

## Irish correspondent Gertrude Gaffney's work on the Spanish Civil War. A qualitative analysis of bias and journalistic standards

Renée Lugschitz<sup>1</sup> y Jose Alberto García-Avilés<sup>2</sup>

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**Abstract.** The Spanish Civil War was the first conflict reported by many female war correspondents. One of them was the Irish Gertrude Gaffney, whose position as a female reporter in this conflict was remarkable in various respects. In contrast to her often inexperienced female colleagues, the correspondent for the *Irish Independent* was already a highly reputed political journalist in her home country. She was one of the very few female journalists to report on Franco's side, and among those who published the most on the Spanish Civil War. Using Gaffney's coverage as a case study to show the relationship between partiality and journalistic quality, this paper examines bias and compliance with journalistic values in her 23 articles on the Spanish Civil War published in two series in 1937.

**Keywords.** Spanish Civil War; female war correspondents; foreign press; journalism quality; Gertrude Gaffney

### [es] El trabajo de la corresponsal irlandesa Gertrude Gaffney sobre la Guerra Civil española. Análisis cualitativo de la parcialidad y los estándares periodísticos

**Resumen.** La Guerra Civil española fue el primer conflicto del que informaron muchas mujeres corresponsales de guerra. Una de ellas fue la irlandesa Gertrude Gaffney, cuyo papel como reportera en este conflicto fue notable en varios aspectos. A diferencia de sus colegas femeninas, a menudo poco experimentadas, la corresponsal del *Irish Independent* ya era una periodista política de gran reputación en su país. Fue una de las pocas mujeres periodistas que informó del lado de Franco, y una de las que más publicó sobre la Guerra Civil española. Utilizando la cobertura de Gaffney como estudio de caso para mostrar la relación entre la parcialidad y la calidad del periodismo, este trabajo examina el sesgo y los valores periodísticos en sus 23 artículos sobre la Guerra Civil española publicados en dos series durante 1937.

**Palabras claves.** Guerra Civil española; mujeres corresponsales de guerra; prensa extranjera; calidad del periodismo; Gertrude Gaffney

**Summary.** 1. Introduction. 2. Hypothesis and objectives. 3. Methodology 4. Results. 5. Discussion: Comparing Gaffney's war reporting with female colleagues 6. Conclusion

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### 1. Introduction: Gertrude Gaffney as a foreign correspondent in the Spanish Civil War

The Spanish Civil War was the first conflict to be covered by female reporters to a significant extent. We could register with some biographical details more than 50 women from many parts of the world working from Spain for international media from 1936 to 1939 (Karmasin, Kraus and Lugschitz, 2017). Previously, there had only been very few women, individual cases, who reported as professional correspondents from war zones (Sebba, 2013). In the 1930s, achievements of the international emancipatory movements allowed women to play a more active role in political

life, which is also reflected in the number of female volunteers who took part in the Spanish Civil War. At least 600 foreign women came to Spain as doctors, translators, nurses, militia women, administrative staff, and journalists. Most of them supported the Republican side (Lugschitz, 2012; Schiborowski and Kochnowski, 2016<sup>3</sup>).

The large number of female correspondents is also due to the ideological dimension of the conflict. It was considered to not be a mere Spanish conflict but a proxy war for the whole continent between fascism and democracy. It "was recognised as a battle of ideas, ideals and ideologies, which meant that issues of mediation and representation assumed critical im-

<sup>1</sup> Medienhaus Wien (Austria)  
E-mail: renee.lugschitz@text-o.com

<sup>2</sup> Universidad Miguel Hernández (España)  
E-mail: jose.garciaa@umh.es

<sup>3</sup> Schiborowski and Kochnowski list around 1,000 women whose names, however, could not all be verified.

portance” (Deacon, 2008a, p. 393). Foreign powers got involved in the Spanish conflict. From immediately after the military coup in July 1936, the Nationalists’ side was supported by Hitler and Mussolini, and the Spanish government received help from international volunteers (Beevor, 2006; Graham, 2008). Hundreds of reporters came to see the conflict with their own eyes. Armero counted 950 foreign journalists in Spain; this gives at least an indication of the extent of international press coverage<sup>4</sup>. The great majority were male correspondents but there were also dozens of female reporters.

