

History and archaeology

Recerca històrica a través de la intel·ligència artificial generativa: presència i paper de les dones nord-americanes a la Guerra Civil Espanyola.

Investigación histórica a través de la inteligencia artificial generativa: presencia y papel de las mujeres estadounidenses en la Guerra Civil Española.

Historical research through generative artificial intelligence: presence and role of American women in the Spanish Civil War.

[Javier Navarro Férez](#) 

Universidad Internacional de La Rioja
Correspondencia: javier.navarro.ferez@gmail.com

[Mónica Orduña Prada](#) 

Universidad Internacional de La Rioja
Correspondencia: monica.orduna@unir.net

Abstract: This article examines the role of American women in the Spanish Civil War, aiming to explore their significance within the conflict. The methodology combines generative artificial intelligence tools with the analysis of primary sources, academic literature, scientific articles, and digital archives. The findings highlight the essential contribution of these women as nurses, correspondents, and activists, emphasizing their humanitarian and journalistic involvement on the Republican front. The research underscores their position as key figures in the international mobilization against fascism.

Keywords: Generative Artificial Intelligence; Women; Spanish Civil War; International Brigades; International Solidarity.

Resum: Aquest article examina el paper de les dones nord-americanes a la Guerra Civil Espanyola, amb l'objectiu d'explorar-ne la importància dins el conflicte. La metodologia combina eines d'intel·ligència artificial generativa amb l'anàlisi de fonts primàries, la literatura acadèmica, els articles científics i els arxius digitals. Les troballes ressalten la contribució essencial d'aquestes dones com a infermeres, corresponents i activistes, emfatitzant la seva participació humanitària i periodística al front republicà. La investigació subratlla la seva posició com a figures clau en la mobilització internacional contra el feixisme.

Paraules clau: Intel·ligència artificial generativa, dones, Guerra Civil Espanyola, Brigades Internacionals, solidaritat internacional.

Resumen: Este artículo examina el papel de las mujeres estadounidenses en la Guerra Civil Española, con el objetivo de explorar su importancia dentro del conflicto. La metodología combina herramientas de inteligencia artificial generativa con el análisis de fuentes primarias, literatura académica, artículos científicos y archivos digitales. Los hallazgos resaltan la contribución esencial de estas mujeres como enfermeras, correspondientes y activistas, enfatizando su participación humanitaria y periodística al frente republicano. La investigación subraya su posición como figuras clave en la movilización internacional contra el fascismo.

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Palabras clave: Inteligencia artificial generativa, mujeres, Guerra Civil Española, Brigadas Internacionales, solidaridad internacional.

On Generative Artificial Intelligence And its methodology

Undeniably, the arrival of artificial intelligence —particularly Generative Artificial Intelligence— in our academic and research landscape is an increasingly palpable reality. It has marked a milestone comparable to other technological advances that, in their day, brought significant transformations to research practice. Just as the transition from the typewriter to the computer facilitated drafting and revising texts, or as internet access revolutionized archival consultation by allowing historians to reach digitized sources from anywhere in the world, generative AI offers new tools to simplify and enhance future investigations. For example, AI algorithms can process large volumes of data in seconds, identify patterns in historical texts that would be difficult to detect manually, and generate drafts or summaries that expedite scholarly analysis. This technological advance is consolidating itself as a key component in steadily supporting historians and professionals across diverse fields of knowledge and education. It is, without doubt, a development that already forms part of our daily lives, often without our having been fully aware of its arrival. In fact, the latest versions of Word and PDF already include AI assistants to facilitate work in general. And when we type any search into Google, the first thing it now offers is an AI-generated view. Not to mention that even in the mobile WhatsApp app one can already maintain a chat with Meta AI or look up particular questions.

We are dealing with genuinely innovative tools, exemplified by the case of ChatGPT, one of the most widely used and recognized forms of Generative Artificial Intelligence, launched in November 2022. In this sense, it should be noted that we are proposing research through disruptive tools which, after their launch, have led to a “generalization of intellectual activities” (Romo-Pérez, García-Soidan, Özdemir, Leirós-Rodríguez, 2023: 323). For this reason, the following pages set out a proposal that enables us to explore the possibility of conducting in-depth research through the use of artificial intelligence. Within the field of Contemporary History, we focus on analyzing the role played by various U.S. women who came to Spain during the civil war between 1936 and 1939. One of the main objectives is to show that the appropriate use of AI can have a positive impact on the development of any investigation, challenging the perception that it is an unsuitable tool and that its use entails improper scholarly practice.

It is crucial to stress that this research approaches GenAI as one tool among others, recognizing its beneficial potential when used ethically and responsibly. Despite the criticisms, misgivings and fears it arouses, this project argues for exploring how GenAI can be effectively integrated into the research process without discounting its usefulness—indeed, valuing that it can be employed to the same extent as other traditional tools.

In this context, the application of GenAI will center on tasks such as information retrieval, bibliographic consultation and data cross-checking. Throughout the investigation, we will conduct a detailed comparison between results obtained through GenAI tools and those achieved via traditional methods, such as close reading of secondary sources, consultation of primary sources in archives and other conventional materials. This comparison

will not only assess GenAI's speed and efficiency in providing information but also the quality, precision and depth of the data supplied. We will analyze GenAI's capacity to identify relevant sources, its ability to cross-reference and verify information, and its limitations in comparison with critical analysis and human judgment. In this way, the study seeks to offer a critical evaluation of GenAI's pros and cons within the research process, with the aim of determining its viability and relevance in the academic sphere.

This proposal not only recognizes the inescapable presence of GenAI in the research domain but also advocates for its conscious and ethical incorporation, underscoring the importance of an appropriate use that respects the fundamental principles of academic inquiry. The path toward a deeper understanding of the intersection between artificial intelligence and research is marked by exploration, reflection and the prudent application of this emerging technology. A clear indication of the need to exercise such prudence is the fact that various Spanish universities have signed Declarations or Commitments to ensure that Artificial Intelligence is used according to ethical parameters in both education and research. Likewise, it is increasingly common to see articles published in academic journals on this topic, insisting on the importance of an ethical framework when using generative AI, since "the social impact of GenAI in general raises legitimate ethical concerns" (Alonso-Rodríguez, 2024: 81).

