

"Spectacle of Broken Cities and Broken Lives"

Media Innovations in U.S. Journalistic Reporting of the Spanish Civil War

JAKOB IRLER

Global Mass Communication / Journalism, Leipzig University / Ohio University

Abstract

This paper examines how the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) was portrayed in the United States through innovative media forms. By conducting a qualitative content analysis of news outlets of *Time Inc.*, the study investigates how photography, radio, and newsreels covered the conflict. These outlets pioneered interpretative reporting and exploited the affordances of emerging media technologies. The analysis shows that coverage centered on the experiences of common people and especially on the devastation caused by aerial bombardment. While some reporting aimed to evoke compassion and solidarity, other narratives dehumanized victims or framed civilian suffering as an inevitable consequence of modern war. The coverage used new media to suggest immediacy and authenticity by empathizing eyewitnessing. In combination with explicit depictions of violence, this produced emotional engagement. The war was thus constructed as a consumable spectacle.

Keywords: *War Reporting, Spanish Civil War, Newsreel, Radio, Photography, Affordance*

When Spain descended into civil war in 1936, this resulted in global attention: "No other war in recent times, with the possible exception of Vietnam, aroused such intense emotion, such deep commitment, such violent partisanship as the Civil War in Spain" (Knightley, 2002, p. 207). This engagement was significantly driven by innovative media. Even though the Spanish Civil War (SCW) was not the first conflict to be captured on camera, it was the war in which "photographs of conflict, destruction and death first became a routine part of modern journalism coverage" (Griffin, 2010, p. 10). Furthermore, the SCW has been described as "the first radio war" (Davies, 1999), as both journalists and propagandists tapped into the potential of broadcasting. The final innovative medium that defined the coverage was the newsreel. For the first time, a war could internationally and continuously be watched on the screen (Guiralt, 2023).

In this paper, I will refer to radio, newsreel and photojournalism as innovative media, even though their underlying technologies had been invented decades earlier. Stöber (2013) describes the innovation phase of media change as the negotiation process that determines a medium's usage and purpose. In the context of war reporting, this is true for all three mediums in the Spanish Civil War, as they saw crucial technological improvements and a professionalized deployment, which transformed their journalistic affordances.

These media innovations make the SCW a relevant subject for communication research. Historically, it represents a pivotal moment in the evolution of war reporting and mass media. An examination can therefore contribute to our understanding of how the modern international system of conflict news has developed. On a theoretical level, the SCW offers a compelling case study for media change in conflict. It can contribute to a more general understanding of how the usage of innovative media technologies is negotiated during a war and how these technologies shape its public perception.

Despite this, communication studies have not yet produced

systematic studies of SCW coverage. Therefore, this paper will integrate the existing historical research into a framework for the analysis of roles of mass media in armed conflicts, Baden & Meyer's (2018) „Transactionist Process Model of Conflict News Production, Dissemination, and Influence." The model aims to "investigate what contextual factors induce media to generate what kinds of contents in which ways" (Baden & Meyer, 2018, p.26). The literature review of this paper is structured in accordance with the main blocks of the model, which concern the context of the reporting as well as its creation and transformation phases. Further, it provides a framework of analysis for media content, which I will use for a qualitative content analysis that investigates how media innovations were used in U.S. journalistic coverage of the SCW. Specifically, I will analyze how the conflict was portrayed in photojournalistic magazines, radio coverage, and newsreels of *Times Inc.*

Literature Review

Context

According to Baden and Meyer (2018), conflict news creation depends on characteristics of the conflict and its actors, which I will now review. At the beginning of the SCW, the U.S. was still rooted in post First World War isolationism (Payne, 2012). Although Roosevelt sympathized with the Loyalists (Republicans), he avoided support due to domestic political pressure as well as the Republic's revolutionary violence and its reliance on the Soviet Union (Seidman, 2018; Alpert, 1994). He later came to regard this nonintervention as a grave mistake, with the SCW contributing to his shift from isolationism toward confronting fascism (Tierney, 2007).