Gertrude Gaffney had a special position among them: she was one of the very few female journalists to report from Franco’s side. Hardly any other female correspondent in Spain already had such a high professional reputation as the *Irish Independent* correspondent. Gaffney had been an important part of the staff there for many years, and was “afforded of roving brief (including the right to contribute articles on foreign and domestic politics)”, an honour that even male colleagues rarely received at the time (Horgan, 2011, p. 116). She was considered to be “one of Ireland’s best known lady journalists” (Noted Woman Journalist, December 10, 1959). In 1937, the *Irish Independent* published two detailed series with a total of 23 articles by “Special Correspondent” Gertrude Gaffney about the Spanish Civil War. This made her one of the female correspondents who reported most extensively on this conflict in a foreign newspaper.

Despite her prominence in Ireland, the life and work of Gertrude Gaffney has so far only appeared on the margins of various studies of Ireland’s history, on the Irish press and its role in the Spanish Civil War (Luddy, 2005; Ryan, 1998, 2003; Soler Paricio, 2013). From 1920 to 1946, she wrote regularly for the *Irish Independent*, then more rarely until 1958. She had her own regular columns like “Leaves from a Woman’s Diary. By G. G.”, which dealt with social and political issues from a female perspective. On the one hand, she advocated the principle of gender equality and women’s employment rights; on the other hand, she criticised women who wore trousers or smoked in public (Gaffney, August 30, 1926, October 16, 1920, May 07, 1937; see also Ryan, 1998, p. 192). She died in December 1959.

In the 1930s, her employer, the *Irish Independent*, was the largest Irish newspaper and “the mouthpiece of the conservative, Catholic Ireland – a policy that reached its political and commercial zenith during the Spanish conflict” (O’Brien, 2017, p. 347). Founded in 1905, the *Irish Independent* was Ireland’s first mass-market newspaper; in 1935, it had a circulation of 123,000 copies (O’Brien, 2017, p. 347). From the outbreak of the war, the newspaper presented the conflict “in bellicose terms as a Catholic crusade against communism”, and “concentrated on discrediting the

legitimacy of the Republican government” (McGarry, 2002, pp. 69–70).

In January 1937, Gaffney was sent to Spain as a special correspondent to give a “first-hand, authentic account of conditions behind the war-fronts” as the *Irish Independent* (In War-Torn Spain, February 19, 1937) advertised. She crossed the border at Irún and went from there to San Sebastián, then on to Salamanca, Cáceres, finally she tried to get close to Madrid, and her journey ended in Pozuelo de Alarcón, about 15 kilometres from the capital. In autumn 1937, Gaffney came back to Spain and again crossed the border at Irún and went to San Sebastián, then made her way to Burgos and Palencia to get to León and from there on to the Asturias front. After each journey, upon her return to Ireland, she published a series of articles, the first in 13 parts, and the second in 10 parts.

Given the importance of the newspaper for which Gaffney was the only Spain correspondent on the Franco side at that time, her series must be seen as having had a significant impact on public opinion about the Spanish Civil War in Ireland. McGarry (2002) and O’Brien (2017), who have studied the Irish press and its attitude towards the Spanish Civil War, both judge Gaffney’s reporting as superficial and purely guided by interests: “Gaffney’s articles shed more light on the Independent’s outlook than on the complexities of the war” (McGarry, 2002, p. 81).

The question of the role of the foreign press in the Spanish Civil War has been discussed in international monographies on the Spanish Civil War (Beevor, 2006) and on war reporting (Knightley 2003) as in specialised studies on broadcasting (Davies, 1999), focusing on representatives of one country (Deacon, 2008a, 2008b; Valis, 2017) or on individual (female) journalists and their coverage (Aguilera-Linde, 2017; Murphy, 2016; Rankin, 2003).