Focusing the research on the role that certain U.S. women played during the Spanish Civil War allows us to deepen a line of inquiry already addressed by some authors² by expanding the information and opening new avenues of work. It also offers an opportunity to test the functioning of a generative GenAI tool in a context that might be considered unfavorable, given the sensitivities that the use of advanced technology can generate in historical research. Such studies may provoke concern or doubts about data accuracy and the interpretation of sources —especially when automated tools are employed that could be viewed as less rigorous than traditional methods.

In this project's methodology, GenAI has been used through different applications. One of the principal tools employed has been ChatGPT —arguably one of the most popular GenAI systems today, in both free and paid versions— released on 30 November 2022. Since then, it has encountered competitors such as DeepSeek, a China-origin AI start-up launched in November 2023, whose impact as a search tool threatens ChatGPT's development and success. For this study, begun earlier and as already indicated, we focus on searches and the generation of information with ChatGPT. If we ask that tool what it is, it provides the following answer:

"ChatGPT is a language model developed by OpenAI, specifically based on the GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) architecture. This model is designed to generate coherent, contextually relevant text in response to a given text prompt. It uses machine learning and natural language processing to understand and produce responses aligned with the provided context. ChatGPT can be used for a variety of applications, such as chatbots, virtual assistants, creative text generation, question answering, among others. Its capacity to understand and generate text makes it useful across a wide range of human-machine communication scenarios." (Open AI, 2024)

When we posed that direct question in March 2024, it returned the response quoted above. We should not forget, however, that GPT is powered by algorithmic models trained on vast quantities of data and that it generates content anew each time it is queried. Therefore, no answer will ever be exactly the same as one previously received. This is why, when general questions are asked about certain topics, the responses it provides are often broadly aligned with what a researcher would need to gain an initial overview. For

instance, if we ask: What can you tell me about the role of American women in the Spanish Civil War? we receive the following answer.

“The role of American women in the Spanish Civil War was significant, although their participation varied and encompassed different areas of support for the Republican side. Here are some highlights:

Medical volunteering: Many American women joined as nurses and medical volunteers in field hospitals and medical units during the Spanish Civil War. Organizations such as the American Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy and the American Women’s Hospital Service sent medical staff and supplies to Spain to assist the wounded on the Republican front.

Journalism and political activism: Some American women—including journalists and writers such as Martha Gellhorn and Virginia Cowles—traveled to Spain to cover the war and write about conditions on the Republican front. In addition, political activists such as Lois Orr, Dorothy Parker and Lillian Hellman participated in fundraising and awareness campaigns in the United States in support of the Republican cause.

In sum, American women played important roles in supporting the Republican side during the Spanish Civil War, whether through their work as medical volunteers, journalists, political activists or even as combatants in the International Brigades. Their participation reflects the internationalist and anti-fascist commitment of many people during that historical period.” (Open AI, 2024)

With this generic result—and as detailed later—the model offers a broad sense of the topic, which we consider a good starting point. In almost record time (under a minute), the chat has provided leads on associations, proper names of key figures, tasks undertaken by some of the women who came to Spain, and so forth. In short, at the beginning of a search for sources, documents or bibliography, we already have general guidelines to initiate the investigation. It is essential, when drafting what we want ChatGPT to supply, to bear in mind the importance of the instructions or questions we pose—that is, the “prompt,” which should be as detailed as possible. Thus, for example, we should specify not only the format in which we want the response, but also the style or tone and the intended audience. Beyond the direct question posed above, for this study using free ChatGPT we can make the prompt more precise and elaborate. For instance: “For an academic article I am preparing for a scholarly journal in Contemporary History, I need data on women from the United States who, during the Spanish Civil War, played a significant role in different areas of the Spanish conflict. I want to know their names and their occupations while they were in Spain.” Since we asked specifically for names and occupations, the response was:

“In the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), several American women played prominent roles in different areas, from participation in international brigades to humanitarian support work. Here are some key women who contributed to the conflict:

Martha Gellhorn (1908–1998)

Occupation: Journalist and writer.

Contribution: Gellhorn was one of the most important journalists to cover the Spanish Civil War, known for her bold, direct approach. She was a correspondent in Spain for several publications, and her reporting offered a stark, realistic view of the conflict. She was among the first journalists to document the war on the ground.

Helen Graham (1899–1982)

Occupation: Activist and volunteer in the medical aid brigade.

Contribution: Helen Graham was one of the American volunteers who joined the

International Brigade, working in hospitals and as a nurse in combat zones. During the war, she became deeply involved in medical assistance to Republican fighters.

Dorothy Parker (1893–1967)

Occupation: Writer and political activist.

Contribution: Although best known for her literary work, Dorothy Parker was also an active defender of the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War. She was a member of several support committees for the Republican cause and raised funds to aid the fighters.

Jessie Jackson (1906–2004)

Occupation: Nurse.

Contribution: Jessie Jackson was another American who worked as a nurse during the Spanish Civil War. She served in hospitals in the Republican zone, providing essential medical care to wounded soldiers. She was part of the International Fighters' Aid Network, an effort to send medical and humanitarian support.

Frances R. Goff (1907–2001)

Occupation: Nurse.

Contribution: She worked as a nurse in Republican hospitals during the war. She was one of the Americans who joined the international support brigade. Her front-line experience was instrumental in improving sanitary conditions for soldiers.

Anna Louise Strong (1885–1970)

Occupation: Journalist, writer and activist.

Contribution: Anna Louise Strong was a prominent American journalist and writer who openly supported the Republican cause. She stood out for her reports and books recounting her experience in Spain and her view of the struggle against fascism. She became one of the most important figures in American support for the Republic.