Despite political neutrality, "no public event of the years between 1919 and 1939 – excepting the great depression itself – moved Americans as did this conflict"

(Guttman, 1962, p. v). The ideological dimension of the civil war contributed to a polarized discourse (Seidman, 2018; Tierney, 2007). The controversy was fueled by a “torrent of propaganda” (Thomas, 2003), professionally stirred by interest groups from both sides via the new media. Support for the Rebels came mainly from fascists, conservatives, and Catholics (Clements, 2022; Guttman, 1962). Republican propaganda relied heavily on the public support of artists and celebrities. Their engagement resulted in what was considered “one of the most effective public relations campaign in American history” (Parry, 1949, pp. 164–165). The most notable effect of this effort was the around 2,400 Americans that fought for the Republic as part of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, 900 of which would die in the war (Thomas, 2003). Even though the recruitment of these volunteers was organized by the American Communist Party, Jackson (1994) argues that their motivation was driven less by ideology than by spontaneous media effects: “The brilliant propaganda conveyed on a new scale by radio, newsreel and still photographs lighted the way to Spain” (p. 54). Like Roosevelt, the American public also grew more sympathetic with the Republican side over the course of the war but was never in favor of supporting it militarily, as contemporary Gallup (1972) polls show. In the U.S., the SCW was reported within a commercialized and consolidating media system dominated by conglomerates like Hearst and wire services such as the AP (Emery, 1972). This standardized reporting to suit diverse audiences, producing the fact-centered, nonpartisan style that Hallin and Mancini (2014) identify as characteristic for Anglo-American media. However, the hegemony of this established system was challenged in the interwar period. The First World War had seemingly revealed the effectiveness of propaganda, prompting social scientists such as Lasswell and Lippmann to stress the public’s vulnerability under the Stimulus-Response paradigm (Schudson, 1981). Radio and professional public relations seemed to amplify this manipulative potential (Saldern, 2006). This assumption of powerful media effects is reflected in contemporary scholarly opinions on the SCW. Riegel (1937) stated that “modern efficiency of press and radio represent an increased hazard in the maintenance of neutrality of thought” (p. 135). Journalism’s reaction to the growing media distrust was ambivalent. While the concept of objectivity was established as a professional ideal (Schudson, 1981), new forms of reporting tried to instead make subjectivity transparent. Most influential were interpretative journalism, which sought to provide context, summaries, and commentary (Emery, 1972), as well as reportage, which combined journalism and literature (Boylan, 1984). These genres were often used in war reporting and were successfully adopted for photojournalism and radio (Brown, 1998; Saldern, 2006). The established media struggled to adapt to these trends, which gave way to the rise of Time Inc. The magazine was launched in 1923 under consultation of Lippman with a concept typical for interpretative journalism (Baughman, 1987): Time aimed to make news memorable by providing vivid storytelling, summaries, and perspective

to readers seeking clarity in a complex world. Its success inspired experimentation with new media. In 1931, Time launched *The March of Time* on radio, a hybrid of newscast and radio play. “Exploiting the affordances of a new medium” (Meyers, 2018, p. 442), it dramatized news stories with actors, orchestras, and sound effects, to make them vivid and memorable. A newsreel version followed in 1935, which used the new sound film to bring the interpretative style of reporting to the screen (Elson, 1968; Fielding, 1978). In 1936, Time Inc. expanded again with *Life* magazine, which pioneered the photo essay, by telling a story primarily through images with some interpretation through text (Emery, 1972). By the time of the SCW, Time Inc. had developed into what could be called the first multimedia corporation.

Creation

The creation stage of the news production process involves the gathering of information (Baden & Meyer, 2018). The circumstances in the SCW involved immense journalistic resources pouring into a country that had previously been of little media interest (Hochschild, 2016). In a typical instance of parachute journalism, nearly 1,000 journalists came to Spain, often lacking local knowledge (Preston, 2009; Jackson, 1994). The new media seized the opportunity: Young photographers like Robert Capa and Gerda Taro made iconic images, every U.S. newsreel company sent film teams, and radio networks treated Spain as a proving ground for live foreign coverage (Brown, 1998).

The scale of reporting from Spain did not result in a diversity of perspectives. Most reporters clustered in Republican areas due to looser censorship and the access to cables and radio transmitters in Madrid and Barcelona (Deacon, 2008; Preston, 2009). This proximity fostered “herd behavior” (Hochschild, 2016, p. 216), in which the correspondents focused narrowly on military battles while overlooking issues like the Spanish Revolution – a phenomenon known today as pack journalism. Furthermore, both sides sought to control the coverage, with violence and intimidation being more common among the Nationalists (Rebels). The Republic allowed reporters relative freedom of movement but tried to steer correspondents towards sympathetic coverage through propaganda and embedding with their troops (Hochschild, 2016; Williams, 2020).

Transformation

In the transformation stage “the gathered information and commentary needs to be transformed into publishable news” (Baden & Meyer, 2018, p. 31). During the SCW, the most influential factors were the professional norms and political biases of the correspondents. Deacon (2008) offers a typology, with “propagandists” as a group of reporters who put their political allegiance over their journalistic values. “Partisans” like Ernest

Hemingway, Martha Gellhorn and Capa also openly aligned themselves with one side. They were influenced by interpretative journalism and sought truth through judgment and observation rather than formal objectivity. “Sympathizers” were often uncommitted on arrival but gravitated toward the Republic, influenced by its relative press freedom and the repressions of the Nationalists. Finally, “agnostics,” mostly news agency reporters, limited themselves to factual reporting.