Armero provided a first listing of correspondents already in 1976; the most detailed description was given by Preston (2008) three decades later. Some of these works have dealt with the question of foreign correspondents’ understanding of objectivity and the extent to which they sacrificed the search for truth to their own partiality. Knightley (2003) argues that partiality of the foreign correspondents in Spain distorted the truth:

The drawback of reporting with heart as well as mind is that if the cause is basically just, as the Republicans one undoubtedly was, the correspondent tends to write in terms of heroic endeavour, rather than face unpalatable facts, and to mislead his readers with unjustified optimism. (Knightley, 2003, no. 4583)

In contrast to Knightley, Preston (2008) stresses the point that “unpalatable truths can be dismissed

<sup>4</sup> Armero’s list is very useful as a starting point but as he names almost no sources, it is difficult to verify his list. He also included some names of women reporters, some of them correctly, some of them wrong and some could not be verified nor refuted; Armero did not list other female correspondents registered in our research.

as bias” (Preston, 2008, pos. 105) and argues that to express partiality means to be honest, as long as the journalist is committed to the truth (Preston, 2008, pos. 605-612).

Deacon (2008b) explores the work of female correspondents, but without systematically examining their new role in a male domain. As women, they were largely excluded from traditional war reporting on military aspects, and they were asked to focus on human touch reports about the civilian population. In their coverage, more emotionality and sympathy were admitted and even expected than in traditional war reporting (Karmasin et al., 2017; Jackson 2010).

From this starting point, we want to continue the discussion about partiality and its effect on journalistic quality by analysing the coverage of a female correspondent.

## 2. Hypothesis and objectives

Using Gaffney as a case study, this article aims to analyse possible bias and the journalistic standards in her articles as well as their correlation. Neutrality, or related terms such as non-partisanship, impartiality, is usually understood as part of journalistic quality (Deuze, 2005; Meier, 2019a). We examined partiality and journalistic quality separately, because we do not necessarily consider neutrality as a prerequisite for good journalism.

In the debate about journalistic quality, the principle of objectivity plays a key role. The various concepts of journalism over time have shared a commitment to truth: “The fundamental claim of journalism is to gain the truth”, as Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014) state. As professional journalism should provide guidance to citizens in modern democracies, objectivity was considered the basic principle to reach the truth (Bentele, 2008; Chalaby, 1998; Lichtenberg, 1991; Mindich, 1998; Schudson, 2008; Ward 2005). However, there are many interpretations of objectivity, depending on the journalistic culture in different times and countries (García-Avilés, 2015, p. 155). The complex debate about objectivity in the journalistic context can only be briefly sketched in the scope of this contribution. Three basic approaches are distinguished in the literature:

- a. The *proponents* of the traditional principle of objectivity, who see the role of journalists exclusively as detached, neutral, emotionless observers, who only present facts (see for example Chalaby, 1998; Figdor, 2010).
- b. The *pragmatists*. Knowing that the ideal of complete objectivity can never be achieved, they propose that the pursuit of it defines good journalistic craftsmanship (Bentele, 2008; Carpentier and Trioen, 2010; Tuchman, 1972; Ward, 2005; Zhang, 2014). Ward (2005), who established the term

“Pragmatic Objectivity”, considers it “a holistic, fallible, rational evaluation of reports” (Ward, 2005, 300).

- c. The *sceptics* argue the impossibility of neutrality and freedom of values and regard the concept of objectivity as inadequate as a journalistic standard (Kaplan, 2002; Muñoz-Torres, 2012). According to them, neutrality is not desirable at all for not taking a stand is basically subjective and helps the powerful (see for example Boudana, 2014; Kellner, 2008; McNair, 2013; Muñoz-Torres, 2012).