Margaret R. Owen (1901–1992)

Occupation: Nurse and activist.

Contribution: Margaret R. Owen was a volunteer nurse in the Spanish Civil War. Over the course of her service, she worked in hospitals in the Republican zone, providing medical care to the wounded from the front."

This list of names and occupations extends to a total of fifteen entries. Obviously, that was not the total number of U.S. women who came to Spain during the Civil War, as documented in archival or secondary sources; nevertheless, it still allows us to find threads to pull in order to approach our objectives. It is a helpful starting point that obliges us to read closely and scrupulously, since one of the names supplied by ChatGPT was that of the leader of Spain's Communist Party, Dolores Ibárruri —who, as is well known, was born in Spain, specifically in Biscay, and did not "come from the United States" to assist in humanitarian tasks or as a journalist. In this case, the chat produced what is termed a hallucination —that is, "the generation of results that may sound plausible but are factually incorrect or unrelated to the given context" (Cárdenas, 2023: 4). How did this happen? Here we can understand it as an association-of-ideas error, because the generated text foregrounded Ibárruri's speech of 28 October 1938 in Barcelona at the farewell to the International Brigades. Faced with such a striking mistake, it is obvious that we must delve into multiple sources regarding the other women's names included in the list—especially those that are less widely known.

There are additional methodological possibilities enabled by generative AI, such as adding bibliographic references while specifying the exact citation style to use. Two tools that facilitate the search for scholarly articles are the websites <https://typeset.io> and <https://consensus.app/search/>. Both function as a kind of virtual assistant that can help with an initial bibliographic sweep: you enter a search concept and they return online articles on the topic. These are open-access pieces that can be downloaded for consultation;

moreover, they include their own GenAI engine (CopyPilot) that allows you to ask questions of the text and review the information.

By way of example, and linked to the topic under study, we noted above that one of the names ChatGPT returned was Martha Gellhorn. Using this name, we ran a search in Consensus. One reference it offered was a book by Sharon Wheeler and Richard Keeble, *The Journalistic Imagination: Literary Journalists from Defoe to Capote and Carter*. The book surveys figures in journalism and includes a chapter devoted to Martha Gellhorn and her time in Spain during the Civil War. Thus, in a matter of minutes —and using only GenAI-associated tools— it is possible to locate a book chapter available online, in another language, and amenable to detailed work through question-asking. The interface is straightforward: when you open the document, a CopyPilot chat appears in the right-hand pane with which you can interact, ask questions, etc., and the system generates information based on the document's content.

Obviously, these two websites also present a series of limitations. A major one is that, for now, they cannot deliver a truly comprehensive search on a topic, since they depend on works being open-access online. Moreover, they almost always draw on articles in English, which can be a hurdle for some researchers.

Nor can we ignore a broader risk: one of the major errors that GenAI co-pilots tend to make is that they always try to give you *some* answer —i.e., to output something to the user— even when it lacks veracity. This phenomenon —again, hallucination— means we must widen our margin for review whenever we use such a tool.

A generative-AI use case that partly mitigates the problem just noted is to employ <https://chatpdf.com>. This site lets us upload PDFs and ask questions of them via a GenAI interface. We can work with the document without reading it in full, because the tool displays the information that answers our query and explicitly indicates the section of the text from which it is drawn.

This tool is genuinely useful, especially for reducing time and optimizing our workflow. It is common in research to encounter documents whose usefulness is uncertain. With this tool, we can simply upload them and ask specific questions about the information we need. If the text contains the answer, we can immediately read the relevant passages; if not, we have saved time by avoiding a full read-through.

In the following pages we address the role of U.S. women who participated in the Spanish Civil War in different ways and for different purposes—chiefly in medical roles and in political or journalistic activism. As regards women who performed clinical or broader humanitarian work, participation was significant. Let us recall, for example, that the Spanish Civil War saw the implementation of a series of professional, medical and nursing advances that would be consolidated during the Second World War.

With respect to studies on U.S. women who served as correspondents or photo-reporters, research has also advanced. In 2022 a monograph on foreign women journalists in the Spanish Civil War was published by D  az Nosty, documenting the presence in Spain of 183 women who came for journalistic or literary purposes, 36 of them from the United States; and in 2024 the aforementioned work by Sarah Watling appeared. In the academic sphere, space is even being devoted to this topic in conferences and courses—for example, the XXII edition of the *Curso de Historia Pol  tica Contempor  nea* at the Casa-Museo Le  n y Castillo in Telde, linked to the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

Transatlantic solidarity: support For the Second Republic from the United States

In the course of the 1930s in the United States, one must underscore the broad mobilization of civil society through participation in a range of political and social movements. Among the most significant examples were the Unemployed Councils, which took shape as “organizations of struggle” and promoted actions such as hunger marches and rent strikes (Martínez, 2017: 362). Within this same decade, the severe repercussions of the 1929 economic crisis led to the creation of trade unions linked to political parties. Indeed, in 1929 “the Communist Party of the United States formed the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL) as a labor confederation and set out to organize dual unions across various industries” (Zapata, 2022: 4). It was a period marked by significant mobilization in political, civic, and trade-union arenas (Bosch, 2012: 64). In addition, some Americans voiced concern at the rise of pro-fascist groupings on U.S. soil, among which the Liberty League stood out (De la Guardia, 2009: 465).

Against this backdrop —where the defense of individualism had made only timid advances toward a broader awakening of solidarity— the Spanish Civil War began in July 1936. As is well known, immediately after the outbreak of the conflict and at the initiative of Britain and France, twenty-seven states signed a Non-Intervention Pact. Among them were Italy and Germany, both of which, despite having subscribed to the agreement, provided massive support to the insurgents from the outset. The United States did not sign the pact, but it held firmly to a policy of neutrality.

