Art and War: Republican Propaganda of The Spanish Civil War

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ART AND WAR: REPUBLICAN PROPAGANDA OF THE
SPANISH CIVIL WAR

by

JASON MANRIQUE

A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

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by

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Advisor: Isolina Ballesteros

This thesis focuses on propaganda used by the Republican side of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) to gain support for their cause and win the war. It focuses on three forms of media: cinema, posters and photography, and it is divided into an introduction, three separate chapters, and a conclusion. In them I provide a historical context on the II Republic and the Civil War and analyze the effectiveness of concrete artworks to propagate the Republican message.
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Introduction

The Second Spanish Republic was in place between 1931 and 1939. Led by General Francisco Franco, the Spanish Civil War began as a military coup attempt on July 17, 1936, with the intent to take control of the government. However, in most large cities, parts of the police worked with the local militias that were formed by different unions and political parties to combat the rebellion (Graham, 2005, 21). This led to only parts of Spain being held under the military and its supporters, called the Nationalists, and the rest being held by the legitimate Republican government. The coup attempt would become a civil war between the legitimate government of the Republic, integrated by a coalition of left-wing parties called Frente Popular (Popular Front) and a fascist-oriented military led by General Franco; that is, between the left and the right. The war ended with the Nationalist victory on April 1st, 1939.

During the 1933 elections, the Spanish right had come together to form a coalition party named Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (CEDA) as a response to the reforms being introduced by the Progressive Republicans. In addition to CEDA there was also the Fascist party of Spain, called Falange Española, which formed between 1933 and 1934. The leader of the Falange was José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the son of the previous military dictator of Spain (Miguel Primo de Rivera who ruled from 1923-1930). Another right-wing group was the Traditionalist Communion of the Carlists, supported by a paramilitary branch called the Requetés. A monarchist group was made up of supporters of the exiled king Alfonso XIII and

1 For more reading on the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, read Mark Williams The Story of Spain: The Dramatic History of Europe’s Most Fascinating Country.
José Antonio Primo de Rivera in a political party called Renovación Española (Spanish Renovation).² All together, these groups (and others) made up the Spanish Nationalists.

The Popular Front was integrated by the following parties and unions: the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) which was formed in 1879 and its trade union organization, Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT) (Preston, 2006: 25). There was the Partido Comunista de España (PCE) (Communist Party of Spain), that was founded in 1921 by former members of other left-wing groups. The anarcho-syndicalist group Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) was founded in 1910 (Preston, 2006: 29). The Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM) which was at odds with the PCE because of the latter’s support of Stalinism and was a supporter of Trotsky, (in other words, anti-Stalinist) and internationalism (Preston, 2006: 332). This division would grow as the war progressed. One of the main factors in the rift between the groups on the left was that the Communists wanted to create a central, unified army, whereas the POUM and CNT preferred militias where there was no order from a higher authority. In addition, the CNT led a workers’ revolution in the Catalonian region, collectivizing industry and even abolishing money.³ The actions by the CNT (supported by the POUM) went directly against the Communists’ strategy of unification which led to the Communists having a negative impression towards the CNT and the POUM. Tensions peaked in 1937 when the collectives owned by workers of the CNT were seized by the Communist government, which angered the CNT members. Things finally reached a boiling point when the Communist police attempted to take over the CNT controlled telephone exchange building in Barcelona. The CNT and POUM

² For further reading, see Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution, and Revenge* (Revised and Expanded Edition).
stood their ground against the Communists for several days and in the end, numerous members from the CNT and POUM were arrested and the POUM was declared an illegal group.

On July 18th, Franco and General Orgaz took control of Las Palmas, capital of the Canary Islands. By July 19th Franco was already in the peninsula (Preston 2006:100). In addition, “volunteer” troops from Italy and Germany started to go to Spain to help the Nationalists. The Nationalists received aid in the form of weapons, supplies and men from Germany and Italy, while the Republicans only got support from the Soviet Union and Mexico. This was due to the fact that other countries, such as the United States, France and Great Britain practiced non-interventionism. The Republic also had foreign volunteers who came to their aid. The International Brigades were made of volunteers coming from all over the world to protect the Republic from the Nationalists and Fascists (Preston, 2006: 170). However, that would not be enough for the Republicans and due to infighting between the Stalinist communists and the Trotskyists and Anarchists, the situation was only made worse. In the aftermath of the telephone exchange standoff, the POUM members were labeled as ‘Fascist spies’ and were persecuted by the Communists because of the POUM’s criticism of the Communists in Spain and the U.S.S.R. The aid from Germany and Italy to the Nationalists proved to be too much for the passionate Republicans and international volunteers. Italy sent about one hundred thousand troops to Spain to aid Franco (Preston, 2006: 193). Throughout the Civil War, Nazi Germany provided Franco with twenty thousand troops, generals and the newest planes and weapons. That allowed the Nazis to practice what would be the infamous Blitzkrieg strategy over Madrid. Close to twenty percent of the international brigadiers were killed (Preston, 2006: 293). On January 6th, 1939, the Nationalists took over Barcelona and several months later, walked into the Republican capital of Madrid on March 28th, signifying that the war was over. The end of the war marked the
beginning of a 36 year long military dictatorship ruled by Francisco Franco, which ended in 1975 with the dictator’s death.

The Spanish Civil War was one of the bloodiest internal conflicts of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, ending right before the start of the World War II. Scholars claim that the Civil War was essentially a dress rehearsal for World War II. This thesis will focus on the propaganda campaign, in the form of media, used by the Republican side of the conflict throughout the war.

The Republic put a lot of effort into producing and using artworks that function as propaganda for their cause because throughout the war, the Republic faced many obstacles. The war went slower than originally intended, and the morale of the public was consistently challenged. Much of the propagandistic artworks was used to encourage Spaniards to continue fighting or helping in any other way. In addition, many Spanish intellectuals sided with the Republic which allowed the Republic to promote their cause in a much more diverse way than the Nationalists’ through the creation of intellectual and cultural institutions. For instance, the Committee for Requisition and Protection of Artistic Patrimony was composed of members from different ideological backgrounds (liberal, communist, etc.). The committee’s main focus was to preserve important works of Spanish art that were in danger of being destroyed by Nationalist air bombings.\textsuperscript{4} There was also the Alliance of Antifascist Intellectuals which was formed by Republican intellectuals to continue their research in the midst of the war. This included scientific research, speaking in radio programs, publishing academic journal articles and even writing a joint manifesto condemning the Nationalists, signed by all of the members (Holguin, 2002:171). Under the Communist party, the Cultural Militias and Itinerant Brigades were sent to

\textsuperscript{4} For more reading on the cultural and intellectual organizations of the Republic, see Sandie Holguin’s \textit{Creating Spaniards: Culture and National Identity in Republican Spain}. 
the battle zones and to the more isolated parts of Republican Spain. Both organizations taught the uneducated soldiers and peasants how to read and write using revolutionary literature (Holguin, 2002: 174).

This thesis will be divided in three chapters that will focus on media used in the Republican propaganda campaign followed by a conclusion. In chapter one, I will analyze three films made during the war: *Sierra De Teruel*, *The Spanish Earth*, and *España 1936*. These films show the reality of the war in Spain and what the Spanish people experienced in the fight against fascism. This chapter will explain how the Republic and its supporters attempted to use film as a way to directly show viewers why support was needed for the Republic.

In Chapter two I will study the posters commissioned by the government and its political organizations. These pieces of artistic propaganda demonstrate the popular aesthetic trends and styles of the time used to reach the international community and the Spanish public. Topics included in these posters were fundraising, anti-fascist solidarity within the parties and unions, calls to enlistment and action, among others. I will analyze the posters, their purpose and location as well as historical reference to organizations (political parties, unions and other groups) that were active in helping create and spread the posters.

In chapter three I will focus on the iconic photography by foreign and Spanish photojournalists Robert Capa, Gerda Taro and Agustí Centelles. I will analyze their photographs for their importance in the propaganda effort and the historical significance of the photojournalist’s coverage of the war. They show the brutality and reality of the war in a way that would be popularized in World War II. In the conclusion, I will discuss the aftermath of the war and the impact of the propaganda to this day.
Chapter 1: Film in the Spanish Civil War

This chapter will look at three war films that were made and circulated during the war by the supporters of the Republic.