The traditional concept of objectivity focussing on neutrality and detachment was already questioned in the Spanish Civil War. U.S. journalist Martha Gellhorn, who supported the Republican side in the conflict, got furious about “all the objectivity shit” (Moorehead, 2004, p. 14). *New York Times* correspondent Herbert Matthews pleaded for neutrality and distance to be replaced, because “in condemning bias one rejects the only factors which really matter – honesty, understanding and thoroughness” (quoted in Knightley, 2003, pos. 4076). In doing so, they anticipated a concept that is discussed today: in the 1990s, Rosen demanded “properly attached” instead of “properly detached” journalists (quoted in Arant and Meyer, 1998, p. 216). In the post 9/11 era, Tumber and Prentoulis (2003, p. 228) see “a paradigmatic shift” in conflict reporting: “from detachment to involvement, from verification to assertion, from objectivity to subjectivity”. This is the so-called “journalism of attachment”, as coined by the BBC reporter Martin Bell (quoted in Zhang, 2014, 182).

This journalism of attachment can already be identified in the Spanish Civil War, even though there was no name for it at the time (Gellhorn, July 17, 1937, January 15, 1938; Cowles, October 26, 1937; Marchant, March 01, 1937). Many female reporters did also explicitly take a political position because for them it was clear from which side the injustice emanated (Karmasin et al., 2017).

Therefore, we consider a certain degree of partiality legitimate. There is a wide range of attitudes from (sincere) sympathy to (truth-distorting) partisanship: “Absolute propaganda and total professionalism are, of course, polarities on a continuum with many graduations” (Deacon, 2008a, p. 402). In our understanding, it is not the bias that is decisive, but the way it is handled. We advocate a pragmatic and flexible understanding of objectivity which does not exclude bias but demands the adherence to journalistic values.

The text analysis was carried out in two parts. The first part was to determine Gaffney’s bias. The second part of the text analysis examined Gaffney’s articles for compliance with widely recognised core journalistic standards. The results of both parts were then studied in relation to each other.

The research questions are:

1. How is Gaffney's partiality reflected in her articles?
2. Were essential journalistic standards met?
3. Which connections between partiality and journalistic quality can be identified?

We formulated two research hypotheses:

- H1. Gertrude Gaffney, in accordance with the editorial line of the *Irish Independent*, showed sympathy for General Franco and the Nationalists in her coverage.
- H2. Her partiality does not necessarily mean poor journalism. Decisive is the handling of the bias

and the sincere effort to give a truthful account of the events.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Sources

This paper is part of a comprehensive study on female war correspondents in the Spanish Civil War. Biographical details of the war correspondents as well as their professional and personal experiences were researched and examined in numerous international archives, see Table 1.

Table 1. Research in international archives

Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica, Salamanca
Spain archives – Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance, Vienna
Imperial War Museum, London
Liddell Hart Military Archives – King's College, London
University of Warwick Library, Warwick
Institut für Zeitungsforschung (Institute for Newspaper Research), Dortmund
Russian State Archive for Socio-Political History (RGASPI), Moscow
Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI), Moscow
International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam
Schlesinger Library, Harvard University
The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin
Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford
Library of Congress, Washington DC

This study is based on a qualitative text analysis from a total of 23 articles, divided into two series, written by Gertrude Gaffney as “Special Correspondent” after her two trips to Spain during the Civil War. The articles were published daily from the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February to the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 1937, with the title of the series being “In War-torn Spain”, and from the 25<sup>th</sup> of October to the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 1937. The articles can be assigned to the genre of reportage which combines information with a description of literary style (Yanes Mesa, 2004) and where facts and news are embedded in on-the-scene reporting, personal experience and emotions (Meier, 2019b). Only the last

article on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November was not in the style of a reportage, but explicitly a personal summary and assessment of the situation in Spain. Some passages from her regular column “Leaves from A Woman's Diary” that refer to the Spanish Civil War were not included in the analysis because they do not correspond to the type of war reporting in the narrower sense.

The articles were all downloaded as pdf-files from the online archive of the *Irish Independent* on the platform irishnewsarchive.com and were transcribed by the authors. For a complete list of the articles see Table 2.