The positions adopted by the various governments with international influence undeniably affected the course of events in Spain. This influence was significant not only for the conflict’s development but also because certain official stances prompted, in some cases, civil societies in different countries to show solidarity with the conflict’s victims when their own governments failed to act. Focusing on the United States, a large segment of the American public awoke to the war and to the administration’s *laissez-faire* posture. This awareness and ensuing mobilization were fueled by reporting about Spain and the impact on civilians that reached U.S. audiences (Orduña, 2022: 430). In general, these organizations shared a common geographical locus of origin, and virtually all arose from private initiatives (Smith, 2013: 3).

Transatlantic solidarity manifested itself in the emergence of various humanitarian and medical-service organizations whose primary aim was to provide aid to Spain. One of the most significant —especially relevant to the present study— was the American Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy (AMB). It was among the first U.S. bodies to organize humanitarian relief after the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, planning the assistance it intended to provide by setting health-centered objectives and recruiting physicians and nurses for that purpose. Although one of its principal missions was to care for the wounded at the front —and its creation was indeed associated with the Lincoln Battalion within the International Brigades— it is also true that, as the conflict wore on, aid extended to civilian children. On 30 January 1937, the first AMB group —four physicians and six nurses, together with support staff— arrived in Barcelona under the direction of New York surgeon Edward H. Barsky, one of AMB’s chief promoters. Over the course of the war, around two hundred volunteers traveled to Spain under the AMB’s auspices.

Fearless hearts: U.S. Women on Spain's Civil War front

As noted above, various women from the United States participated in the Spanish Civil War in different ways —whether serving in medical roles, carrying out humanitarian relief, working as journalists, or even acting as political activists. Although they were not numerous—the Friends of the International Brigades estimate around eighty-five —many arrived alone as part of different volunteer contingents, while others came in the company of their husbands.

This article focuses on the female cohort that went to the Republican zone, but we should not overlook that U.S. women also offered their collaboration in the rebel zone, and that there were women who provided humanitarian assistance from a stance of neutrality, without any political affiliation or sympathy for either of the warring sides.

Among those who joined through associations and support groups for the Second Republic, the women who entered through the AMB mostly had a solid education, which allowed them to take on responsibilities in the medical sphere —either thanks to training as nurses or by supporting administrative and logistical work— even though some lacked specific medical experience. Their contribution did not end with the war; many maintained their ideological commitment in subsequent years, continuing the struggle against fascism and supporting the Republican cause. (Coale, 2005: 90)

Although their motivations varied —from personal interests to the desire for adventure— most, according to their own testimonies, were driven by ideological convictions. They joined to defend democracy or to confront the growing threat of fascism. These women not only provided medical care and support in field hospitals; they also took part in fundraising campaigns and public lectures to raise awareness of the conflict in Spain. Standout figures include Lillian Hellman, Dorothy Parker and Martha Gellhorn, who helped bring visibility to Spain's cause in the international arena. (De la Guardia, 2009: 469)

Nurses played a fundamental role in humanitarian work during the Spanish Civil War, serving both in field hospitals and at the front: administering medication, treating battle wounds, offering emotional support to the injured, and more. They performed their duties in the midst of war, under extraordinarily harsh personal conditions—far from their families and constantly exposed to the danger of bombs and frontline fire. Many of these courageous women lost their lives; others were wounded; and very few avoided illnesses such as dysentery, fevers, or other infections. Resources were scarce, shifts extraordinarily long, and the effort required pushed them to the limits of their capacities. (Rodrigo, 2017: 183–186)

In some of the most intense battles of the war —Jarama, Teruel, Belchite— the constant stream of wounded arriving at field hospitals was the day-to-day reality for medical personnel stationed there. On many occasions they lacked the capacity to attend to all the wounded under optimal conditions, which generated deep frustration. These circumstances led to the implementation of improvements in medical practice, producing a noteworthy reduction in mortality among the war-wounded in comparison with the First World War (Coale, 2005: 88). In this regard, it should be emphasized that, broadly speaking, Spanish Military Health Services were far from ill-prepared, drawing on experience from the Moroccan Wars. Their preparation was further stimulated by advances such as Dr. Josep Trueta's method, which "avoided countless amputations and deaths due to septicemia caused by war wounds." In connection with these medical advances —which were later consolidated during the Second World War— we also crafted a prompt before consulting secondary sources, with two aims: first, to try to find leads that might facilitate the search for information; and second, to compare whether information offered by Generative AI coincided in any way with academic sources. In this case, the response we obtained

helped us meet those aims: “Dr. Josep Trueta, a Catalan physician, was a leading figure. He developed a revolutionary method for treating open wounds, known as the ‘Trueta method’, which consisted of debridement, antisepsis, and immobilization with a plaster cast, drastically reducing infections and saving many lives.” Here, the answer did indeed guide us toward an appropriate search via Dr. Trueta’s name and, although it did not provide a bibliographic reference because we had not requested one in the prompt, there is clear concordance between the AI-generated response and data in an academic publication.

Today we know many of the stories lived in those field hospitals, and among the volunteers who worked with the International Brigades, thanks to associations such as ALBA (The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives). ALBA defines itself as a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting social activism and the defense of human rights, inspired by the American volunteers of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade who fought against fascism in the Spanish Civil War. It works to preserve their legacy. In fact, on its website one can find a list of brigaders’ biographies —an invaluable resource that helps us learn their stories and enables us to retell them.

From the outbreak of the war, many nurses joined the Republican cause, whether because they happened to be in Spain on holiday or traveling, or because they were in Barcelona on the eve of the planned People’s Olympiad (Olimpiada Popular). Conceived “as a pacifist and anti-fascist demonstration around sport and culture...” (Gounot, 2005: 115), the event —scheduled for 19–26 July 1936— was, as is known, cut short by the start of the Civil War.