The Spanish Earth

“The Spanish Earth”, originally released in 1937, came out right in the midst of the Spanish Civil War. Directed by Joris Ivens, the film shows villagers from a village within the Republican held territory working to send aid in the form of water and food to the other Republicans in Madrid. The first scenes present a scenic view of the rural setting with what sounds like traditional rural Spanish music in the background. This lasts for about 20 seconds until the narrator begins to speak. The narrator’s first words describe the workers of this land: “This Spanish earth is hard and dry, and the faces of the men who work that earth are hard and dry from the sun.” The first location of the film is then presented as “Fuentedueña” (Fuentidueña, its official name, is in the province of Segovia in the region of Castile-Leon) by the narrator: “This worthless land with water will yield much…now we will bring water to raise food for the defenders of Madrid.” The consistent mention of the inhabitants or “defenders” of Madrid throughout the film is a reference to the people who stayed in the capital of the Republic while the Nationalists were very close to entering the city. It was during the fall of 1936 that 25,000 nationalists were just about to enter Madrid with aid from Nazi Germany in the form of the Condor Legion (air support). As a result of how dire the situation looked, the Republican government had fled to the new capital, Valencia, leaving the city of Madrid to be protected by a defense council created by General Miaja (Preston, 2006: 164). The film then shows the men of
Fuentidueña preparing to go off to work in the fields while the women go to pick up bread. What is noticeable from this scene is that the bakery shown has propaganda posters in the background, on the walls of the bakery (though it is somewhat difficult to describe them because of the film’s poor visual quality). In addition, one piece of bread is shown to have the mark of one of the Republican-supporting groups, the UGT. It is here where the narrator brings up a topic he addressed earlier about the town and its vital role: “Irrigating the wasteland of the village can give up to ten times as much grain for bread, as well as potatoes, wine and onions for Madrid.”

Following that scene, the film then switches its location to Madrid, where the defense of the capital is underway. Here, through the sounds of machine guns, a map is shown outlining the city of Madrid with an arrow directed towards University City. University City is located in the Northwest of Madrid, where fighting between the Nationalists and Republicans was one of the strongest in the city for much of the war. It is important to notice at this point where the filmmakers support lean towards: the overall defense of Madrid. In this span, the narrator lists the names of prominent members that are leading the defense of the city. For example, the Narrator mentions: “Enrique Lister, a stonemason from Galicia…José Díaz, who used to work 12 hours a day before he became a member of the Spanish parliament.” These two men were members of the Spanish Communist party which gained support as the war progressed. And then we hear Dolores Ibarruri: “On behalf of the Communist Party, José Díaz and Enrique Lister asked Largo Caballero to order the Fifth Regiment to defend the historic city” (Ibarruri, 1976: 234). Their membership in the Communist party (or anything about the Communist party) was not mentioned in the film, due to the fact that the other nations watching the Spanish conflict (United States, France, Great Britain) were not eager to aid that group given their stances on non-interventionism after world war I.
The French Prime Minister at the time, Leon Blum, clearly declared that. In her autobiography, Dolores Ibarruri described Blum’s uncertain attitude towards helping Spain when she and other Republicans met with him: “He wanted to help Spain, but he couldn’t…It would mean war…He was a pacifist…Besides, the war in Spain was a civil war, France couldn’t intervene” (Ibarruri, 1976: 229). The United States, around the same time, also had politicians uncertain about sending aid to both the left-leaning republicans or the conservative, fascist-leaning nationalists. In addition to the uncertainty, the passing of Neutrality Acts and a “moral embargo” before and during the span of the civil war only made things more complicated. There were also American factories in Spain such as the Ford Motor Company located in the Catalanian region of which workers were taking direct control. The U.S clearly did not support a worker’s revolution that would jeopardize their economic interests, but at the same time did not support the open brutality of the Nationalists towards those workers.\footnote{For more information on the early American response to the Spanish Civil War, read Juan Carlos Morales, “The First Months of the Spanish Civil War in the United States of America”. (Historia Actual Online). 2017.} Secretary of State Cordell Hull was also informed about the poorly trained civilian militias and how the Soviet Union had begun selling weapons to the Republicans. President Roosevelt leaned towards non-interventionism and even gave a speech titled “I hate the war,” in which he declared the US a neutral country in order to ensure international peace (Morales, 2017: 5).

In order to show how dire the situation was for the Republicans, the second half of the film shows buildings around Madrid destroyed from the fighting and a long line of people waiting for food. The narrator comments: “Sometimes the food runs out before you reach the door, sometimes a shell falls near the line.” After that scene, the focus then returns to the people of Fuentidueña and their attempts to irrigate the nearby land which begins to show signs of
progress. After this, the focus goes back to Madrid and bombardments by German forces aiding the Nationalists. Footage depicts people running away and an explosion that destroys a section of a building after which citizens run to clean up the debris. The narrator describes the reason why the citizens stay to defend the city: “They stay because this is their city, these are their homes, here is their work, this is their fight, the fight to be allowed to live as human beings.” The next scene takes place out of Madrid and in a small town where a few planes are shown flying over the sky, followed by images of a destroyed home and several people killed from the aerial attack. It is evident that it is a German plane when the wreckage shows German writing. Nonetheless, the film ends on an optimistic note, showing the government soldiers fending off the Nationalists from capturing a road in an effort to cut off the supply line and the people of Fuentidueña successfully creating the irrigation system.

*The Spanish Earth* is a clear and precise attempt to promote the defense of the Spanish Republic. None of the parties or groups associated within the Republican government were mentioned throughout the film. One notable exception was the stamp of a union (the UGT) shown briefly but nothing about its socialist affiliation was mentioned. In a New York Times review on the film, the unnamed author describes this careful attempt as a way to avoid explicit revolutionary or left-wing propaganda. He states that “The Spanish people are fighting, not for broad principles of Muscovite Marxism, but for the right to the productivity of a land denied them through years of absentee landlord ship.” The same writer also acknowledges the success of the film’s attempt to promote the Republic. “In its contemplative way, the film argues its point

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much more effectively. Its technique is that of a documentary, but Hemmingway’s screenplay makes it a definitely propagandist effort.” The film has a slow pace, and the locations are heavily detailed throughout thanks to the narration, giving the viewer a better sense of the setting either in Madrid or Fuentidueña.

The propagandistic element of this film resides in the image it provides of Republican Spain. *The Spanish Earth* depicts Spain as a country that has been attempting to institute reforms that are meant to benefit large groups of Spanish society that had been ignored for so long. The war has to do with the old conservative and traditionalist forces of Spanish society attempting to aggressively take back power. The use of scenes in Fuentidueña and in the battlefield in Madrid were intended to show viewers that the war affected not just the urban population, but the rural one as well. The message that the film wanted to send by using those two settings was that there was a cooperative effort from both the urban and rural populations in defending the Republican government. The film was released in the United States in 1937 and a French version was made, with Jean Renoir narrating in French around the same time. There is no Spanish narrated version of the film. The full version released in the United States was privately screened to President Roosevelt. However, in other parts of the world the film was edited for different reasons. In the version of East Germany, a section of the film featuring anti-fascist writer Gustav Regler was cut off due to his vocal criticisms of communism (it happened after World War II). The French version of the film took out 10 minutes of film that spoke about Nazi Germany in order to prevent any animosity between Germany and France.

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1.2: Sierra De Teruel:

*Sierra De Teruel* was written by André Malraux and Max Aub and directed by Malraux. Malraux was a French writer and member of the Alliance of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals for the Defense of Culture and one of the signatories of the group’s manifesto, denouncing the Nationalists (Crussells, 2004: 4). Max Aub was a Spanish writer and intellectual who supported the Republic. Aub served as cultural attaché for the Spanish embassy in Paris and was the co-organizer of the Spanish Pavilion in the 1937 World’s Fair. Aub was the one who commissioned Pablo Picasso to paint one of his most iconic works, the *Guernica* in 1937. The film begins with a graphic illustration describing the movie (year, location of filming and funding). It shows that the film was released after the Civil War ended and during World War II: “This film is an attempt to dramatize sympathetically two actual incidents which preceded and foreshadowed the global war in which we are now engaged.” 8 The opening graphic illustration explains the purpose of the making of the film and how it was connected to World War II, which began months after the Civil War ended.