Table 2. List of Spanish Civil War articles written by “Special Correspondent” Gertrude Gaffney in the *Irish Independent*

Month day 1937	Title	Page no.	Extension in words (without title and subtitles)
Feb. 22	In War-Torn Spain (I.). Over France's Frontier	6	2135
Feb. 23	In War-Torn Spain (II.). Charmss of Beautiful Basque Country	6	2166
Feb. 24	In War-Torn Spain (III.). Flight from Fury of Reds	7	3005
Feb. 25	In War-Torn Spain (IV.). Historic Salamanca Visited	6	2184
Feb. 26	In War-Torn Spain (V.). A Motor Break-down	6	2406
Feb. 27	In War-Torn Spain (VI.). We are attacked by Reds	6	3742

March 1	In War-Torn Spain (VII.). With the Irish Brigades in Caceres	6	2426
March 2	In War-Torn Spain (VIII.). Spirit of the Irish Brigade	6	2453
March 3	In War-Torn Spain (IX.). Irish Brigade's Day of Joy	6	2478
March 4	In War-Torn Spain (X.). A Struggle to the Death	6	2281
March 5	In War-Torn Spain (XI.). General Franco's Motto is Business as Usual	6	2252
March 6	In War-Torn Spain (XII.). I Reach the Suburbs of Madrid	6	2478
March 8	In War-Torn Spain (XIII.). In a Land the Godless Left Desolate	7	2281
Oct. 25	I Cross the French Frontier at Irun	9	1700
Oct. 26	Peace and Plenty in Nationalist Spain	7	1405
Oct. 27	Up to the Front Line among the Mountains	6	1621
Oct. 28	Nationalist Guns Go into Action	5	1388
Oct. 29	Prisoners of General Franco	6	1757
Oct. 30	Ruined Bridges of War-Torn Spain	9	2561
Nov. 1	Flag that Marked Army's Drive	7	1685
Nov. 2	A Narrow Escape from Red Fire	8	2601
Nov. 3	Unpleasantly Close to the Reds	7	2253
Nov. 4	A War to Save Spain for Spain	5	1945

### 3.2. Qualitative content analysis

For the evaluation of the coverage, qualitative content analysis as a “research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p. 1278) was applied. The analysis was carried out by the authors through meticulous reading. Support by digital programs was deliberately omitted.

#### The qualitative analysis consisted of two parts:

Part 1. Determination of partiality: the articles were examined for perceptible characteristics which express partiality such as blaming, heroisation, demonisation of a warring party, as well as the labelling of the warring parties<sup>5</sup> which in the context of the Spanish Civil War could give clear indications of the political attitude (Beever, 2006; Deacon, 2008b; Preston, 2008). The selection of these patterns was based on a first test reading considering relevant studies of discourse analysis, in particular *Análisis del Discurso Ideológico* by van Dijk (1996) and the scheme of war and peace journalism by Galtung (2003).

Table 3. Characteristics expressing partiality for Nationalists or Republicans

BLAMING	DEMONISATION	HEROISATION	IDENTIFICATION	LABELLING
Blaming one side for origins and consequences of the conflict.	Generalised condemnation of one side as criminals, plunderers, godless, murderers, etc.	Explicit admiration of personalities or groups from one side and their heroic deeds	Perception of the warring parties as “we” and the “enemy”, e.g. through expressions such as “enemy troops” or titles that emphasise the belonging together, e.g. “We are Attacked by Reds”.	Naming of the warring parties, e.g. <i>Republicans, Reds; Nationalists, Patriots, Francoists</i> (includes combined terms such as <i>Red troops, Franco zone...</i> ). Only expressions referring to a side as a whole and not to individual political groups were recorded.

Part 2. To establish the definite categories to be applied to Gaffney's work, we followed Meier's Matrix on Journalism Quality (Meier, 2019a), which highlights three key values – independence, truth/facticity, relevance (see also Deuze, 2005). We adapted the

associated criteria for our investigation. The next step was to define what they mean exactly in our context. In contrast to comparable studies, such as the one by González Gorosarri (2017), which examines the ob-

<sup>5</sup> Only terms that refer to an entire warring side and not to individual political groups were included.

servance of objectivity as a journalistic method, we do not take impartiality or neutrality as a basic value.

1. *Relevance* examines the importance of the news, the originality of the news angle, and the embedding of the information as well as the efforts of attractive storytelling and appropriate journalistic role perception.
2. *Facticity* evaluates the efforts of enquiry and transparency following criteria such as the quality and diversity of sources as well as their verifica-

tion and information on the circumstances of the research.

