The civil war that has been raging in Syria since 2011, the contiguous conflict in Iraq and, to a lesser extent, the conflict in eastern Ukraine have thrust the phenomenon of foreign war volunteers (or «foreign fighters» in contemporary parlance) into the agenda of politicians, security agencies, the media and academics. Some commentators have been quick to point out that there are lessons to be learned about present-day foreign fighters by looking at previous instances of transnational wartime volunteering, especially during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939).¹

The foreigners’ motivations for fighting in a distant land, their wartime experiences and their post-war trajectories have attracted most of the attention, both today and in the historiography on earlier conflicts.² Indeed, academic research has focused overwhelmingly on the «actors» – the volunteers themselves – and their networks.³ The ways in which foreign volunteers have been remembered, and at times celebrated, by their home states have become a popular topic in recent years.⁴ When it has been examined, the nature of the interaction between these foreigners and their respective hosts has mostly been studied from the volunteers’ perspective.⁵

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4 For an analysis of how Philhellenic foreign volun...
There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. For instance, historian Anne-Claire Ignace has shown how, after the Palermo revolution of January 1848, the Sicilian government sought to make use of French and other foreign volunteers to bolster the locals’ military capacity. She also briefly examined interactions between the foreign volunteers and their Italian hosts in 1848–1849. Ferdinand Nicolas Göhde explored how foreign volunteers and Italians interacted with one another throughout the Italian Risorgimento. In her analysis of French memories of the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871) in Dijon, Karine Varley highlighted both positive and negative appraisals of Giuseppe Garibaldi’s conduct while he commanded the Army of the Vosges. David MacKenzie outlined some of the local criticism that was levelled at the Pan-Slav Russian volunteer, General Mikhail Grigorevich Cherniaev, in Serbia in 1876. Frans-Johan Pretorius brought to light some of the friction between the Boers of southern Africa and foreign volunteers who served in their ranks during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902. However, studies that focus primarily on the governments that enlisted foreigners or have had to contend with their presence, and the societies that hosted and dealt with them, remain rare. This is one of the gaps in the historiography which the present issue seeks to address.

Another gap is the post-war, long-term impact of foreign war volunteers on host states and societies; a topic that has hardly ever been examined. In this context, the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina after the 1992–1995 war is fairly unique. During the war several hundred volunteers, predominantly of North African and Middle Eastern origin, joined units loyal to the government in Sarajevo. Their reception was ambiva-

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lent from the beginning. Some locals welcomed the foreigners’ willingness to fight and risk their lives even though no one had asked them to come. Others resented the brand of Islam that the volunteers brought with them and tried to propagate. Karmen Erjavec, Stephanie Zosak and Darryl Li have written about how the policy of the Bosnian government towards those volunteers who had settled in the country changed from the mid-1990s onwards, and about how these foreigners were portrayed in the local media. They also showed how the government stripped naturalised former volunteers of their Bosnian citizenship in response to international pressure, in the wake of the global «war on terror».11 For most of the other conflicts of the modern era, however, no similar work has been carried out.

The purpose of this issue is to take a step towards a more systematic analysis of the receiving end of transnational military volunteerism, while not neglecting the volunteers’ perspective. This explains why we apply the concept of «encounters». The following five articles place emphasis on cross-cultural encounters and interactions, which would not have happened without the context of armed conflict and the subsequent arrival of transnational volunteers. Contributions to this issue focus on the questions: How did host governments and military organisations receive the volunteers? What kinds of interaction did foreign volunteers have with the civilian population? How were demobilised volunteers, who chose to settle in the countries where they fought, treated by their hosts? And what influence did the participation of foreign volunteers have on the ways host countries remembered their historical conflicts?

For the purpose of this issue, foreign/transnational volunteers are defined as individuals who served in a military force of a state or an entity other than their own state of nationality or residence. Moreover, their service was not motivated primarily by the pursuit of material gain. Because of our focus on voluntary engagement in foreign conflicts, mercenaries, military contractors and private security companies will not be discussed.12

We recognise that foreign war volunteers form part of a broader spectrum of transnational voluntary activism. Wars have often generated interest and stirred emo-
tions beyond the borders of the belligerent state or states directly involved. Individuals who sympathised with one of the sides in a foreign conflict could commit themselves to carrying out aid work abroad as doctors, nurses, engineers and so on. Foreign war volunteers, however, take matters further. Having committed themselves to a cause militarily, they implicitly agreed to take orders, to risk their lives and ought to have been prepared to take the lives of others. It is for this reason, we argue, that they deserve special attention. Foreign war volunteers differed from each other in the way they viewed their home states. Some felt disappointed with the policy of their home state and decided to take it upon themselves to rectify their government’s policy. Others have had their ideological beliefs defeated in their home state and so they went to fight in a foreign war that resonated with their ideological beliefs, in the hope that one victory would pave the way for the next. Others still were part of diaspora communities and may have felt that, in specific historical circumstances, their loyalty towards their ethnic group abroad overrode their commitment to their state of residence. This issue, however, focuses on how foreign volunteers of different backgrounds and motivations have interacted with host states, and on the memories that such military involvements generated.