*Sierra De Teruel* is based on a novel written by André Malraux titled *L’Espoir (Man’s Hope)* published in 1937. The sierra referred in the title was the setting of an important battle in the Civil War. The battle of Teruel was a bloody battle that began during one of the coldest winters in Spain. Around 50,000 Nationalists and 60,000 Republicans died in the battle (Preston, 2006: 281). In a review of the film from the New York Times, written in January 21st, 1947, Bosley Crowther provides information on the lore of Malraux’s piece. Crowther begins the review with this statement: “For years we had been hearing about a picture which the French

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8 The translation of narration and dialogues to English is mine.
novelist, André Malraux had made in Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War, back in 1938…it lay hidden all through World War II and only recently has had public showing.”9 The title of the review, “More Grief Than Hope” sums up the reaction to the film after watching it eight years after the war ended and knowing the aftermath of the war.

Compared to The Spanish Earth, Sierra de Teruel provides a very realistic depiction of the conflict by showing exactly what the Republican supporters were facing. It shows the scarcity of basic supplies (cars, weapons, plane parts, etc.) along with unreliable intelligence and some hostility within the Popular Army. Ivens’ film did not show any of the issues faced by the soldiers that are seen in Sierra De Teruel. Malraux’s film shows that soldiers defending the Republic have to hide from Nationalist tanks, fighting with small firearms and negotiating with other Republican groups for the use of their cars (which were in very low supply). The Nationalists were aided by the Germans and Italians with troops and the latest military technology (tanks, planes, etc.), while the Republicans had some support from the Soviets and Mexico (but not to the same extent that Germany and Italy gave to the Nationalists).

Max Aub, one of the writers of the screenplay, provided a detailed account of the making of the film. In it, Aub established that the date for filming Sierra began on July 20th, 1938. (Aub, 1968:1). In his piece, Aub recalls Malraux telling him about the section of his book that would end up being an important part of the film: “One time he told me an episode he had described in his novel L’espoir which would serve as the plot for a film to be made in Spain. As Malraux and his comrades were evading the fascist zone, someone introduced a peasant who said he would

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show where he had discovered an enemy aerodrome. One of the soldiers (a Frenchman from the International Brigades) took the peasant’s advice but, from the height, the peasant could not recall the place. The pilot was obliged to fly at a lower altitude, and the enemy shot at the plane.ODY

Aub also brings up the fact that both he and Malraux were aware of the American stance on the war: “Everyone had heard of the ‘North American neutrality law’ and the Nye amendment which would permit the shipping of war materials (Aub, 1968: 2).” The Nye amendment (introduced by Senator Gerald Nye, a supporter of the Republic) was intended to allow the shipment of arms to the Spanish Republic even with the Neutrality Act already put in place. However, it was not passed due to a 17 to 1 vote count from the Foreign Relations Committee. Aub claims that the Republican government (through the Catalanian government’s propaganda department) offered to show Malraux’s film in 1,800 movie theaters: “1,800 cinemas, with an average of 2,000 tickets a day, is 3,600,000 viewers” (Aub, 1968:2). The goal of the film was to reach as many people as possible and raise as much support for the Republic by shifting public opinion in the U.S.A and other European countries.

Filming in the middle of a civil war was a challenging task for Aub, Malraux and the rest of the crew. Due to the constant bombardments in Barcelona, power outages were frequent, which resulted in having to repeat scenes days after the outages ended: “We had to repeat some scenes eight, fifteen days later” (Aub, 1968: 3). Aub also recounts the aftermath of the war and how that directly affected the film: “The Nazis and the Falangists destroyed the negatives and only three or two copies remained in the world” (Aub, 1962: 2). The prohibition and destruction of literature or any form of opposition propaganda was equally done by the Francoists and the Nazis. Franco’s policies after the war, as he initiated a dictatorship that lasted until 1975,
included suppressing Spain’s autonomous regions of the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia. All three regions were equally forbidden to speak their autochthonous language, and express their cultural identity, and they lost their political and legislative autonomy.\textsuperscript{11} Aub didn’t just consider \textit{Sierra De Teruel} to be a propaganda film, but in his own words, “A tribute to the Spanish people and to the many who came from hundreds of parts around the world to defend them” (Aub, 1968: 4).

\textit{Sierra De Teruel} is much more explicit than \textit{The Spanish Earth} about its motives to serve as a propaganda film for the Republican side. In addition, the film’s style is not in the form of a documentary like \textit{The Spanish Earth}, but that of a fictional film. The film is based on the chapter from Malraux’s book, \textit{L’Espoir}, where he recreates his time as leader of the French aerial squadron of the Popular Front (Aub, 1968:1). The plot of the film involves Republican forces in the Teruel province fighting against a better equipped Nationalist army. Thanks to the help from a peasant, the Republicans get knowledge of a Nationalist airfield and attempt to bomb the airfield along with the bridge of the nearby town, damaging the Nationalists’ supplies and transport. The film starts with an airplane pilot dying in the midst of battle after which he is surrounded by fellow soldiers and townspeople mourning him. One of the pilots tells another “it was one against eight (planes).” The next notable scene shows the townspeople assembled in a council meeting, discussing plans for a strategy to get behind enemy lines. Following that, a group of men are carefully walking in the narrow streets, when they are suddenly ambushed by a

\footnote{For more information on the Galician language during the Franco dictatorship, see Deirdre A. Dunlevy’s article, “Linguistic policy and linguistic choice: a study of the Galician linguistic landscape.” \textit{Linguistic Landscapes, Multilingualism, and Social}. For the Basque Country under Franco, see: The role of the media in empowering minority identities: Basque-language radio during the Franco dictatorship (1960s–1976) and their influence as identity catalysts by Irati Agrirreazkuenaga. For Catalonia, see: The Leading Role of the Party: Catalan Communism and the Franco Regime, 1939-1970 by Andrew Dowling.}
A sniper from one of the balconies nearby. After escaping this attack, two men enter a car and appear to serve as a distraction for the nationalist troops while their comrades escape in the midst of fighting. The scene ends with the Nationalists killing the two men in the car and the others running out of the town. It is easy to notice that the overall atmosphere of the film is set in a much darker tone than in *Spanish Earth*. Republican soldiers are shown losing and retreating from the Nationalists, whereas Iven’s film has the Republicans fighting with the outcome being a decisive victory. In *Sierra de Teruel*, in an exchange between two members of the Republican army, the commander tells a German brigadier about the lack of supplies for the few airplanes they have: “It has been 6 months since we got new motors.” Several of the characters in the film were from different countries such as Germany, Italy and France. Right after this conversation, a Spanish soldier follows with the commander and he speaks with another council of workers, and asks for transportation: “I have no cars; the ministry has no cars. You, you do have cars…this is a matter between life and death for comrades fighting.” By the middle of the film, the Republicans are shown to have very few weapons and supplies including the most basic items.

There are several instances where the names or images of left-wing groups are shown in the film. In a small town, a banner on top of the door of a building has the initials for two Republican affiliated groups: the UGT and the CNT. This is an important contrast with *Spanish Earth* where there was no mention or image of the CNT, the Anarcho-Syndicalist group that was at odds with the Communists. Malraux was a Communist who always defended their stance in the war. The scene in which the Commander negotiates with the reluctant members of the CNT- UGT to get transport serves as an indicator of how by that point of the war (nearing the end), the different left-wing parties and unions were distrustful of one another. The climax of the film has some of the soldiers boarding an airplane and bombing the airplanes belonging to the
Nationalists in the airfield identified by the peasant, as well as the nearby bridge. However, this all takes place near Nationalist lines, so the planes are quickly attacked by the Nationalists planes and crash on the side of a mountain. The movie ends with some of the pilots getting rescued while a few were killed in the crash. Leading the rescue were regular people from a nearby town. The whole town comes out to help or see the rescued (or deceased) Republican fighters and some salute with a raised fist just before the film ends. During that sequence, a slow, non-diegetic music by French composer Darius Milhaud, is played while the peasants bring the soldiers back to their town. That final scene of the film, with the peasants coming out in large numbers to help the soldiers, intended to show how grateful the Spanish people were for the international volunteers who gave up their lives for the Republican cause.