Furthermore, news organizations shaped coverage through their economic and political goals. Editorial offices often demanded sensational stories to sell more papers, even at the expense of accuracy (Williams, 2020). Furthermore, Pro-Republican correspondents struggled in right-leaning outlets, often facing censorship or dismissal (Preston, 2009). At the centrist Time Inc., the war triggered fierce internal disputes between partisans of each faction. The company’s stance shifted after Guernica, when the coverage grew decidedly sympathetic to the Loyalists (Guttman, 1962). Publisher Henry Luce later framed this as the beginning of a firm stand against fascism and stated that “the Spanish Civil War was fought in the *Time & Life* building” (Elson, 1968, p. 258).

Finally, the transformation of information into news is shaped by the affordances of media channels (Baden & Meyer, 2018), which changed drastically in the SCW. In photojournalism, the portability of the 35mm Leica camera enabled photographers to capture spontaneous, mobile shots with a sense of immediacy and authenticity (Paul, 2006). These images appeared to show truth while simultaneously bearing the photographer’s perspective. They became “objective record and personal testimony” (Sontag, 2004, p. 23). The immersive aspect of photography also afforded emotionalization (McLaughlin, 2016), often used in depictions of killed and wounded to evoke shock and pathos (Bloomfield, 2018). Newsreels afforded additional options to contextualize the images through cutting, voice-over commentary and music (Aldgate, 1973; Gómez, 2023). Another claim to authenticity and immediacy was made by radio through the introduction of live reporting, allowing the audience to witness events in real time and even hear the sounds of battle (Williams, 2020). Additionally, radio elevated the personality of the speaker through individual voices. Consequently, radio was often used for news commentary (Brown, 1998).

Method

This study employs qualitative content analysis, which allows for the systematic examination of visual, textual, and audio-visual media. Following Mayring’s (2015) approach of content structuralizing, the method combines deductive and inductive coding. As a framework for the development of the coding scheme, three levels for the analysis of media content by Baden and Meyer (2018) were used. The first of these are *Evidential Claims*, which constitute “information about key events and facts shaping audiences’ perceptions of the conflict” (Baden & Meyer, 2018, p. 26). On the second level, *Interpretative*

Frames add meaning to the perceived reality by providing evaluations and moral assessments (Baden & Meyer, 2018). From the first two levels, *Agendas for Action* “delineate the behavioral and political choices available to audiences in order to respond to the evolving conflict situation” (Baden & Meyer, 2018, p. 26). Subcategories were established in accordance with the literature review and a first coding trial.

The sample for this study consists of photo essays, radio shows and newsreels of Time Inc. Restricting the sample to this media organization allows a comparative study of media channels produced within the same editorial culture and news rooms (Baughman, 1987). The photojournalistic content was accessed through the complete digitalization of Life (Google Books, 2024). 36 of the 125 issues from 11/23/1936 to 04/10/1939 contain photo essays covering the SCW. The longest article was chosen from each issue, resulting in a sample of 36 photo essays that cover most months of the war, except for summer and fall of 1936, when Life was not yet in publication. In the early issues of Life, the SCW is often covered in a section for general foreign news. These pieces feature one to three pages and there is usually no disclosure of the sources of the photos. One image showing coffins of supposed air raid victims (L_01/18/37) is again featured in a second article that explicitly denotes it as a propaganda photo (L_10/25/37). Apparently, Life could not yet supply the demand for war photography. Later, the consolidation of Life’s structures of news gathering and of the system of foreign reporting from Spain in general allowed for more extensive stories of up to eight pages with more vivid, exclusive photos. For the first anniversary of the war, the SCW was for the first time reported in a cover story, which includes Capa’s famous *Loyalist Militiaman at the Moment of Death* as a frontispiece (L_07/12/37). Increasingly, photographers are now credited in the articles.

The only The March of Time newsreel concerning the SCW is *Rehearsal for War* from August 6, 1937, which runs for 6:30 minutes (Alexander Street, 2024). It features a clear narrative structure: In the exposition, the implications of the SCW for the next global war are established by military experts. Then, suspension is built with Franco’s advance, which climaxes in the defense of Madrid. In the end, experts draw a conclusion. The film contains video material that was acquired by The March of Time’s own camera team, through freelancers and from other newsreels. Taro and Capa were involved in the shooting of the film and Taro’s death occurred during the production (Fielding, 1978). Only about half the shots appear to depict Spain, while the rest features diplomats and military experts, as well as footage from fascist Italy and Germany.