3. *Independence*. We understand independence as being open-minded. We set criteria such as displaying autonomy in the choice of topics, showing diversity representing different perspectives on the conflict, handling partiality in a transparent way and discussing official narratives.

The analysis was carried out according to the following evaluation template (see Table 4).

Table 4. Evaluation sheet – journalistic main values

<b>Value RELEVANCE</b>		<b>Criteria: Originality, contextualisation, and attractiveness of the story</b>	
<i>Does the audience benefit from reading the article in terms of knowledge enhancement, orientation and engaging, comprehensible narration?</i>			
<b>a. Focus &amp; embedding.</b> Is the article characterised by a special approach that goes beyond a mere news report? Such as detailed background information on military aspects, international dimension, consequences of war etc. and/or a special news angle?			
<input type="radio"/> Yes/predominantly	<input type="radio"/> Partly	<input type="radio"/> No	
<b>b. Attractive narration.</b> How was the information processed and presented?			
- Is there an individual voice perceptible (instead of unified, stereotype narrative)?			
- Does the length of the article seem adequate in relation to the information presented (as opposed to lengthy)?			
- Is the reading stimulating and does it meet widely accepted requirements such as a gripping teaser, an engaging introduction, anecdotes, lively presentation?			
- Does the article have a comprehensible structure?			
<input type="radio"/> Yes (at least 3 of 4)	<input type="radio"/> Partly	<input type="radio"/> No	
<b>c. Adequate Role Perception.</b> Does the journalist stay in the background as a narrator or does she use personal experiences in a decent way to illustrate the war and its consequences to her readers? (In contrast to playing the role of a protagonist in her own story.)			
<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> Partly	<input type="radio"/> No	
<b>Value FACTICITY</b>		<b>Criteria: Reliability and transparency of enquiry?</b>	
<i>How well is the presented information documented?</i>			
<b>d. Sources.</b> Is the origin of information transparent and are there references to different and diverse (official, independent, eyewitness) sources?			
<input type="radio"/> Yes, various, and diverse	<input type="radio"/> Partly	<input type="radio"/> No	
<b>e. Placing into perspective:</b> Is the reliability of sources discussed and/or is reference made to their possible partiality?			
<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> Partly	<input type="radio"/> No	
<b>f. Clear circumstances.</b> Does it become clear in the article with whom, when and where the journalist is?			
<input type="radio"/> Yes/predominantly	<input type="radio"/> Partly	<input type="radio"/> No	
<b>Value INDEPENDENCE</b>		<b>Criteria: Open-mindedness and autonomy</b>	
<i>Are there any clear efforts to distance herself from the official narrative and the personal bias, and to develop independent perspectives/considerations?</i>			
<b>g. Independent topics.</b> Is it possible to recognise independent choice of topics and of research in the article (in contrast to an officially accompanied trip without recognisable attempts to distance herself)?			
<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> Partly	<input type="radio"/> No	
<b>h. Diversity – different perspectives.</b> Are there any attempts at a differentiated representation of the events of the war from different perspectives, such as referring to Nationalist and Republican side; to civilian and military aspects; to the heterogeneity of the Republican side/ the Nationalist side; to different front sections telling different stories; to the range of gender roles, etc.			
<input type="radio"/> Yes, various from own enquiry and witnessing	<input type="radio"/> Partly	<input type="radio"/> No	
<b>i. Dealing with official propaganda.</b> Are official positions and narratives critically discussed (in contrast to adopted without reflection)?			
<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> Partly	<input type="radio"/> No	- Not referred to

## 4. Results: Gaffney's Coverage of the Spanish Civil War

### 4.1. The dimension of partiality

Gaffney's articles are characterised by her partisanship for the Nationalists (see Table 5).

- **Blaming:** In not a single one of her texts did Gaffney even mention a possible question of guilt of Franco and the Nationalists, but she repeatedly referred to the responsibility of the Republicans and their allies for origin and continuation of the war.
- **Demonisation:** In even more articles, 10 in total, Republicans are generally associated with devastation and/or looting.