1.3: ESPAÑA 1936

*España 1936* is a documentary film directed by Jean Paul Le Chanois and produced by Spanish filmmaker Luis Buñuel. The film was released in two different versions, one in Spanish and another in French. The film begins in a way similar to *Sierra de Teruel*, where captions are shown explaining why the documentary was made, in this case, what the Civil War was about. This film’s captions in the opening scenes say that its purpose is “to present the facts about what public opinion calls ‘rebels’ and ‘pro-government’, ‘nationalists’ and ‘reds’…a unique cinematic report, which has no other motive than to serve the cause of history” (Crusells, 2004:7). The film first scenes explain the important events leading up to the beginning of the war, such as the creation of the Republic in 1931 and the workers uprising of Asturias in 1934. Numerous propaganda posters and art depicting the Asturias revolt are shown in the first minute of the film. The film shows footage of the elections that occurred just before the war (the general elections of February 16th, 1936) and the Popular Front posters and flyers telling people which coalition to
vote for were seen throughout the major cities of the country. The film includes some of the men who would become notable figures of the Nationalist and Fascist groups during the Civil War. The previous films discussed did not use any actual footage of the rebels or the specific names of the leaders of those groups such as Francisco Franco, General Mola and other members of the Falangist party. Early in España 1936, the fascist salute is being done by party members and in the middle of them is Falangist leader Joaquin Miranda. The following scene shows General Queipo de Llano in Seville. This scene shows the Nationalists taking over a major Spanish city early in the war, and the Falangist symbol right behind Queipo de Llano. It also points out that the Nationalists in the army were willing to collaborate with the Falangists by promoting their symbols alongside themselves.

The narrator in this film is similar to those in the previous films in terms of the way they refer to the civilian militias that were formed early on in the war. The narrator says: “They are poorly equipped, have no training but they form the Republican army.” In The Spanish Earth, the narrator does not openly say that the Republican army is “poorly equipped” or had “no training.” On the contrary, España 1936 does not try to claim that the newly formed Republican army is prepared to fight against the better equipped and trained Nationalists. Rather, the film’s narrator clearly acknowledges that the Republican army is at a disadvantage against an enemy that is composed of experienced military personnel and receives more training and aid from foreign powers at the same time. Similarly, in Sierra de Teruel, the Republican soldiers are more vocal about the lack of supplies which is shown throughout the movie. Sierra de Teruel was a fictional film, rather than a documentary, and did not use actual footage of the army. Similar to a

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12 General Queipo de Llano was one of the leaders of the initial coup attempt and responsible for the capture of the cities of Malaga and Seville.
newsreel, *España 1936* uses different footage taken from multiple sources. This includes other documentaries made by Republican groups and individuals such as renowned soviet filmmaker Roman Karmen and other newsreel clips (Crusells, 2004: 5). The film also uses more real combat footage than both *Spanish Earth* and *Sierra de Teruel* did. Early in the film, footage from the battles in San Sebastian and Irun (ending in September 3rd) were used along with footage of the defense of Madrid (which began in early November of 1936).

*The Spanish Earth* mainly focused on the defense of Madrid and of a vital road near the city. In Ivens’ film, numerous locations were used to show the different settings where fighting took place. It is clear that *España 1936*’s intended audience was the French people. One sign is that the film was presented in French, and while an Italian version exists, it would not have made sense to address an Italian audience because the Italian government was under control of the Fascists and the film would have been immediately banned. France was Spain’s close neighbor and was not under a dictator but under control of a social-democratic leadership. This meant that there was a chance that France could help the Republican government. In addition, the film also uses footage of notable Communist party members, such as Dolores Ibarruri, praising the French. “May the French people never forget that the struggle which the Spanish people are bearing is the struggle for peace, the struggle for freedom, the struggle for democracy.”

*España 1936* ends with the image of a woman holding the flag of the Spanish republic (purple, red and yellow). What is significant about this image is that the woman holding the flag was often used as a symbol of the Republican government on posters, stamps, and other items. Called “La Niña Bonita,” she was meant to be the Spanish adaptation of Marianne, the French symbol of liberty.

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13 For further reading, see Crusells, Magi. “Cinema as Political Propaganda during the Spanish Civil War: *España 1936*”. 
The three films discussed here had a common goal: to aid the Spanish Republic. All three films were released in different times of the war, thus setting a different tone for each film. *España 1936* was released in June 1937. Joris Ivens’ *The Spanish Earth* was released in July of 1937, a year after the fighting had begun. Although Malraux’s *Sierra de Teruel* began filming in July of 1938, it was released in the United States in January, two years after World War II ended. *Sierra de Teruel* showed audiences the unfortunate reality the Republican soldiers faced long after the war ended so it clearly was not as successful as *The Spanish Earth*.

*España 1936* was an authentic documentary made to highlight the real issues faced by the Republic and the forces that were posing a threat to the Republic. The release of a French version along with open praise for the French by the Spanish subjects in the film showed that *España 1936* was directly aimed at gaining the needed support of France. Unfortunately, France would also be part of the non-interventionist countries that could have aided Spain but did not. Ivens showed the viewers that the Republic was not some “godless,” violent Marxist experiment (as it was presented by Nationalist propagandists during the same time). Instead, a government that was trying to simply survive and improve the lives of so many Spaniards after the proclamation of the Second Republic, and after being ruled by the monarchy, the landowning elite and the church.

Malraux wanted to show the public how dire the situation was for the Republican fighters and how dedicated the people of the Republic were to the defense of their government in *Sierra de Teruel*. There were instances when these films were able to help to gain international support for the Republicans. For instance, President Roosevelt saw *The Spanish Earth* and did express sympathy towards the Spanish Republic. However, when an American company violated the “Moral Embargo” (that banned the transportation of arms to the Spanish Republicans) Roosevelt
was angered and placed a legal embargo on exporting arms to Spain. Elections were also beginning in the United States and Roosevelt needed the support of the Catholic population (which supported Franco), so he did not want to outright declare his support for the Republic (Morales, 2017: 8). The efforts made by all three films did succeed to an extent in spreading awareness on the Spanish Civil War (mainly in the United States and France). Still, the loss of the Republicans in 1939 due to other circumstances (such as non-intervention, isolationism, lack of resources, etc.) indicated that the films only did so much in gathering needed support.
Chapter 2: Republican Posters

This chapter will focus on the propaganda posters used by the Spanish Republic and its supporters. As I mentioned in the introduction, posters at the time were an effective and common tool used by political groups in order to get their message across to the public. They provided a visible and accessible form to shape public opinion. As literacy in Spain at the time was not very high, posters with powerful images and few words were vital in informing and educating the public. I will analyze some iconic posters from different groups such as the CNT and UGT.

During the early part of the 20th century, posters were the main tool used by governments to promote their messages. In the United States during World War I, the Uncle Sam poster “I want you! For U.S Army” became an iconic image that is still recognized today. After World War I, the Soviet Union’s use of revolutionary rhetoric in their posters would also serve as a template to the posters made by the Republic during the Civil War. It is important to mention the Soviet and American posters because by the time the Civil War began in 1936, propaganda posters were established as an important tool to shape public opinion towards a political cause. In the case of the United States, the focus was more on the Great War and for the Soviet Union, the Revolution. Republican posters addressed both war and revolution, depending on the group making the poster. These posters were made with the Chromolithographic method of printing. This oil-water repulsion process involved using a wax or greased-based pen to draw on plates of Zinc, then the use of specific plates with a certain color ink and pressed (or rolled) it onto paper.
to put the colors on, giving the poster its color. In war-time Spain, most of the posters were made with only three colors or different flat inks because of the limited accessibility to different colored inks. Most of Spain’s artists were not familiar with the lithographic process, so they made their drawings in drawing school and sent the drawings to lithography workshops.¹⁴

Aside from the Soviet Union, artists in Spain during the Civil War also drew their inspiration from the Spanish artistic tradition. In his time, Francisco de Goya (1746-1828) was considered to be the “Painter of the People,” and during the Civil War his paintings inspired many artists and became a symbol of resistance against the fascists (Carulla, 1999: 24). Goya’s work was (still is) seen as an open criticism of the horrors caused by war. His famous painting, “Third of May, 1808”, shows Spaniards being executed by Napoleon’s army during the Peninsular War (Guerra de la Independencia, 1808-1814). In the early 20th century, different artistic styles were prevalent. Socialist Realism was one popular style during the interwar period, especially in the Soviet Union. The purpose of Socialist Realism was to glorify the working-class through symbols such as the clenched fist or the hammer and sickle. Other avant-garde styles, such as Constructivism, seen in posters that highlighted industry, and the photomontage style, which inserted real photos in the graphic art, were used to maintain the climate of revolution and war in Spain (Carulla, 1999: 27).