Most nurses reached Spain in late 1936 or early 1937, and their participation unfolded in units organized and financially backed by different countries that provided medical assistance to the government of the Second Republic. These health professionals integrated into multidisciplinary teams that included managers, administrative staff, physicians, interpreters, pharmacists, stretcher-bearers, ambulance drivers, among others. All left the country before the war’s conclusion, when the Second Republic opted to withdraw foreign personnel. (Rodrigo, 2017: 161–165) In the case of U.S. brigaders and a significant number of humanitarian volunteers, their return from Spain was followed by investigations launched by the House Committee on Un-American Activities in August 1938. Documentation produced by that Committee already stated at the time that the International Brigades —and, by extension, the Abraham Lincoln Brigade— were closely linked to the Soviet Union: “*The International Brigade is the ‘red’ army of Spain, composed of radicals of all countries, but chiefly of Russian ‘red’ troops*” (Rodríguez, 2019: 112).

As for nurses from the United States, as noted above, one contingent arrived under the direction of Dr. Edward Barsky and Fredericka Martin, head nurse of the volunteer nurses who came to Spain —and about whom there is substantial documentation in the Special Collections at New York University. Both oversaw logistics, seeking to build an organized work network: beyond direct medical care, they also assisted with administrative tasks such as medical-record management, coordination of shifts and schedules, organization of medical supplies, ambulance driving, and communication with other hospitals (Coale, 2005: 88).

In fact, their role went much further, as they became directly involved with Spanish society. For example, over the radio they announced free nursing classes to train more people who could help from the health-care side at the front. This was, in a sense, a way of reaching out to Spanish society and seeking integration into it. Alongside the clinical actions implemented in different Republican areas, it is important to highlight their public outreach regarding what was happening in Spain —chiefly through lecture tours in the United States aimed at raising funds to help the Second Republic, supporting the maintenance of U.S. medical services in Spain, or recruiting more nurses. For instance, the aforementioned Fredericka Martin returned to the United States in February 1938 to “conduct

a yearlong national speaking tour, recruiting personnel and raising funds to keep the medical volunteers in Spain supplied.” This combination of humanitarian care and public advocacy to inform U.S. audiences about Spain’s situation —and the need to mobilize American civil society to send aid— became standard practice.

Returning to their work in nursing, we can underline their role in the establishment of various hospitals and medical centers across different parts of Spain—often field hospitals set up close to the front line. A few notable examples include: a hospital near El Romeral (Toledo province), very close to the Jarama Front, opened in 1937 —where, as is known, one of the rebels’ bloodiest offensives sought to cut communications with Madrid; Hospital Villa Paz in Saelices (Cuenca), created by the Abraham Lincoln Battalion of the XV International Brigade and offering 250 beds; and additional facilities established in Belchite (Zaragoza), Gandesa (Tarragona) and Cuevas Labradas (Teruel) which functioned practically as operating theaters to treat the war’s many wounded. In Tarancón (Cuenca), they also set up three hospital complexes. If we pose the following prompt to a generative-AI system— “I need to know whether, during the Spanish Civil War, members of the International Brigades who came to fight in Spain founded an American hospital in Tarancón (province of Cuenca). I want to know how many physicians and how many nurses worked there.” —the tool returns information which, in this case, does cite previously published sources:

“During the Spanish Civil War, members of the International Brigades established several hospitals in Tarancón, province of Cuenca, to care for the wounded. In February 1937, the first U.S. medical unit arrived in Tarancón and set up three hospitals known as American Hospital No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3, located in different buildings in the town. These hospitals were crucial during the Jarama and Guadalajara battles, treating numerous wounded. However, due to the constant bombardment Tarancón suffered during that period, part of the medical services was moved to safer areas... As for medical staff, while there are no exact figures specifically for the Tarancón hospitals, it is known that in early 1938 the International Brigades’ medical service comprised approximately 240 doctors of different nationalities, more than 800 practitioners, and around 1,500 nurses and auxiliaries, distributed across various hospitals. It is likely that a significant proportion of this personnel was assigned to the Tarancón hospitals, given their central role in wartime medical care.”

The figures provided by Generative Artificial Intelligence do not differ greatly from those reported by some authors, who indicate that, in 1937, roughly 220 physicians and 580 nurses were active in Spain, attached either to the International Brigades or to various voluntary organizations. Their work extended across 23 hospitals with a combined 500 beds, 13 surgical teams, about 130 ambulances, seven surgical railcars, three casualty-evacuation groups, and several rear-area hospitals. (Coale, 2005: 89) In this case, the AI system does cite, across the paragraphs it generates, some of the bibliographic sources it claims to have used in composing the text —specifically, a chapter by Esteban González López and Rosa Ríos on medical brigaders in the Spanish war, included in the University of Castilla–La Mancha’s collection *El pasado que no pasa: la Guerra Civil española a los ochenta años de su finalización*, as well as an article from a cultural journal in Tarancón. Naturally, both works have been reviewed by the present authors to check whether the Generative AI in fact drew on those sources to produce its response.

One U.S. nurse who played a particularly significant role during her time in Spain was Salaria Kea. An African American nurse, she not only performed crucial clinical work but also took an active part in political activism. She traveled to Spain through the Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy and, after returning to the United States, continued to raise funds and public awareness for the Republican cause. Her testimony appeared in

1938 in *A Negro Nurse in Republican Spain*, in which she narrated her experience and the challenges she faced, especially those related to racial segregation. For her, being authorized in Spain to care for white patients marked an unprecedented turning point, bringing into sharp focus the discrimination she had endured in her own country. Indeed, in 1936 she volunteered with the American Red Cross to serve as a nurse in Ohio, a state then devastated by severe flooding, and the humanitarian body denied her the opportunity to help (del Valle, 2007: 30). Her written testimony was reprinted in February 1977 by the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade association.