- **Heroisation:** The heroisation of individual personalities and groups within the nationalists was a focus of Gaffney's reporting. In 11 articles, Gaffney emphasised her admiration for General Franco and other "war heroes" like General Aranda, and highlighted Franco's allies' "deeds".
- **Identification:** There is hardly any formal distance between Gaffney and the Franco side. The Republicans are the "enemy", she sees herself as an ally of the Nationalists.
- **Labelling of the warring parties:** Gertrude Gaffney referred in almost all of her articles to the Republicans as "Reds". This is a clearly pejorative term mainly used in the beginning of the war by other journalists (Deacon, 2008a, 129). For Franco's side, she primarily used the rather neutral "Nationalists" and sometimes the strongly positively

connoted terms “Patriots” and “Whites” which seem to legitimise the uprising of the military, without further argumentation being necessary. Gaffney also used the name “Franco” very often, but mostly referred to the General’s person and not to Francoists in general. For example, while other authors wrote about “Franco territory” (e.g. Cowles, October 17, 1937), Gaffney referred to

“Franco’s territory”. A reference to the great admiration she felt for Franco.

How this partiality affected the quality of her reporting is illustrated in more detail by the analysis of the main values. For an overview of the results see Table 5.

Table 5. Results of partialiy and journalistic quality analysis

Date		Characteristics expressing partiality					Journalistic quality. Features identifiable (Yes; Partly; No; - no ref)**									
Month	day	Blaming of	Demonisation of	Heroisation of	Identification with	Labelling Republican side*	Labelling Nationalist side*	Relevance			Facticity			Independence		
								a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i
<b>Series 1</b>																
Feb.	22	-	-	-	-	Reds	Nationalists, Patriots	N	P	N	P	N	P	N	P	P
Feb.	23	-	-	Nationalists	-	Reds	Nationalists, Patriots	P	P	P	P	N	P	N	P	N
Feb.	24	-	Republicans	Nationalists	Nationalists	Republicans, Reds	Nationalists	P	P	N	P	N	P	N	N	N
Feb.	25	-	-	Nationalists	Nationalists	-	Nationalists, Patriots	P	P	N	P	P	Y	N	N	N
Feb.	26	-	-	-	-	-	-	N	P	N	P	N	Y	N	N	-
Feb.	27	-	Republicans	-	Nationalists	Reds	Nationalists	N	P	N	P	N	P	P	N	-
March	1	-	-	Nationalists	Nationalists	Reds	-	P	P	P	P	N	Y	Y	P	N
March	2	-	-	Nationalists	Natinonalists	Reds	-	P	P	P	P	N	Y	Y	P	N
March	3	-	-	Nationalists	Nationalists	Reds	-	N	N	N	P	N	P	P	N	N
March	4	-	-	Nationalists	Nationalists	Reds	Nationalists	P	P	Y	N	N	N	N	P	N
March	5	-	Republicans	-	Nationalists	Reds	Nationalists	P	P	N	P	N	P	P	N	N
March	6	-	Republicans	-	Nationalists	Reds	Nationalists	P	Y	N	P	N	P	N	N	P
March	8	-	Republicans	-	Nationalists	Reds, Godless	Nationalists	N	P	N	P	N	Y	N	N	N
<b>Series 2</b>																
Oct.	25	Republicans	Republicans	-	-	Reds	Whites, Francoists	N	P	P	P	N	P	N	P	N
Oct.	26	-	-	-	-	Reds	Nationalists	N	P	P	P	N	P	N	N	N
Oct.	27	-	Republicans	Nationalists	Nationalists	Reds	Whites, Francoists	P	P	N	P	N	P	N	N	N
Oct.	28	-	-	-	Nationalists	Reds	Nationalists	N	P	N	P	N	P	N	N	-
Oct.	29	-	Republicans	-	-	Reds	Nationalists, Whites	N	P	P	P	N	P	N	N	N
Oct.	30	Republicans	Republicans	-	-	Reds	Nationalists, Whites	P	P	Y	P	N	P	N	P	N
Nov.	1	-	-	Nationalists	Nationalists	Reds	Nationalists	N	P	P	P	N	P	N	N	N
Nov.	2	-	-	Nationalists	Nationalists	Reds	Nationalists, Whites	P	P	N	P	N	P	N	N	-
Nov.	3	-	Republicans	-	Nationalists	Reds	Nationalists, Francoists	N	N	N	P	N	P	N	P	N
Nov.	4	Republicans	-	Nationalists	-	Reds	Whites	Y	P	Y	N	N	Y	N	P	N