The radio shows of The March of Time were obtained via a digital archive (Old Time Radio Researchers, n. d.). Of 19 available episodes from the analyzed timeframe, nine feature a dedicated segment on the SCW and were included in the sample. Of those, seven were aired from January to March 1938. The segments feature a variety of different settings and narrative archetypes that the audience knows from fiction, like a tragic love story (MoT_08/18/36) or

a horror-mystery story (MoT_10/21/37). Some of them combine available sources with a fictional dramatization. For example, the story on the Madrid subway bombing (MoT_01/20/38) is loosely based on an article in *Time* magazine (“Death Underground,” 1938), but is fluffed out by a dramatic police chase. In another episode, a British ship is torpedoed off Spain by a submarine, which is then discussed in the House of Commons (MoT_02/03/38). The scenes aboard the ship are likely fiction, but the transcript of the debate must have been a source of the production, as the reenactment quotes verbatim from the record (British House of Commons Hansard, 1938). In other episodes, even the dramatic details are taken from journalistic sources. This can be reconstructed for episodes on Rebel atrocities in Teruel (MoT_01/27/38) and the bombardment of Barcelona (MoT_03/24/38), where the *New York Times* journalists Lawrence A. Fernsworth and Herbert Matthews appear as protagonists. The segments directly quote their articles (Fernsworth, 1938; Matthews, 1938).

In the following chapters, each unit of analysis from Life (L), The March of Time newsreel (MoTn) and The March of Time radio show (MoT) will be identified with a code that consists of an abbreviation of the medium and the date of publication.

Results and Discussion

Evidential Claims

I will now follow the structure of the coding scheme to present the results of the qualitative content analysis, beginning with the evidential claims.

Evaluations of Authenticity. On this level, a first subcategory *Evaluations of Authenticity* assesses any statements on the veracity of an information and the basis on which these statements are made to account for the contemporary discourse on journalistic objectivity (Schudson, 1981). The SCW is used for extensive self-reflection of journalistic techniques in the reporting of Life. Propaganda is discussed critically: “LIFE neither believes nor disbelieves any of the captions attached by the Spanish antagonists to these pictures. All that is manifestly true about them is that each was issued by one side or the other to make a calculated impression” (L_10/25/37). An antithesis to uncertainty and propaganda is constituted by a reference to unspecified “facts” or “science” (MoTn_08/06/37): “Behind the Spanish lies, stand quiet statistics” (L_10/25/37). This reflects the editorial culture at Time, whose staff “shared an infatuation with ‘facts’” (Baughman, 1987, p. 42).

However, the most common strategy to give authority to evidential claims is the highlighting of eyewitnessing. In the radio episode adapted from Fernsworth’s article on Rebel atrocities, a Spanish woman ends an account of an execution with the words: “I can tell you that much, Señor, for I saw it with my own eyes” (MoT_01/27/38). This is a digression from the original: “I couldn’t see more because they arrested me and took me into a

building near by [*sic*]. But I heard a shot and then people applauded” (Fernsworth, 1938). Here, the significant status of eyewitnessing becomes apparent, as it seemed important enough for the editors of The March of Time to falsify this detail of an otherwise largely unchanged story. The authenticity of eyewitnessing accounts is often asserted by highlighting the danger under which they have been created. For instance, an article discusses at length the death of Taro and presents her last photos. Similarly, the caption of Capa’s Moment of Death photo highlights the closeness to the frontline and the killing: “Capa’s camera catches a Spanish soldier the instant he is dropped by a bullet through the head in front of Cordoba” (L_07/12/37). Notably, the camera becomes the actor here, and by itself captures a direct representation of the event. In this narrative, photographs not only assure authenticity but also create immersion and atmosphere when they show “the panorama of war as it really looks” (L_04/10/39) and “manage to catch the sense of this strange spectacle” (L_11/28/38).

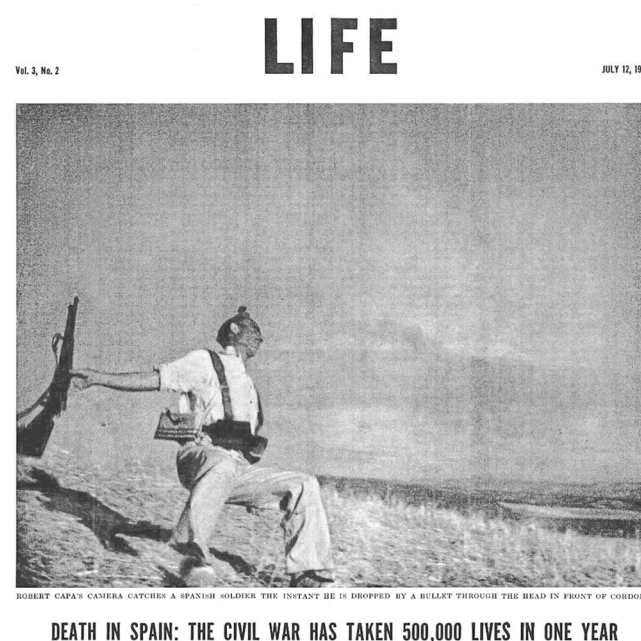


Fig.: „Loyalist Militiaman at the Moment of Death“ (L_07/12/37)

