boiffard, August 12, 1933, BMHN 2 AM 1 K16a, Archives of the Musée de l’Homme, Bibliothèque du Muséum national d’histoire naturelle.

35. On the place of photography within the reorganization of the Trocadéro, see: Anaïs Mauuarin, “De ‘beau documents’ pour l’ethnologie,” *Études photographiques* 33 (Fall 2015): 20–40.

36. On the colonialist orientation of Rivet and Rivière’s ethnographic developments, see: Daniel Sherman, “‘People’s Ethnographic’: Objects, Museums, and the Colonial Inheritance of French Ethnology,” *French Historical Studies* 27, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 669–703.

37. On the role of the Surrealist group in mounting the anti-colonial exhibition in English see: David Bate, *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism, and Social Dissent* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004); and Janine A. Mileaf, *Please Touch: Dada and Surrealism After the Readymade* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth University Press, 2010).

Figure 5. René Dubosc, illustration for “Précis de la question marocaine,” *Commune: Revue de l’Association des écrivains et des artistes révolutionnaires* 4 (December 1933): 350. Photo: Gallica/National Library of France.



conscious intellectuals to take up their true role with us against idiotic and bloodthirsty fascism, against the French imperialism responsible, against misery and war, for a uniquely proletarian front.”³⁸

In December 1933, the AEAR’s journal, *Commune*, edited by Louis Aragon, devoted a special section to Morocco, articulating how French imperialism and German fascism were inexorably united by the forces of capitalism. The issue included extracts from a poem by Jean Fernand, entitled “Moroccans in Morocco, Soviets in Paris,” a calendar of France’s military action in Morocco from 1912 to 1933, and a history of the French intellectual response to France’s involvement in the Rif War during the mid-1920s. Beginning the section is a collection of “Brief illustrated précis on the Moroccan question” with texts by the Spaniard Francisco Galán and illustrations by French caricaturist René Henri Dubosc.³⁹ It provides a history of European imperialism in Morocco since 1898, when Spain forfeited its colonies in Cuba and the Philippines after the Spanish–American War and launched a military campaign in the northern Morocco in order to mitigate those losses. The texts and images condense nearly three decades of colonial negotiations between European powers. Dubosc’s first drawing, for example, shows allegorical figures representing France, Great Britain, Spain, and Italy carving up North Africa with a handsaw. Galán traces Franco-Spanish relations in Morocco from the Treaty of Fez (1912), which officially established Spanish and French “zones of influence,” or protectorates, in Morocco, to the Rif War (1920–1927), during which France aided Spain in squashing the rebellion of the indigenous Berber tribes. For many Surrealists, including Boiffard, the Rif War provided the impetus to join the Communist Party, which protested France’s involvement.⁴⁰

Having provided an account of Spanish and French influence in Morocco, Galán turns to the present-day situation. He accuses French centrist Social Democrat politicians of exploiting Spain’s economic position as a way shore up its defenses along the Mediterranean against possible German and Italian aggression. In a brief section titled “Spain, Vassal of French Imperialism,” Galán writes that “the capital invested in Spanish affairs by French financiers” renders Spain in “political servitude” to French interests. Galán describes this “state of vassalage” as an “intermediate step between imperialist nation and colony.”⁴¹ The conception of Spain as occupying a liminal status between Europe and Africa, and between colonizer and colony, was not a new one, but it was typically construed in racial and ethnic terms, rather than economic

38. Statement in Paul Éluard and René Crevel in *Ceux qui ont choisi. Contre le fascisme en Allemagne. Contre l’impérialisme français*, edited by the AEAR (1933), 21.

39. Dubosc was an important caricaturist for French leftist publications, serving as one of the principal illustrators of the Communist newspaper *L’Humanité* from 1925 to 1939. His work also appeared frequently in *La Vie Ouvrière*, *Le Canard Enchaîné*, *Marianne*, *La Caserne*, and *La Lutte antireligieuse et sociale*.

40. On the leftist resistance to the Rif War in France, see: Jonathan Derrick, *Africa’s Agitators: Militant Anti-Colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918–1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). On the Surrealist response specifically, see: David Drake, “The pcr, the Surrealists, Clarté and the Rif War,” *French Cultural Studies* 17, no. 2 (June 2006): 173–188.

ones.⁴² Gálan's text updates an old trope to emphasize the connections between empire, capital, and war. Dubrosc's drawing | fig. 5 | helps to illustrate the economic ties between Spain and France. In it, a large Marianne figure stands before the Bank of France, slackening a cord of thread or rope that is tied to the foot of a small woman dressed in traditional Spanish costume. She walks away, still tethered to France, carrying a sack bearing the word "loan" (*prêt*).

The *Exir Dallen* series complemented this issue of *Commune*, exposing the entanglement of Spain and Morocco within a capitalist, imperialist system. To picture extreme poverty in Spain, where conservative leaders had recently defeated a Socialist-led government, was also to picture a symptom of French imperialism. Placed alongside images of poverty and labour in Morocco, the images produce a view of capitalist oppression as an interconnected totality. Lotar pays close attention to ropes, threads, and nets in his compositions, so that they become a metaphor for the working-class labour which provides France with raw and human resources. Think back to the "dreadful shack" in Málaga with its endless heaps of rope used in fishing, or the bound bundles of hemp rope hauled by Arab workers in Mazagan (not, as Aragon suggests, Algeria) for export out of Morocco. In Málaga, fishermen's wives mend nets and clothing and, while aboard the ship, sailors mend a broken sail, with cords of rope at their feet. In its repetition of these motifs, the series unravels the common threads between the Spanish and Moroccan proletariat, both victims of France's imperial ambitions.

Viewed as a series in the intimate space of the Galerie de la Pléiade, which played host to Paris's leftist intellectual elite, the photographs would have read like a call to action, imploring the viewers to align themselves not just with the French working class, but with a broader global proletariat. Gálan's text similarly entreats French workers to serve their Spanish and Moroccan counterparts by struggling against French imperialism. "The enemy," he writes, "is in our home."⁴³ For Lotar and Boiffard, Spain and Morocco provided fertile ground to explore the limits of revolutionary photography in service of the "exploited against the exploiters." Although Santeul fails to grasp the political import of the images, his observation that the term "document" could not quite encapsulate Lotar and Boiffard's project is an astute one. Santeul's equivocation as to the documentary status of photographs, and his recourse to the "psychology of photography," might be an unconscious acknowledgement of what he would elsewhere call the "propagandistic force that photographic imagery possesses."⁴⁴ ¶

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41. F. Galan, "Précis de la question marocaine, illustré par R. Dubosc," *Commune* 4 (December 1933): 350.

42. Throughout the 19th century, for example, Spanish culture was construed as a blend of European and Arab. José F. Colmeiro offers a discussion of the construction of Spain as an Oriental, exotic, and feminized "internal other" to the rest of Europe, in "Exorcising Exoticism: 'Carmen' and the Construction of Oriental Spain," *Comparative Literature* 54, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 127–144. See also María DeGuzmán, *Spain's Long Shadow: The Black Legend, Off-Whiteness, and Anglo-American Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

43. F. Galan, "Précis de la question marocaine," 354.

44. Claude Santeul, "L'exposition de l'AEAR," *La Revue française de photographie et cinématographie* (December 15, 1933): 395.