¹⁴ For further information, see: La Guerra Civil en 2000 Carteles by Jordi and Arnau Carulla.
The poster titled, “Campos y fábricas para los Sindicatos!” (Figure 1) addresses the solidarity between the two unions, the UGT and the CNT. Both flags are tied together to represent the unions’ flags working together for the common goal of having direct worker ownership. As for colors, the colors of both flags displayed the ideologic differences between the two unions. The CNT flag uses the traditional colors of Anarcho-Syndicalism, red and black. Red represents the labor movement and socialism, black is for anarchism. The UGT flag was just red to represent the labor movement and its support for Socialism rather than anarchism. The
background of the poster shows a field and factories, which symbolize the places of work that both members of the two unions had collectivized. Many of the members from both unions worked in the industrial and agricultural sectors, which is why the poster uses images of both places. During the years of the Republic before the war started, the CNT and UGT were at odds with one another, with both groups having membership exceeding one million (1.25 million for the UGT and 1.5 million for the CNT). However, once the war broke out, the two sides worked together and even shared worker collectives throughout the war. This poster is referring to the process of collectivization and campaigning for agricultural and industrial productivity that could help product supply during the war. One estimate has the total number of workplaces collectivized at 3,000 in Barcelona. The poster also symbolizes the unity and solidarity between two large unions that were once rivals, now comrades in the fight against fascism. An artist only known as Gallo was the individual who is credited for creating the poster. Many posters were anonymous, used a fake name or just a first name with little to no information about the artist. In this case, there is no information on Gallo.

15 For more information on the CNT and UGT poster, go to https://library.ucsd.edu/speccoll/visfront/sindicatos.html.
16 For more information, see Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook by Mark Bray. 2017.
The poster called “Front Popular! Front de victoria, de llibertat!” (Popular Front. Front of Victory and Liberty) (Figure 2), was made by Martí Bas. In the poster, five flags fly together behind a man holding a raised fist. The flag with the hammer and sickle belongs to the Catalan Communist Party, the two red and yellow flags are the official flags of Catalunya (the flag with the star is called Estelada and the other, Senyera). The red, yellow and purple flag was the Republican flag, the red and black one was the CNT flag. The message Bas was promoting was the collective unity between the different groups that integrated the Popular Front. The Popular Front was the name of the electoral coalition formed to defeat CEDA in the 1936 elections. Promoted by the Communists, the Popular Front was composed of left-wing groups after losses in the previous election of 1933 and modelled on the “success” of the French Popular Front (Williams, 2009: 236). The French Popular Front was formed in 1936 as a way to combat the rising far-right parties in France. Left parties in France were also in constant disagreement with each other, similar to the problems with the left in Spain. The coalition in France proved to be successful, prompting the Spanish left to unite like the French did to prevent fascism from rising.
Martí Bas was an artist who was part of a Catalanian organization of artists called SDP or Sindicat de Dibuixants Professionals (Union of Professional Draftsmen). The group was formed in 1936 and accepted orders to make posters for different organizations such as the CNT, UGT, POUM and others. In addition to being a founding member of the SDP, Bas (1910-1966) was a member of another group called Cèl·lula de dibuixants del Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya, or CDPSUC (Chamber of Draftsmen of the United Socialist Party of Catalunya) (Carulla, 1999: 21). In 1936, the animosity between the different groups on the left (Republicans, Communists and Anarchists) was not as serious as it would be later on in the war. The man’s clenched fist represented the Communist solidarity salute which fit well with the rest of the image since the flags are all meant to unite in the Civil War. Starting with labor organizations such as the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World), the fist was used as a propaganda tool for resistance and solidarity. In 1931, Russian socialist Sergei Chakhotin suggested to the SDP (Social Democratic Party) of Germany to use the fist as an ideologic symbol to combat the Nazi party (Bray, 2017: 24). The Spanish Civil War was where the clenched fist gained its fame thanks to its appearance in posters and in photographs. Since the different flags are behind the message used by Gallo, “Front Popular! Front of Victory, Front of Liberty!” most likely means that a united front is what will lead the Republic to victory against, and liberty from the Nationalists. Gallo could also have added the “liberty!” in the message to appeal to the CNT members since they supported a left-wing libertarian ideology that the UGT and PCE did not.

17 For more information on the SDP and similar groups, see: “La Guerra Civil En 2000 Carteles” by Jordi Carulla and Arnau Carulla.
The poster, “Izquierda Republicana en vanguardia contra el fascismo internacional” (Left Republicans at the forefront against international Fascism) (Figure 3), highlights the international nature of fascism. In it, a soldier on the right side is wrapping with the Republican flag the caricatures of four fascist leaders on the left. The figure dressed in military attire is Francisco Franco. The figure above seems to be Adolf Hitler, due to the recognizable mustache on this figure. The man above Hitler is not identifiable although his outfit, black with a white collar and a pendant of the Sacred Heart, looks like the habits Catholic bishops used to wear, and the figure above him is Benito Mussolini. Behind the Republican soldier is Manuel Azaña, the Prime Minister of the Republic and President of the Republic at the end of the war. It was Azaña who helped form the Popular Front by uniting smaller Republican groups with the larger left-wing groups (Preston, 2006: 81). The bottom right shows the symbol of the Izquierda Republicana party and its local propaganda delegation located in Valencia. By 1937, the Republic had moved its capital from Madrid to Valencia due to the fighting in Madrid and fears that the city would be
taken over by the Nationalists. While the two previous posters promoted unity between the different groups within the Republic, this one was mainly promoting the Republic’s fight against the Nationalists, who were aided by fascists in other countries. Guillén added the images of Hitler and Mussolini in order to show the public that the Nationalists were fascists getting direct help from other fascists in Europe. The poster also implies that the church was complicit with fascism because of the unidentifiable man, who looks like he is wearing a bishop’s outfit. It is true that the Catholic Church in Spain (very conservative) strongly opposed the Republic’s reforms that were meant to reduce the Church’s influence in Spanish politics and society. While other posters made by groups such as the CNT or UGT were more revolutionary in their language, the Republicans (including the Izquierda Republicana/Left Republican party) were generally more concerned with winning the war and defeating Franco and his fascist enablers, since its members were from a moderate, mainly middle-class background.
“Ganar la Guerra es impulsar la revolución, dice el Partido Comunista” (To win the war is the way to launch the revolution, says the Communist Party) (Figure 4) also promotes the idea that winning the war is the most important goal. Similar to Figure 1, the name associated with this poster is a singular name with no other information on the artist. As shown above, the poster’s sole imagery, is the communist red star with hammer and sickle, and the text is a statement from the Communist Party. It is a lengthy statement, and there are parts that are highlighted in bold and a larger font size, namely, “If we do not win the war, the development of
the revolution will be set back…We struggle to create a better society…All those experiments, socialism or libertarian communism, will crumble to the ground like imaginary castles if the war is not won.” There is no date indicating when the poster was published but a good approximation is that it was made during the time when the Communists were attempting to portray themselves as moderates compared to the CNT and UGT in the summer/fall of 1936.\textsuperscript{18} The communists were not just focused on winning the war, but they were also trying to gain popularity for their side. I mentioned earlier that the UGT and CNT each had over a million members, while the Communists in 1936 had about forty-thousand members. It was during the progression of the war that the Communists were building influence. The message of the poster is much more direct than that of Izquierda Republicana (figure 3) as the communists were trying to appear as a moderate party compared to the Anarchists and Socialists by asserting that the war needed to be won first before any type of revolution or experiment could happen. Posters such as this one were used to present a practical image to the public, and the promotion of “Discipline, Hierarchy, and Organization” (Preston, 2006: 250). These tactics allowed the communists and their allies to take over key positions in the government. In addition, the Republic’s connections with the Soviet Union became stronger during this period, and led to the formation of the Popular Army and the Fifth Regiment with the help of Soviet military technicians and following the model of the Red Army (Preston, 2006: 250).