Individuals who joined the ranks of foreign regular and irregular forces were far more likely to come into contact with host societies in ways that other categories of military personnel did not. While the experience of foreign fighters meeting local ones might have fostered transnational camaraderie, it also could have created friction and hostility. Furthermore, the arrival of transnational war volunteers invariably created a number of dilemmas for their hosts. The articles in this issue assess the range of reactions of different political regimes and military cultures to the incorporation of foreigners, give an account of the specific backgrounds these individuals came from and examine the often unintended consequences of such transnational encounters.

First presented at a workshop at the University of Leeds in 2014, the case studies under examination include: the Italian volunteers who fought for France in 1914 and 1915 (Hubert Heyriès); the non-Russian soldiers who joined the Red Army during the Russian Civil War (Peter Whitewood); volunteers from occupied and neutral countries who fought either for Britain or for Nazi Germany in the Second World War (Steven O’Connor and Martin Gutmann); and foreign volunteers who offered their services to the Israelis during the wars of 1948 and 1967 (Nir Arielli). The final contribution examines how the International Brigades were remembered in Spain since the death of General Franco in 1975 (Peter Anderson and Jorge Marco). The size of


14 In addition to the authors, we would like to thank Julia Eichenberg, Graciela Iglesias Rogers and Jessica Meyer for contributing to the workshop.
these foreign contingents varied, from only a few thousand in the case of the Italian volunteers in France or the volunteers who went to Israel in 1948 to hundreds of thousands in the case of Germany during the Second World War. However, considering the overall number of troops engaged in each of these conflicts, the foreigners only constituted a small part – normally less than 10 per cent – of the armed forces on each side. The articles are not arranged according to the chronological order of the conflicts under examination. Instead, the first three contributions of the issue focus predominantly on wartime interactions, while the last two centre more on foreign war volunteers in post-war contexts.

We argue that the hosting of foreign volunteers in times of war offers a unique litmus test to assess the rhetoric of national causes. Countries at war profess to represent certain ideals. Following the outbreak of the First World War, France presented itself as a beacon of Republicanism. The early Bolshevik regime used class-centred and anti-nationalist rhetoric. In the Second World War, Britain presented itself as the last bastion of European democracy, while Nazi Germany claimed to be the defender of European civilisation against Bolshevism. The Israeli leadership promoted a notion of «gathering the exiles» and establishing a melting pot for diaspora Jews. The manner in which transnational volunteers were treated puts these declarations to the test. The way in which foreign volunteers were received can help us to measure whether high ideals permeated societies at war in a significant way, or whether other interests, considerations and needs took precedence.

Peter Carroll, Josie McLellan and others have already illustrated how attitudes towards former members of the International Brigades changed over time in their home states. Changes in approach towards these veterans reflected broader political, societal and cultural shifts that took place in the Cold War and post-Cold War periods.15 We argue that similar processes can be detected among host societies. The articles by Whitewood, Heyriès, Arielli, and Anderson/Marco highlight the ways in which the memory of transnational military participation was shaped and re-shaped by host societies and regimes, and how such memories have changed, according to shifts in the historical context. In other words, the memory of the volunteers could be neglected or mobilised and transformed to symbolise different things at different times.

There are, inevitably, some methodological challenges in studying transnational encounters in times of war. One such challenge is representing an elusive phenomenon such as transnational encounters on a collective, rather than an individual, level. Memoirs, autobiographies and diaries have long been used by scholars concerned with foreign war volunteers and these have also been cited here. However, such «ego documents» tend to present encounters in a fragmentary and, unavoidably, biased

15 Carroll, The Odyssey; McLellan, Antifascism and Memory.
way. To address this challenge the authors have made use of a wide range of sources. Personal accounts have been supplemented by host-state newspapers as well as governmental and military records regarding the volunteers and their commemoration. In some cases – such as in Russia during the Civil War – the authorities mistrusted the foreigners they enlisted. In others – as was the case with the Eastern European soldiers who fought for Nazi Germany – foreign personnel were mistreated. On some occasions – such as in France in early 1915 – displays of bravery by foreign volunteers were praised. One thing that many different host military organisations and regimes had in common was that they compiled reports about the morale and/or reliability of their foreign contingents. Where such reports are available, they have been used to provide a fuller picture of the many layers of the encounters that occurred in each of the historical cases.

Foreign volunteers who participate in a war outside their state of nationality or residence almost inevitably have an impact on their hosts. The political, social and cultural aspects of this impact go far beyond the role the foreigners play on the battlefield. The study of the transnational encounters generated by such wartime service adds a new dimension to our understanding of the contemporary «foreign fighter» phenomenon and gives us a better appreciation of its importance. It will probably take several years before we will be able to assess the true significance and long-term impact of the arrival of thousands of foreign volunteers in Syria, Iraq and other present-day war zones. As the Stalinist policy towards non-Russian minorities in the Soviet Union during the 1930s, the contemporary memory wars in Spain and the other cases under examination from Europe and the Middle East in the twentieth century illustrate, the consequences of such encounters can be unintended, multi-layered and have a very long after-life.

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