Kea repeatedly underscored the importance of training provided to Spanish girls and women in the hospitals where she worked, highlighting the connection and solidarity that this mission fostered. She also emphasized the diversity that characterized the field hospitals, where soldiers from many parts of the world and of different races joined together in the fight against fascism, setting aside individual differences to collaborate toward a common goal. In her view, it was clear why “Negroes” —as she herself writes— should fight and provide humanitarian aid in Spain’s war. She argued, in particular, that Mussolini’s Italy, which was collaborating intensively with the Francoist side, had invaded Ethiopia, and that when that invasion occurred, young Black volunteers who offered to go and fight the fascists in Ethiopia were not allowed to go. For her, fighting in Spain and defeating the Italians there was the first step toward reclaiming Ethiopia (Kea, 1938: 1).

Beyond Kea’s first-person account, there are various studies —such as those by María Luz Arroyo and Carmen Cañete— that address aspects of this highly charismatic figure. If we turn to Generative AI and craft a prompt specifying inclusion of bibliographic references as a criterion, the system indeed returns several titles. It is undoubtedly useful to see a bibliography that purportedly supported the generated text. In this case, the list was:

“Hochschild, Adam. *Spain in Our Hearts: Americans in the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016.

Kea, Salaria. *A Negro Nurse in Republican Spain*. New York: Negro Publication Society of America, 1938.

Nash, Mary. *Rojas: Las mujeres republicanas en la Guerra Civil*. Barcelona: Ediciones B, 1999.

International Brigades Archive. ‘Salaria Kea Biography.’ Tamiment Library, New York University.”

There is no doubt that Kea’s own work and the information on her preserved in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade collections —indeed housed at Tamiment Library— are sources legitimately used to generate a profile when requested. Even so, the references require closer scrutiny to verify whether they truly served as academic support for the profile of Salaria Kea. In Hochschild’s book there are, to be sure, references to Kea; however, in Mary Nash’s *Rojas* there are no references to the African American nurse, nor to the work performed by U.S. (or other foreign) women volunteers in caring for the wounded during the war. We therefore insist that AI-generated results must be handled scrupulously.

Another American who formed part of that female volunteer corps in nursing was Lini de Vries. She belonged to the contingent of nurses who arrived in February 1937, experienced first-hand what occurred during the Battle of Jarama, and in fact went on to head American Hospital No. 3 (Phillips & Wever, 2018) —a responsibility likely entrusted to her because she already had prior experience in nursing and social work. In that American Hospital, de Vries lived through dramatic situations that she herself described in the memoirs she published in 1968:

“Our hospital was planned for fifty. A little later, that same day, we had two hundred. I was on the first floor where they arrived; those who had died en route had been left in the frozen courtyard. The wounded lay on the floor or two or three to a bed. We struggled first to keep them alive. Then we took their surnames to register them as wounded. When we had time, we tore the clothes from the frozen, rigid dead to see if they had letters or information for identification. I cut the clothes from boys I had danced with on our voyage to Spain.”

Before traveling to Spain, de Vries had already gone through a number of experiences that had awakened in her a strong commitment to social and political causes. She was a member of the League Against War and Fascism, and after her experience in Spain she returned to the United States and began a lecture tour to explain the importance of aiding the Republican government. She placed particular emphasis on the struggle, effort and adaptability of Spanish women. One striking example appears in Coale’s 2005 book, quoting a letter included in *Madrid 1937: Letters of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade from the Spanish Civil War*:

“They live in a semi-feudal society and yet they are on a much higher level of political thought than the American proletariat. They are lively, sensitive and intelligent (...). My nurse, Modesta, arrived yesterday afternoon with an ambulance. No task is too much for her; four weeks ago she was a peasant and today she gives injections.” (Coale, 2005: 90)

As noted above, the number of volunteer nurses who served during the Spanish conflict was greater than the two individuals highlighted here — Salaria Kea and Lini de Vries— but we single out their trajectories as part of a broader research process currently being carried out in preparation for a doctoral thesis.

Pens and trenches: U.S. Journalist on the news Front of the Spanish Civil War

U.S. women also traveled to Spain to carry out work of a more intellectual nature rather than first-line medical aid. Some were professional journalists, others delegates of support organizations, and others writers. As correspondents for various U.S. print outlets we might single out figures well known to the general public such as Martha Gellhorn, who wrote for *Collier’s*, *The Nation* and *Harper’s Bazaar*, or Virginia Cowles, linked to the Hearst group. Nor should we overlook names such as Lone Robinson, author of a series of drawings (e.g., *Spanish Children*) exhibited as an art show in various U.S. cities; Eleanor Packard (*United Press*); Elizabeth Deeble (*The Washington Post*); Annita Brenner (*The New York Times* and *The Nation*); Frances Davis (*Chicago Daily News*); Josephine Herbst (*New Masses* and *The Nation*); and Olga Kaltenborn (*The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*).

Information on these correspondents is, in some cases, relatively easy to locate; authors such as Watling and Díaz Nosty are currently working to reconstruct many of their biographies. In keeping with our initial approach to the possibilities offered by Generative AI, we also designed a prompt to see which names it might supply or whether it could furnish complementary information. The prompt read: “During the Spanish Civil War, U.S. women journalists and writers were in Spain reporting on the conflict both in the Republican zone and the Francoist zone. I need information to prepare an academic article about

them that includes a bibliography.” In this case, the AI generated two responses that differed only in format, since the content was virtually identical. In terms of substance, it supplied only two names —Martha Gellhorn and Virginia Cowles— referring us to sources such as Wikipedia, *The New Yorker*, or *eldiario.es*. It did, however, offer a recommendation we consider highly appropriate:

“For a deeper understanding of the role of foreign women journalists in the Spanish Civil War, the following work is recommended:

Díaz Nosty, Bernardo. *Periodistas extranjeras en la Guerra Civil*. Editorial Renacimiento, 2022.

This comprehensive study identifies nearly 200 foreign journalists, photojournalists and press collaborators who reported on the Spanish Civil War. It offers biographical profiles, excerpts from their chronicles and an analysis of their impact on coverage of the conflict.

This book is an invaluable source for understanding the contribution and perspective of foreign women journalists during the Spanish Civil War.”