\textsuperscript{18} For more reading on the Communist Party in Spain, go to https://library.ucsd.edu/speccoll/visfront/ganar.html.
“SIA” (Figure 5), is a poster that belonged to a humanitarian organization called Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista (International Antifascist Solidarity). As seen in the poster, the group provided aid in several forms, such as nursing the wounded, providing shelter to families and orphaned children, and delivering supplies to the front and cities including Madrid. SIA also released propaganda films that promoted the revolution in Catalonia and SIA aid arriving to Madrid from Catalonia. The organization was created in June of 1937, about a month after the clashes between the CNT, POUM and the Communists in Barcelona. The CNT-FAI (military wing of the CNT) and AIT (Asociación Internacional de los Trabajadores) helped create the SIA along with other affiliated groups in other countries such as France and the United

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19 The following link goes to the film: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vnat1D3pRGM.
States (Goodwin, 2012: 128). Since it was created by Anarchists, SIA was meant to serve as a humanitarian organization, operating with a left-libertarian ideology, which explains the chained hands in the top right of Figure 5, referring to the chains of government (not to a specific party). The existence of SIA branches in different countries shows its effectiveness, but, at the same time, intellectuals within the left showed little support towards the Anarchists and SIA. In 1937, one hundred and forty-nine writers gave their thoughts on the Civil War in the academic journal *Left Review*. Only three leaned towards the Anarchists and one of them, Aldous Huxley declined the offer to become a sponsor for SIA (Goodway, 2012: 129).

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20 For more on SIA in Spain, read: *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow: Left-Libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward* by David Goodway. PM Press. 2012.
“C.N.T Comité Nacional A.I.T. Oficina de Información y Propaganda” (Figure 6) is a poster commissioned by the CNT to promote anti-fascism. In it, a man is motioning to swing a hammer on a snake with the word “Fascism” on its stomach. The only other writing is the CNT and AIT acronyms and the name of the department that commissioned the poster, the Office of Information and Propaganda. Manuel Monleón (1904-1976) was the artist who designed the poster. In 1933, Monleón was part of a group formed by artist Joseph Renau called Unión de Escritores y Artistas Proletarios (Union of Proletariat Writers and Artists) and worked with several radical publications before the Civil War. In one of the magazines he worked for,
*Estudios,* his work centered around free love, with the use of nude females. Similarly, in this poster, the man depicted is nude. During the Civil War, Monleón became a prominent artist in Valencia, a city that produced many propaganda posters and rivaled only by Barcelona (Carulla, 1999: 22). His work was also placed alongside other famous artists like Renau and Arturo Ballester in an exhibition on revolutionary art in Valencia (Carulla, 1999: 23). Monleón’s choice of a naked man in red, prepared to smash a green snake with the word “Fascism” on its side, is indicative of his skill as a propaganda artist of that period. Snakes were often used as the symbol of fascism and the man drawn in red, is a reference to the use of red by numerous left-wing groups along with the hammer and sickle which is the symbol of communism. The man is also very muscular, as a way to represent the strength of the Republic, ready to crush fascism. Manuel Moleón’s poster shows how detailed his work was with the numerous references to left-wing symbols without the need for other words or slogans. His contribution to the propaganda campaign was his powerful art that did what a poster was intended to do, motivate viewers with symbols and little words.
“Union! Disciplina! por el Socialismo!” (Union, Discipline, for Socialism) (Figure 7) was commissioned by the POUM. In it, there is a member of the POUM proudly holding a hammer, a sickle, a pencil and a rifle in his left hand. The main message the poster and the POUM are promoting is the importance of all parts of society. The hammer and sickle represent industry and agriculture, respectively while the pencil signifies education, and the rifle, war. One of the POUM’s better known members out of Spain was English writer George Orwell, who documented his experiences fighting in the front as a POUM member in his essay-memoir, *Homage to Catalonia*. In it, Orwell was critical of the way POUM militias were organized, due to the fact that all authority hierarchies and commanding officers had been eliminated as a way to practice real equality between the soldiers. The criticism was that these militias, with no leader, would have no discipline and no order, which could have a negative effect when fighting the
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Nationalist army, a traditional, organized army. Orwell corroborated this criticism in his book by providing his experience working with those revolutionary militias: “A newly raised draft of militia was an undisciplined mob not because the officers called the private ‘comrade’ but because raw troops are always an undisciplined mob (Orwell, 2014: 22).” The POUM was also poorly equipped with arms and other supplies, making their objective of fighting the better equipped Nationalists an even greater task than it already had been. The poster’s main intention was to remind POUM members to fight the Nationalists by being a united and disciplined force, not by going against the orders of their comrades or misbehaving out in the front.

The Republican propaganda posters made during the Spanish Civil War varied in their messaging depending on the artist and the group commissioning the poster. Those commissioned by groups such as the UGT and CNT, focused on revolution and combatting fascism. For the Communists and moderate Republicans, winning the war was the most important goal, and posters made by them emphasized that aspect rather than the workers’ revolt against the capitalist class. The use of the union’s different flags were important indicators to show the public which groups supported what positions, revolution or war. Alongside young, inexperienced Spanish artists, renowned artists, such as Renau, worked together to produce posters with symbolic designs as part of their contribution to the Civil War. Over the course of the Civil War, it is estimated that around 3,500 posters were made on the Republican side, with the majority being made in the early part of the war (Carulla, 1999 :15).
Chapter 3: Photography of the Spanish Civil War

Throughout its duration, the Spanish Civil War was big international news. Journalists and photographers from around the world went to Spain to cover the war. Thanks to the introduction of small portable cameras, along with accessibility to quick, cheap, high quality printing, taking pictures in difficult, war torn locations became much easier. Robert Capa, Gerda Taro, and Agustí Centelles became known for the pictures they took in Spain. Their work covered all aspects of the war including scenes of the battlefield, destroyed buildings, refugees escaping cities and towns, daily life during the war, political rallies, etc. Their work gives us an understanding of how modern photojournalism was taking shape. The 1930’s is considered to be the beginning of the golden age of photojournalism because of the introduction and the rise of magazines that were formatted on photo essays. LIFE magazine was created in November of 1936, 8 months before the Civil War began. Capa’s most iconic photos were used to illustrate their articles of the Civil War. It was during the Spanish Civil War when news agencies from around the world would send professional photographers to document the war and use those photos as part of their coverage of the war.

Decades after the war ended, many undeveloped photos taken by Capa and Taro were missing. In December of 2007, three yellow boxes with a total of 4,500 negatives were given to the International Center of Photography (ICP), created by Cornell Capa, the brother of Robert Capa. Cornell had spent years trying to recover his brother’s lost photos and he had recovered
many, but not those 4,500 negatives.\textsuperscript{21} The boxes contained photos that were given to Capa’s darkroom manager who had received them from Capa himself. The manager then gave it to a Chilean man, after which they ended up with the Mexican Ambassador to France, General Francisco Aguilar González. The negatives stayed in Mexico for years until they were uncovered by Benjamin Tarver, the nephew of the Ambassador.\textsuperscript{22} These discovered photos helped reintroduce the importance of the work done by Gerda Taro, Robert Capa and Chim (a close friend from Poland who worked alongside them and whose real name was David Seymour), during the Civil War.