Actors. The category *Actors* examines the protagonists of the media coverage to account for the tendencies of the new journalistic styles and media to focus on the individual (Boylan, 1984; Meyers, 2018). Most notably, individuals affiliated with the Republicans are covered far more extensively than Nationalists, even though Franco is the most discussed person by far. Common soldiers and non-combatants appear mostly on the Loyalist side. While this reflects the greater presence of reporters in the Republican zone, it is also the result of the coverage of civilian bomb victims. Furthermore, there is extensive reporting on the Spanish Revolution, which differs from its neglect in general media discourse (Hochschild, 2016). The focus on common people and their lived realities is typical of interpretative journalism (Williams, 2020) but can also be interpreted as a result of the innovative

media that allow for more personalization through image and audio.

Violence and Suffering. Another category is dedicated to the depictions of *Violence and Suffering*, which was unprecedentedly drastic in the general reporting on the war (Griffin, 2010). Even though almost all objects of analysis cover these topics, they vary immensely in their explicitness. In a few instances, these themes are absent, notably in images. These include motives like resting soldiers, playing children, and couples. However, these depictions are mostly interested in the contrast of violence with everyday scenes. This is evident in an essay on life in Barcelona by David Seymour that is titled “between bombing raids, the people try to live” (L_11/28/38).

Violence is also not depicted directly in instances where industrial warfare makes perpetrators and victims of violence invisible. The industrialization of war is acknowledged: “Gone are the World War days of heroic single combat between fighter planes” (L_01/02/39). The distance and anonymity between perpetrator and victim sanitize the actions. Images frequently only depict weapons like planes, tanks or submarines themselves, not the individuals operating them. The victims are similarly anonymized, as the reports often feature aerial photographs, where the consequences of violence are abstract. A caption of one of these images praises a “perfect job of bombing a military objective” (L_01/02/39). It becomes apparent here that industrial warfare draws the perspective of the reporting to the efficiency of killing. This rationalization devalues human lives: “All these bombs have killed only 4,000 Loyalist civilians, a picayune result for the high cost” (L_01/02/39). The coverage registers but also reproduces this dehumanizing logic: “Señora Valdez and her son Juan are no mere air raid victims, but human guinea pigs in a war experiment” (MoT_03/24/38).

However, most accounts of violence and suffering are concrete and include multiple forms like sexual violence, traumatization, hunger, and disease. This is justified by journalistic duty as the images “have an authority far more potent than any editors’ policy or readers’ squeamishness” (L_01/24/38). Less explicit is *Rehearsal for War*, where the stricter norms and censorship for newsreels become apparent (Williams, 2020). Aerial bombardment is featured in the coverage more than any other form of violence and therefore overrepresented over crimes that took a higher death toll: While around 10,000 were killed by bombs, 130,000 were murdered and executed behind the own lines (Thomas, 2003). Apparently, the novelty of aerial bombing and its first-hand experience by the reporters put it on top of the media agenda. The portrayed victims of the bombings are almost exclusively children and women. At times, there is an attempt to evoke sympathy with the victims, like in this caption to an image of a bomb victim: “This was a man who had nothing to do with the war – a bookkeeper on his way to his office at eight o’clock in the morning” (L_07/12/37). The account of the everyday routine of the victim was relatable for the American audience and therefore allowed for a higher degree of identification. A

fictional account of the bombing in *The March of Time* takes this further: “It’s not pleasant to see thousands of people weeping. It’s not pleasant to see 200 men, women and children wiped out in a quarter of a second, and I think, ‘next time it’ll be me’” (MoT_03/24/38). Here, the imagination to be in place of the victims is evoked among the audience.

Contextualization. A major feature of interpretative reporting was *Contextualization* (Emery, 1972). All three formats provide a variety of context information to the reported stories. Life utilizes captions and short articles to accompany depictions of individuals with information on the larger political or military context. One example is Capa’s *Moment of Death* image, that is followed by the headline “Death in Spain: The civil war has taken 500,000 lives in one year” (L_07/12/37). Here, the title references the falling soldier and makes him emblematic for the abstract casualty number. In both versions of *The March of Time*, contextualization works through the narrating *Voice of Time*. Notably, many radio episodes have a similar structure as Life photo essays, where an audio play section provides individualized stories, that are then put into a larger context by the *Voice of Time*.