U.S. women correspondents also played a significant role in conveying information about events unfolding in Spain as the confrontation advanced. They helped to publicize in the United States the situation Spain was undergoing —especially the suffering of civilians— while seeking to awaken consciences about the need to contribute to relief efforts for the areas hardest hit by the conflict. Thus, for example, Virginia Cowles (Cowles, 2018) described in her chronicles the contrast between everyday life in the cities and the harshness of the bombardments, underscoring the “paradox of normality amid destruction” endured by civilians. Through her articles she sought to sensitize U.S. public opinion and encourage the sending of humanitarian aid. Similarly, other correspondents and writers — such as Martha Gellhorn, Dorothy Parker and Lillian Hellman— organized fundraising campaigns in the United States and published texts that, besides reporting on the tragedy in Spain, appealed to their compatriots’ moral responsibility to offer solidarity (Anton-Solanas, 2010). In this way, these women played an essential role in raising awareness and promoting U.S. support for the populations hardest hit by the conflict.

Significantly, women’s participation in narrating the Spanish war challenged conventional gender roles, marking a milestone that, in some measure, paved the way for subsequent generations of journalists. These professionals helped shape narratives that crossed borders, drawing international attention to the conflict. Positioned at the vanguard, they were fundamental in building a more comprehensive understanding of the Spanish Civil War. Their courageous work not only left an indelible mark on journalistic history but also helped transform entrenched perceptions of women’s place in reporting on historical events. We know the experiences of some of the best reporters in Spain today thanks to their letters, articles and memoirs. We should recognize that what journalists wrote was crucial to how public opinion in other democracies understood the Second Republic.

On many occasions, those who practiced journalism risked their lives to inform. Among women, a significant case was Gerda Taro, a German photojournalist considered the first female war photojournalist, who, as is well known, died on the Madrid Front at the end of July 1937. Beyond personal risk, they also had to confront censorship, which had a significant impact on correspondents’ reports. Censorship was applied by both sides to prevent the dissemination of sensitive information or to avoid undermining morale among the population and the troops.

The debate over whether women were assigned “less grim” aspects of the war at editors’ request is of limited relevance and lacks evidence to support broad generalization. It is more accurate to consider pre-set editorial values that determined content. Women’s

inclusion in journalism as a step toward equality was more notable in progressive outlets than in conservative ones, which helped expand the female readership and, consequently, boost sales. During the conflict, a considerable number of women entered journalism, surpassing historical rates. Their writing —shaped by the ideological orientation of their outlets or by personal initiative— reflected values of sensitivity and compassion and addressed significant aspects often absent from the male narrative. Pejorative terms such as “women’s topics” or “soft features” do not do justice to the importance of their contributions. Despite their diversity, these texts tended to emphasize human rights and to condemn the persistence of irrationality and barbarism in historical processes. Women’s participation in journalism also entailed an increase in their public presence, enabling them to offer critical perspectives or simply to reflect other existential concerns in news coverage (Meuret, 2015: 79).

In this regard, it may be noted that some of these women correspondents sought to bring readers closer to the horrors of war through a vantage point in which a deeply human perspective is ever present. We see this, for example, in the following fragment by Martha Gellhorn, highlighted by Bernardo Díaz Nosty in one of his recent works:

“An old woman, with a shawl over her shoulders, grasps the hand of a thin child and starts running to cross the street [...] When they are halfway across, a piece of twisted, red-hot, razor-sharp steel breaks off from the shell and strikes the child in the throat. The old woman stands still, holding the hand of the dead child, staring at him, dazed, saying nothing, and the men run over to take him away.” (Díaz, 2022).

Ultimately, in contrast to the normalization of violence in contemporary news coverage, these women approached the exceptionality of suffering and death not only among soldiers at the front. During the Spanish War, the systematic bombing of civilians was witnessed for the first time —a distinctive phenomenon that foreshadowed the scenarios of future conflicts. Fatality was not confined to the battlefield; it also reached the rear, striking defenseless individuals.

Among the American women who served as correspondents in Spain during the war, there were not only sympathizers of the Republican side filing reports from that zone; there were also accounts by women who wrote in favor of Franco. One such figure was Aileen O’Brien, of Irish-American descent, who, in addition to her work as a writer, displayed considerable activism in promoting the supposed virtues of the Francoist regime, and even “worked as a volunteer nurse, performing first aid in combat zones and herself being seriously wounded on one occasion.” (Escobedo, 2023: 192). O’Brien went so far as to say that Franco was the most impressive figure she had encountered in her life —despite his shyness— and that Spain under his control, even in wartime, was the happy Spain of old, which would never be fascist but rather Catholic Spain, invoking the alleged restorative benefits of the Holy Inquisition (Díaz, 2022). In this sense, O’Brien belonged to that sector of U.S. Catholic opinion shaped by the early reports that circulated as the war began. Other women who also wrote their chronicles from the Francoist zone included Helen Nicholson and Jane Anderson.

Another added difficulty faced by U.S. journalists was that the editorial line of many newspapers at the time aligned more with defense of Francoist actions than with support for the Republic. This created publication obstacles; for example, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* was openly at odds with the Republican government. One of its correspondents, Jay Allen, was in fact dismissed by the paper on the grounds that his dispatches and articles were clear arguments in favor of the Second Republic. As Martha Gellhorn later wrote, however, explaining the Republic’s cause “was not a band of blood-thirsty reds nor the effect of the Russian claw” (Gellhorn, 1956).

In addition to women who came to Spain almost from the outset of the war as newspaper correspondents, there were also writers whose aim was not to cover daily news yet who clearly supported the Republican cause. Among the most prominent were Dorothy Parker and Lillian Hellman, who formed part of the large cohort of writers and poets present in Spain between 1936 and 1939. One of Parker's most acclaimed and famous short stories, "Soldiers of the Republic," was published shortly after her 1937 stay in Spain and "addresses the disaster of the Civil War as the narrator experiences it in Valencia" (Burgos, 2021). In her autobiography, Lillian Hellman recounted her time in the Spanish Civil War and her later resistance activities against the Nazis in Austria and Germany.