3.1: Gerda Taro:

Gerda Taro was a female photojournalist who was killed in the Civil War. Born in 1910 in Southern Germany, Taro (her real name was Gerta Pohorylle) lived in Germany until 1933 when the Nazis arrested her for distributing anti-Nazi leaflets. Aware of how dangerous Germany was becoming, especially for her since she was Jewish, Taro went to France and it was there that she met her partner Robert Capa in 1934. With Capa, she practiced photography and began working alongside him. They both went back and forth from Spain to France, covering the Civil War in different parts of Spain. On July 26\textsuperscript{th}, 1937, Taro was caught in an accident with a tank and died from her injuries a day later.\textsuperscript{23} She was the first female war journalist to die on the

\textsuperscript{21} For more on the Mexican Suitcase, read the article: “A Secret Archive: On the Mexican Suitcase” by Dan Kaufman.

\textsuperscript{22} Further reading: Adler, Margot. The Mystery of the Mexican Suitcase: A Trove of Unseen Photos. NPR

\textsuperscript{23} For more information on Gerda Taro’s life, read “Gerda Taro: The First Woman War Photographer to Die in the Field”. link: https://www.magnumphotos.com/newsroom/politics/gerda-taro-first-woman-war-photographer-to-die-in-the-field/.
field. While her work in Spain was done within less than a year, her photos taken during that
time are some of the best and memorable images of the Spanish Civil War.

   During her time covering the Civil War, Taro took many photographs of militiawomen
(milicianas) who had a unique and symbolic role in the war. The milicianas were depicted to be
anti-fascists feminists who wanted to defend “liberty and justice” from an enemy that wanted to
take those rights away from them. 24 However, in reality, feminist groups were generally
considered to just offer support for the war effort by staying in the cities and not in the
battlefields. Early in the war, there were women who joined the militias and fought in places
such as Andalucía, Aragón, and Mallorca, among others. A majority of the milicianas were
young, they did not have children and other domestic responsibilities. There are also accounts of
mothers going to fight alongside their sons (Nash,1999: 4-5). However, over time, the women
were seen as better suited to serve in the rearguard and in cities, offering moral support. In the
fall of 1937, Prime Minister Largo Caballero approved a military decree that ordered the
milicianas to leave the front (Nash,1999:7), causing frustration and anger in the women who had
been committed to fight and had risked their lives for the Republican cause along their male
comrades.

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24 For more information, see Mary Nash’s “Rojas. La Mujeres Republicanas de la Guerra Civil”.
"Republican Militiawoman Training on the Beach Outside Barcelona” (Figure 8) is one of Taro’s first photographs taken in Spain. It is of a woman practicing shooting in a beach somewhere outside of Barcelona. Taro took this photo in her first trip to Spain in early August of 1936, a few weeks after the Civil War had begun. Here, the woman is part of a militia that formed right after the Civil War began. The militia was part of a branch of the Catalanian Communist Party, called the United Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSUC). In the early months of the Civil War, civilian militias were formed by political parties or unions (such as the UGT or CNT). What makes this photo by Taro symbolic is that the woman is wearing heels and learning to shoot a gun in a time where that was uncommon for women. She is also wearing the workers’ overalls universally worn by milicianos at the beginning of the war. All those qualities are part of the message that this woman was directly challenging Spain’s traditional expectations of what a woman was supposed to look like. Spain at the time was a very conservative country on many
issues since the Catholic Church had strong influence in the country’s society. The Republic’s reforms beginning with the 1931 Republican Constitution included granting rights to women such as the right to vote, divorce, run for parliament, etc. (Preston, 2006: 88). The militiawoman in this picture represents the Spanish women of the Republic taking arms to defend the recently granted rights from the Conservative and Traditionalist forces that had originally limited her rights.

Figure 9: “Women Training for a Republican Militia Outside Barcelona," Gerda Taro. 1937.  


“Women Training for a Republican Militia Outside Barcelona"(Figure 9), appears to have been taken in the same location as the previous photo. Here, five women in total, are in formation with one holding a rifle at the front. Unlike the previous, Taro shot this from a tilted, low angle (also known as Dutch Angle), a display of her photography skills. The women in the
photo are also looking away from the camera like in the previous photo, a sign that they are more concerned with their training and not with posing for the photograph. This photo, like the previous, shows that Taro was not just impressed by the militiawomen but, wanted to also promote what the women in the Republic were doing to defend themselves and the new set of rights they had recently won. Because of this promotion by Taro and other photojournalists that went to cover the war, militiawomen were seen as heroines. In the early stages of the Civil War, the international press, along with the general imagination, labeled the militiawomen as “heroines of the people,” women taking up arms to directly confront fascism (Nash, 1999: 6).

Taro’s work included highlighting the roles of women in the Republic during the war, aside from the pictures of battles and war-torn areas. Other than in newspapers and periodicals, Taro’s work was also shown in international exhibitions made to promote the Republic. One example is the “Foto ‘37” exhibit in the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam) in June of 1937. Taro’s pictures were part of the exhibit’s section on photojournalism and had additional work from Capa, Chim and other photographers who were active in Spain during the time (Faber 2018: 12-13).
3.2: Robert Capa:

Robert Capa (real name Endre Freidmann) was born in Budapest in 1913. Growing up, Capa was influenced by the work of American journalists Jacob Riis and Lewis W. Hine in using photography to highlight important social issues. In 1931, Capa left Hungary, escaping anti-Semitism from the pro-Fascist government and went to study in Germany. However, that did not last very long since the Nazi party gained control over Germany and Capa’s parents were not able to pay his tuition, so he fled to Paris, France. While in Paris, Capa met Gerda Taro (then Gerta Pohorylle) in 1934 when doing a job for a Swiss insurance brochure (Hirsch-Abel, 2019: 1). It was in France where he would change his name from Endre Freidmann to Robert Capa to get more job offers (Whelan 1999: 1-2). The Spanish Civil War was where he made his name as a very talented war time photographer.


“Old Woman and Child on Platform of a Subway in Aftermath of Nationalist Air Raids” (Figure 10) was taken by Capa in May of 1937. In it, a woman and a child take shelter from the

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25 More information, read Richard Whelan’s article in Capa: Cara a Cara: Fotografías de Robert Capa sobre la Guerra Civil española.
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Nationalist air raids in the Madrid subway. The woman is awake, looking in the direction of the camera, but in a pensive way, oblivious of Capa and his camera while the child is sleeping on the floor. Due to the circumstances, it appears that the woman (understandably so) is too concerned to acknowledge Capa’s presence. Capa’s photo does not show it, but behind the woman there is a poster promoting the defense of Madrid. Numerous photographers were taking photos of the people finding shelter in the subway, including Capa. The other known photograph that shows the poster was taken by an anonymous photographer known only as “ANTIFAFOT”. The ripped poster in the background can serve as a metaphor to the public atmosphere at the time. The public’s enthusiasm for defending Madrid from the Nationalists is starting to weaken as the Civil War progresses. The war by 1937 became a war of endurance to see which side would outlast the other. Capa’s photo shows the viewer how the women and children of Madrid had to adapt and survive from this new type of warfare from the Nationalists.

Figure 11: "Running for Shelter from Air Raids," Robert Capa. Bilbao. 1937.

26 For more on the photography of the war, read Sebastian Faber: Memory Battles of the Spanish Civil War. History, Fiction, Photography. The picture by Antifafot can be seen on page 40.
The picture shown above, titled “Running for Shelter from Air Raids” (Figure 11), also involves the Republican citizens reacting to aerial attacks. This photo was taken in Bilbao, a very important city in the Basque country. The most infamous air raid in the Basque region took place in the town of Guernica, on April 26th 1937. At the requests of the Nationalists, the Nazis tested their blitzkrieg strategy along with Italian air support on the Basque town. The town was targeted because it was a historically important town to the Basque people and on Mondays (the day of the bombing), people from nearby villages would gather at the town market (Preston, 2006: 267). It was this event that inspired Pablo Picasso to create one of his most famous paintings, Guernica, based on the accounts of the scene. Capa’s picture shows two women in the middle of the street, running towards the camera. Behind the women, everyone else on the street is running away from the incoming air raids. In the picture, two women and a man are close enough to the camera where you can see their expressions. One woman on the left side is looking away from the camera very worried while the woman on the right appears to be looking at the camera in a rushed manner. A man right behind the two women seems to be calmly crossing the street and is looking in the direction of the camera. Similar to Madrid, Bilbao, and other large cities within the Republic were subject to the air raids done by the Nationalists and their allies (Germany and Italy). Eight years later during the Nuremberg Trials, the Reich Commissioner for Aviation, Hermann Göring, confirmed that the use of Germany carpet bombings was done in Spain as an experiment (Kaufman, 2011:1). What can be taken away from this photo by Capa is that urban life during the Civil War was constantly changing. An air raid, which was a relatively new method of warfare, made living in the cities as unpredictable and dangerous as fighting in the front. Capa’s ability to take shots of the people reacting right at the moment of the air raids is
part of what makes his photos so iconic, showing viewers the unfortunate reality of being a citizen in the midst of a war.