Language is frequently used to supplement the affordances of the specific medium. For example, atmospheric details and settings are most extensively described in the radio episodes. In turn, the captions of images often describe sounds, as in this account written by Hemmingway of being under bullet fire: “The close ones have a zipping whisper and the really close ones crack” (L_07/12/37). Through contextualization, Life also admits limitations of photography: “The best pictures cannot show war in all its horrors and ugliness. ... No picture can convey the sounds that come from a thousand dying men or the smells that come from thousand dead men” (L_01/24/38).

Interpretative Frames

I will now examine how the covered actors and acts of violence are framed. Thereby, I will put an emphasis on how interpretative frames are supported by the affordances of innovative media.

Actors. All three publications try to avoid partisanship. In Life, the political positioning on the war is inconsistent. It switches between very favorable personal depictions of Franco, Nationalist atrocities, and sympathetic pieces on the Spanish Revolution. By comparison, the radio version of *The March of Time* is notably more pro-Republican. It features more compassionate accounts of attacks on civilians and stronger condemnations. The film *Rehearsal for War* was produced with the intention to convey an antifascist, anti-Franco message (Fielding, 1978, pp. 175–176). However, the focus of the film on the future of warfare prevents a more political perspective. Generally, the reporting expresses a general rejection of totalitarian ideologies: “These 900,000 (estimated) were killed because their political theories about what should

happen to Spain were not exactly the same as somebody else's" (L_10/25/37).

Consequently, both parties are mostly portrayed negatively. The Loyalist army is described as an "untrained, riotous rabble" (L_04/12/37). The trope of the Republicans as an uncontrollable, violent mob is repeated frequently but is somewhat retracted later in the war: "When the war started, most U.S. citizens looked on the Loyalists as half-crazy, irresponsible, murderous scum that had turned on its honorable betters. A year of war has taught the U.S. more of Spain" (L_07/12/37). Similarly, David Seymour's photo essay on life in Barcelona states that "it is no longer fashionable in Loyalist Spain to kill a man for his opinions" and observes a "return to humane sanity" (L_11/28/38).

The Rebels are constructed as a counterpart to the perceived chaotic and irrational Loyalists: "The Spanish Rebels have at least one virtue that the Socialist Government conspicuously lacks: a love of discipline and order" (L_03/29/37). From this, their military superiority is deduced: "Franco and his disciplined army adopt fascist strategy and tactics, in swift shattering drives routing superior numbers of untrained Loyalist fighters" (MoTn_08/06/37). Franco himself is portrayed positively as "a devoted family man, [who] helps his only daughter with her homework and does not drink or smoke" (L_04/10/39). He is exempted from the generally racist portrayal of the Spanish: "In a country of impatient, arrogant and hot-tempered men, he is slow, thorough and endlessly patient" (L_04/10/39). This legitimizes him as a civilizer on the mission "to impose discipline on Spain's turbulent people" (L_03/29/37). Contrary to Franco's positive image, the reporting is very critical of the Nationalists in general because of their bombardment of civilians.

With both main factions compromised, sympathies are projected on the Republican Basques, "who are both pro-Liberty (which the Rebels are not) and pro-God (which the Loyalists are not)" (L_05/10/37). Similarly, the "heroic International Brigade" (L_10/31/38) is admired for its idealism: "That some 50,000 anti-Fascist citizens of a dozen nations risked their lives, rightly or wrongly, for the Spanish Loyalists is probably the most impressive exhibit of the human spirit in the world today" (L_10/31/38). The volunteers are portrayed as superior to the Spanish fighters: "Their superb fighting qualities, discipline, morale and intelligence were a model for the Loyalists' first scraggling Peoples' Army" (L_10/31/38). To achieve an idealized image, the brigadiers are distanced from communism, stating that "Americans have died fighting for democracy in Spain" (L_10/31/38). Instead, the coverage focusses on personal motives. A Jewish volunteer states that he wants to fight fascism because "I know what Hitler is doing to my people" while a Black brigadier wants "to fight Mussolini and avenge the rape of Ethiopia" (L_03/28/38).