One of the most significant features of foreign women journalists' reporting is its proximity to lesser-known facets of the war, underscoring that the humanitarian crisis did not occur exclusively on the battlefields, nor was journalistic interest confined to barracks or government offices. Horror and death were also palpable in city streets, where life ebbed away in makeshift hospitals, and morgues offered harrowing images —just as we saw above in Gellhorn's account of a child's death. Nor should we forget the articles that denounced war crimes, with detailed descriptions of the consequences of bombardments. A near-universal pattern in these pieces was the emphasis on civilians' plight and on the injustice of the relentless bombing they endured.

The number of women who came to Spain as journalists is estimated at around 189, though D  az Nosty —the scholar who has worked most extensively on the presence of women correspondents— acknowledges that gaps in the data prevent us from knowing the exact figure. As in the section devoted to nurses, here we have confined ourselves to only a few cases, since our research is broader, as indicated. These journalists left a large corpus of articles that helps us to understand the war through their gaze and perspective, and to approach their day-to-day experience during the conflict.

Conclusions

This article has explored —both methodologically and substantively— the role and significance of U.S. women who took part in the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). Their contribution has been examined chiefly in two domains: health care, especially through organizations such as the American Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy, and journalistic/intellectual coverage by various U.S. correspondents and writers. As shown, both facets were decisive for understanding the conflict's international projection and the mobilization of transatlantic solidarities.

First, the methodological approach based on Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) has illustrated the possibilities and limits of this new tool. The capacity of ChatGPT and similar applications to deliver rapid information, identify patterns, or summarize sources is highly valuable for contemporary researchers; at the same time, we have underscored the dangers of hallucinations —that is, the generation of data or references with no factual basis. This phenomenon demands constant verification through traditional methods of reading primary and secondary sources. GenAI thus emerges as a complementary, not substitutive, instrument: it can accelerate searching and cross-checking, but must be framed within ethical and rigorous practice in historical research.

Second, we have delved into the roles played by different U.S. women during the war. In the health-care and humanitarian sphere, volunteer nurses —often linked to U.S. associations such as AMB— brought their expertise to field hospitals and areas near the front. Figures such as Salaria Kea and Lini de Vries exemplify how, motivated by anti-fascist ideals and a commitment to solidarity, they integrated into a context marked by shortages of personnel and medical supplies. At a moment when the Second Republic needed external aid, their involvement substantially reinforced medical care and

introduced innovations through their training. Their testimonies also reveal the multicultural dimension of the Republican front and the specific challenges they faced: scarcity of resources, language barriers, and —in some cases— racial discrimination in their own country. Kea's trajectory, in particular, illuminates the connection between the anti-fascist struggle in Spain and the civil-rights movement in the United States.

In journalism, U.S. reporters and correspondents —including Martha Gellhorn, Virginia Cowles, Dorothy Parker, and Lillian Hellman, among others— highlighted the everyday tragedies that struck both the rear and the front, with a gaze often attuned to the human impact and the suffering of civilians. Their chronicles and articles not only offered a closer, more empathetic view of the war; they also played a decisive role in U.S. public opinion, awakening consciences and encouraging moral and financial support for the Republican cause. Detailed attention to daily life in bombed cities and to the testimonies of the wounded was essential to this informational work. At the same time, some correspondents openly supported the Francoist cause, confirming that there was no monolithic bloc of journalists in favor of the Republic, but rather a plurality of political positions —a complex landscape in which professional reporting intersected with ideological militancy.

Third, this research highlights the synergies between these two dimensions (medical and journalistic) and their link to solidarity initiatives. Many of the U.S. women who served as nurses or medical volunteers became, upon returning home, key voices in raising awareness among American society about the situation in Republican Spain—fundraising and publicizing the realities of the conflict. For their part, correspondents helped craft a narrative that humanized the victims of war and justified, before U.S. audiences, the importance of becoming involved in support of the Republic.

Fourth, this work offers a critical analysis of how Generative AI —when used properly— can streamline bibliographic searches and the discovery of clues and new primary and secondary sources. Tools such as ChatPDF or Copilot help filter information and break down long documents, allowing researchers to optimize their time and, in some cases, access data that is hard to locate in digital libraries. Nevertheless, the need to collate and verify AI outputs against archives and traditional sources remains beyond question. It is advisable to craft prompts that are increasingly precise, detailed, and purpose-driven, and to maintain constant vigilance against the invention of facts or citations.

Finally, we should underline the historiographical relevance of the approach adopted: by focusing on U.S. women who participated in the Civil War, we recover a chapter not always addressed in academic literature. As volunteers who often moved between the front and the rear, or as foreign correspondents with perspectives different from those of the era's marquee journalists, these women's voices shed light on everyday realities that historians have not always investigated with sufficient depth. Giving visibility to these individual itineraries —especially those less documented than the careers of more famous figures— consolidates a vision of the conflict as genuinely international in scope.

In conclusion, the dual lens of GenAI's contribution and the recovery of U.S. women's memories during the Spanish Civil War illuminates one of the most significant aspects of contemporary history: the articulation of solidarity networks and the construction of international narratives in the face of fascist barbarism. This article confirms the importance of deepening our engagement with these testimonies —not only to recover voices that time has tended to silence, but also to understand the motivations, tensions and achievements of women who, driven by personal and political convictions, chose to live and bear witness on the front lines of one of the twentieth century's most dramatic conflicts. Looking ahead, future research could broaden the scope to other groups of foreign volunteers —from different countries— and conduct comparative assessments of their roles in media coverage, humanitarian care, and the subsequent transmission of wartime experience in their home countries. In this way, we will help complete a historiographical mosaic that—thanks to the

synergistic use of Generative AI and classical research methods—is today more accessible and compelling than ever.

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