3.3: Agustí Centelles:

Agustí Centelles was born in Valencia in the year 1909. Centelles picked up photography at the age of 15 and at 25 was able to get his hands on the Leica Model III camera (a small, handheld camera). His work mainly covered the Aragón Front, the Battle of Teruel and the Battle of Belchite. In the aftermath of the Civil War, Centelles fled to France through the Pyrenees Mountains with other refugees of the war. Like other Spaniards who fled through France, Centelles was put in the Bram concentration camp near the French-Spanish border, but took his negatives with him. His work also included highlighting the living conditions of Republican refugees in the French concentration camp. Because of his photos, Centelles is considered to be one of the first and best Spanish photojournalists, earning the nickname “The Spanish Capa.”

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27 For more information on Agustí Centelles, read the article: “Agustí Centelles: mirar la guerra y salvarla del exilio” by Sandra Lario.
28 Further reading, follow the link: https://negativoapositivo.wordpress.com/2012/12/12/la-guerra-civil-y-agusti-centelles/
“Militant Anarchists and Assault Guards on Layetana Avenue” (Figure 12) was taken by Centelles in Barcelona. In the photo, CNT members are riding on top of a car with the union initials painted all over the car. The year of the picture was not provided, but judging from the presence of assault guard next to the CNT members, this must have taken place early in the Civil War. The relationship between the Assault Guards and the CNT members gradually deteriorated as the Civil War progressed due to changes in ideology and allegiances. In the photo, many of the anarchists look happy and have several prints of the “Niña Bonita”, which was a symbol not just of the Spanish Republic, but of liberty as well. Barcelona was one of the cities where the military tried to take control at the beginning of the coup. On July 19th, the Army had set up headquarters in the Atarazanas Barracks and was beginning to enter the city center. However, the CNT had raided the local arms depots and the Assault Guards had agreed to stay loyal to the Republic. Because of this, the Nationalists were crushed at the Barracks and failed in their
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capture of Barcelona (Preston, 2006:113). Centelles’ photo shows what the defenders of the Republic in Barcelona looked like, regular citizens and police officers fighting the fascist military.

![Image](https://pro.magnumphotos.com/C.aspx?VP3=CMS3&VF=MAGO31_10_VForm&ERID=24KL535353#/CMS3&VF=MAGO31_10_VForm&ERID=24KL535353&POPUPIID=2S5RYDY804NP&POPUPPN=118)

“The Barricade of Dead Horses in Calle Diputacio” (Figure 13), is one of Centelles’ most iconic photos of the Spanish Civil War. Four men are positioned behind a makeshift barricade using only the dead bodies of horses to protect themselves from the Nationalist attack. The men appear to be members of the Assault Guards and one of them looks to be an armed citizen. Three of the four men are using rifles while the fourth is using a small pistol. The small pistol reinforces the fact that Republicans often faced a disadvantage when fighting the Nationalists. Centelles’ picture shows the reality of the Civil War, where the fighting could suddenly erupt and barricades were made with anything nearby (including dead horses). Centelles, like Capa was able to take photos of brutal scenes that showed how the Civil War looked in the streets of
Barcelona (Capa mostly covered Madrid). Centelles was a very important figure in the effort to document the Civil War and inform the international community in real time. His talent earned him important positions working for different organizations such as the Propaganda Committee of the Catalan Generalitat in 1937.29

The work done by these three photojournalists intended to show the world how brutal the Civil War was. It was during this decade where journalists gave immediate accounts of the battlefield with the help of their pictures as evidence of their reporting. Their contribution to the Republican propaganda effort was helped when powerful posters were made with their photos as a template. Done in the form of photomontages, these posters were a mix of the real photos of the war and the political message of whoever made the poster (Faber, 2018: 25). Aside from posters, their work was also seen in French and British periodicals and tabloids, and in early news magazines such as *LIFE* and *Regards*. *Regards* was a left-wing periodical that was created in 1932 and was one of the earliest magazines to focus on photography. Along with the exposure through *LIFE* and other magazines, an international audience was exposed to the Civil War, which helped serve the Republican cause. When the Civil War ended, many of the negatives that belonged to Capa, Taro and Centelles were lost or misplaced for decades. The discovery of the Mexican Suitcase and the Spanish government receiving 10,000 negatives by Centelles’ sons has brought back interest in the visual documentation of the War (Faber, 2018:44). While these photographers sought an immediate effect—affect the public and raise national and international awareness about the horrors of the war— their photographs have been essential to provide visual evidence of the Civil War and have left a powerful impact on the world for generations.

29 For more information on Centelles’ career, read: “El fotógrafo Agustí Centelles (1909-1985)” by Luisa Fernanda Vanrell Coll.
Conclusion

The Spanish Civil War officially ended on April 1st, 1939. Francisco Franco would rule Spain as a military dictatorship until his death in 1975. During the dictatorship, films, books, and photos that challenged the Franco regime’s official narrative of the Civil War were banned. It was only after Franco’s death in 1975 when people were able to document openly the Civil War and share opinions that would have gotten them in trouble during the Franco years. That also included researching, documenting and recording the propagandistic work of the Republicans.

The Spanish government has been part of the process in terms of preserving and recording these visual artworks. However, other tasks have been recently performed by the Spaniards in order to openly address the dictatorship. In 2000, the Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica (ARHM) (Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory) was formed by Emilio Silva and Santiago Macías to exhumate unidentified mass graves around the country with the help of non-profit organizations, eyewitness accounts, anthropologists, forensics, and family members. Their work has helped in finding some of the Republicans killed and buried in common mass graves by the Nationalists. In 2007, the Spanish government, under the PSOE (Socialist Party) passed the Ley de Memoria Histórica, which officially recognized the victims of the dictatorship and offered support to families that were looking for their relatives’ remains. Politically, this has sparked a debate in Spanish society. The Popular Party, the opposition party at the time, was opposed to the 2007 law because they believed that the law (and other similar programs) would only reignite tensions between the left and right. The Socialists believed in finally recognizing the war victims and officially condemning Franco and the Nationalists. The
propaganda posters and the movies mentioned earlier can now be accessed through online databases made by the Spanish government. Photos and films that would have been destroyed or kept sealed away in the past are now seen in art exhibits, archives and museums as evidence of the Civil War and its brutal reality.

While the initial aim of the Republican propaganda campaign was to motivate the Spanish (and international) public in fighting against the forces of Fascism, it also served a historic and memorialistic purpose. The vast amounts of visual art in the form of posters, film and photography constitute the memory of the Republic’s efforts in fighting the Nationalists and winning the war. These works also help challenge the revisionist attempts by the Franco regime (and his supporters) who downplayed the severity and brutality of the Nationalists in the Civil War. The artwork of the Republican propagandists, meant to motivate people at the time, still inspire people who see them today. Popular slogans of the Civil War such as “No Pasarán”, used by the Republicans who defended Madrid throughout the war (made famous in a speech by Communist Dolores Ibarurri) are still used by anti-fascist activists today (Bray, 2017: 32). The raised left fist, as seen in many photos taken by Capa and Taro are still used as a symbol of working-class resistance and strength. I attempted to show the importance of the Republican propaganda campaign, whose images continue to inspire people, 80 years after the Spanish Civil War ended.
Works Cited


Further Reading


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