Violence and Suffering. Violence is in most cases attributed to the Nationalists. Direct condemnations are avoided in the coverage, instead they are cited from authoritative personalities. The strongest protests appear in the radio episodes, where Secretary of State Cordell Hull calls the

bombardment of civilians "barbarism" (MoT_03/17/38). Furthermore, U.S. ambassador to France William C. Bullitt is cited: "There are murderers at large who take pleasure in dropping bombs on helpless men" (MoT_01/27/38). The victims of violence are sometimes portrayed as innocent: "The majority of the dead in Loyalist Spain were middle-class citizens who tried not to take sides. The dead in Rebel Spain were poor folk whose crime was that they aspired to having an opinion as to how they should be ruled" (L_10/25/37). However, there is a striking number of instances in Life where a contributory fault is specifically attributed to the civilian victims of bombing raids: "Four thousand civilian Madrilenos [*sic*] have so far been killed behind the lines but they took the risks of war by remaining in a purely military objective" (L_10/25/37). This role reversal of victims and perpetrators extends to the killing of children: "By far the majority of the bombing casualties are careless children, carelessly allowed to play on the streets" (L_11/28/38).

The SCW is often put into a global context. The involvement and geo-political interests of the involved states are discussed extensively. Furthermore, the SCW is linked with other world events to form an overarching narrative. The account of the bombardment of civilians is contextualized as a "story told a thousand times in the past year in Madrid, in Shanghai, in hundreds of Chinese and Spanish towns" (MoT_03/24/38). Similarly, a radio piece covers simultaneously on the Anschluss of Austria and the SCW (MoT_03/24/38). In both examples, the SCW acts as a setting, but the main interest lies in more general stories on modern war or totalitarian expansionism. Furthermore, the SCW is called a "testing ground for tools of battle" (L_04/10/39), "a phase in the struggle between fascism, communism, and democracy" (MoTn_08/06/37). Here it becomes evident that the war is framed in a larger geo-political and military context. It is especially seen as a case study for future conflicts: "The war in Spain is a poor man's war but it has produced a few huge air battles, prophetic of the air battles in the rich men's wars to come" (L_01/03/39). This perspective on the war as a "dress rehearsal" is most present in the newsreel, where already the title *Rehearsal for War* suggests that the conflict in Spain is not a war in its own right (MoTn_08/06/37).

In many such instances, the coverage tries to determine the character of modern war. Therefore, it is especially interested in military tactics and the performance of weapons: "German tanks were a bitter disappointment, vulnerable and inefficient. ... French multi-seat bomber was a terrifying flop" (L_04/10/39). Furthermore, the coverage frequently discusses military theory, especially that of Giulio Douhet:

The victor of the next World War will not be that nation whose armies are victorious in battle, but that nation which strikes first at the enemy's civilian population. Military objectives are unimportant. The important thing is to terrify and unnerve the enemy's civilian population, for which purpose aerial bombs are ideally suited. (MoT_03/24/38)



Fig.: „Barcelona At War“ (L_11/28/38)

By applying Douhet's theory, the targeted killing of civilians is destigmatized, stating that “modern war makes the whole nation a military objective” (L_10/18/37).

Sonic/Visual Framing. Frequently, music is used to transport emotions or attributes and support the narrative of a story. For instance, when German and Italian expansionism are discussed, the score transforms into a military march (MoTn_08/06/37). When a policeman is running to a train station to stop a bombing attack, the dialogue is interrupted by a short accelerating, dynamic music piece, that imitates the rhythm of running (MoT_01/20/38). Sound effects

can similarly be used to illustrate or drive a story. In the radio episodes killing is often only implied by gunshots or explosions. Sound effects also make events seem more immediate, like in a radio episode on the bombardment of Barcelona (MoT_03/24/38). Here, each account of a bomb victim is introduced by the whistling and detonation of a bomb. The repetition of the unpleasant sounds creates a distressing effect, which provides a high degree of immersion.

Visual techniques are similarly applied to create a sense of immediacy. Over the course of the war, images in Life increasingly show actors in motion, and are often slightly blurred, which highlights dynamic scenes. Conversely, the newsreel features few dynamic shots, which can be explained with Capa's unfamiliarity with the medium: “Being a still photographer, he didn't know how to use a movie camera. So as a result we had these perfectly marvelous shots, but they were perfectly marvelous *still* shots” (Fielding, 1978, pp. 175–177). „*Fig.: [L_11/28/38]“

Sometimes, image sequences are arranged to independently tell a story. A Life essay links an airplane over Barcelona to crowds looking up and finally to wounded children in a hospital (L_11/28/38). This establishes causality and avoids the frequent anonymized depiction of violence through aerial bombardment. In other instances, images reflect accompanying text, like when aerial photographs are paired with dehumanizing descriptions of bombing. Sometimes, images use symbolism to refer to cultural knowledge. For example, the gas mask recurs to represent the fear of modern war in *Rehearsal for War* (MoTn_08/06/37) and a photo of a toddler sitting between bombs (L_10/25/37) hints to the child victims pervasive in the reporting.



Fig.: Toddler sitting between bombs (L_10/25/37)

These photos of child victims are used for emotionalization. An example is an image titled “this little Basque boy, now safe in France, is still mortally terrified by what he went through in the Spanish Civil War” (L_05/31/37). The image is framed on both sides by advertisements for nail polish and swimsuits. Here, suffering is displayed to make it consumable through sensationalism. The magazine fulfills the demand for a voyeuristic, first-hand view on the suffering of others, which is advertised in a commercial on The March of Time radio show:

Two million families, 18 million people in all, will look forward to Life's coming, to follow with their own eyes the news of the world and the ways of the world's people as well as the spectacle of broken cities and broken lives in war torn Europe. (MoT_03/24/38)

Here, it becomes apparent that the eye witnessing of violence and suffering through photography is a main selling point of Life.

BILBAO BOMBARDMENT (continued)
This little Basque boy, now safe in France, is still mortally terrified by what he went through in the Spanish Civil War

Swim trunks by Bradley—
Snuggler by name! A woman and girl... two weeks with pay... big men and little men want swim trunks that make them feel free, gay and alive. The Snuggler lets you stand on your head, ride the waves—and love it! (And while, too, like for swimming suits styled by Bradley!)

The Snuggler
BY
BRADLEY

LaCrosse
NEWARK, N. J.

Fig.: „Bilbao Bombardment“ (L_05/31/37)

Agendas for Action

Finally, I will describe the possible courses of action that the coverage delineates from its framing. It is apparent that personalized depictions of bomb victims are supposed to evoke outrage and compassion. Nevertheless, consequences are barely discussed. Towards the end of the war, there is an article in Life on a possible U.S. intervention, but arguments in favor or against an intervention are not discussed (L_01/30/39). Much more prominent than these Agendas of Action that aim at an intervention in the conflict are deductions of military consequences. For example, the Secretary of State Hull “declares that the US must prepare against aggression with

an additional billion-dollar naval expansion program” (MoT_03/17/38). The agendas for action mostly concern a future war: “Biggest lesson is that the nations with the best factory workers, mechanics and chauffeurs will probably win the next war” (L_04/10/39). In that sense, the coverage lacks a humanitarian or political agenda as a result of the geo-political framing of the conflict and the greater interest in the military consequences for the next war.

Conclusion

This study examined how the SCW was portrayed in the U.S. through innovative media. For the first time, interpretative reporting styles and new technologies – photography, newsreel, and radio – were applied on a broad scale. The conflict created high demand for news while posing challenges through censorship and political bias. My qualitative content analysis found that reporting centered on common people and the violence they suffered, with aerial bombardment as the dominant theme. Accounts varied: some evoked compassion for victims, while others focused on geopolitical lessons for future wars, which often obscured the ongoing human suffering in Spain and possible interventions in the conflict. Consequently, victims were dehumanized in some cases, normalizing civilian targeting as an accepted reality of modern warfare. All different perspectives on the war had in common that they used the synergies of the new styles and the new media to provide the reporting with a greater sense of immediacy. The perceived presence then allowed the evocation of drama and emotions. In the reporting, the SCW became a spectacle. Thereby, a good story was often valued higher than the dignity of the victims.

This research has provided new insights into the foreign perception of the SCW, in which news, entertainment, and propaganda often intertwined. It has also contributed to the research of war reporting, to which it provides an analysis of different depictions of violence. Finally, the study demonstrates how innovative media establish novel forms of storytelling, especially in respect to wars.

However, some limitations of the results must be addressed. I was only able to access a non-representative sample of the radio reporting of the war. Furthermore, the potential for generalization of my results to the entirety of the American reporting is very limited, because of the examination of a single media corporation. Future research could address this by drawing on the identified frames for a comparison with traditional newspaper coverage. Conversely, specific aspects like the obscuration of violence through aerial photography could be further investigated using semiotic methods.

The new media of the 1930s made Americans more aware of the world around them than ever before. The war in Spain was only the first chapter of a descent into violence that could be witnessed live and illustrated. This coincided with a profound change in public opinion in the following years. While only 21% of Americans were in favor of weapon support to the Spanish Republic in

January 1939, 68% were ready to fight a war themselves shortly before Pearl Harbor (Gallup, 1972). The world had changed a lot in less than three years, but without

the new channels of perception that brought the war-torn world to American living rooms, this turn away from isolationism would not have been possible.

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JAKOB IRLER,
M.A./M.Sc., studied Communication Science and History in Munich. He is a graduate of a double degree program in Global Mass Communication/Journalism at Leipzig University and Ohio University. During his studies, he specialized in historical media change and the analysis of war reporting. Currently, he is living in Munich.