## 4.2. Evaluation of main values

The presence of various characteristics referring to “Relevance”, “Facticity” and “Independence” as key values of journalistic quality was asked for. None of these could be identified as a continuous feature (which would have corresponded to a predominant evaluation with “yes”), at best they were “partly” present.

What does that mean in detail?

### 4.2.1. Relevance

Gaffney was travelling in a country unknown to most Irish people and of little importance to them. The topics followed her trip chronologically and focussed on the journalist’s experiences on the road which is also illustrated by many titles: “We are attacked by Reds” (Gaffney, February 27, 1937); “I Reach the Suburbs of Madrid” (Gaffney, March 06, 1937), “I Cross the Frontier at Irún” (Gaffney, October 25, 1937).

Always using her personal experiences as a framework, Gaffney gave account of what she saw of the Civil War and of what she was told, mixing civilian and military facets. She tried to attract her readers’ interest with comparisons between the Irish and Spanish way of life. In her first article she compared the women in both countries and wondered why Spanish women stayed at home even in times of war: “To us it would seem but natural that women should go into jobs and relieve all those men for arms” (Gaffney, February 22, 1937). In her account of the war, she described “villages of wrecked and burned houses” (Gaffney, March 05, 1937); she spoke about Franco’s strategies (Gaffney, February 22, 1937, February 24, 1937) and why “Red Soldiers Failed to Stop Advance” (Gaffney, October 30, 1937). She reported the presence of German soldiers in Franco’s headquarter (Gaffney, February 25, 1937) and she observed prisoners of war building roads (Gaffney, October 29, 1937). While her

first series showed a certain variety of topics, depending on what she encountered along the way, the second series in the autumn of 1937 focused solely on military aspects and her experiences on the Asturian front. In both series, often broader context and background knowledge are missing.

A special focus was put on Gaffney's visit to the Irish Brigades of volunteers in Cáceres. Three full articles (Gaffney, March 01, 1937, March 02, 1937, March 03, 1937), out of a total of 13 from her first series, were dedicated to this rather insignificant group in the Spanish Civil War (Soler Paricio, 2013). Of course, the Irish had an understandable and legitimate interest in the fate of their compatriots, but the descriptions of the good living conditions, the praise of their military discipline and piety were not only lengthy but bore "little resemblance to contemporary accounts of the Irishmen in Spain" (McGarry, 2002, p. 81). It was more likely aimed to show a united Irish nation by highlighting how Irish volunteers who belonged to different political fronts reconciled in Spain, rather than a complex picture of the Civil War.

Another problem related to the relevance of Gaffney's reporting is her own position: she was not only the observer and narrator; she was the protagonist of her stories. She often spoke only about her personal experiences and made little reference to the war and its impact on the country. The editorial mandate had been to give an account "through a woman's eye"<sup>6</sup>, which meant the coverage had to have a soft edge. Gaffney implemented it with touristic chit chat, as she decided to "make no apology for going into what may seem to many trivial details" (Gaffney, February 22, 1937). In her reporting war became a kind of travel destination and her tone inappropriate, almost cynical, for instance describing the "colourful medley of uniforms" which were for the foreigner the "most picturesque and astonishing aspect of this Civil War" (Gaffney, February 22, 1937).

#### 4.2.2. Facticity

In this category, the diversity of the sources and their reliability as well as the information on Gaffney's research conditions were examined. Gaffney's sources came only from the Nationalist side and very often remained anonymous, therefore the category "sources" was only rated "partly" throughout. Phrases such as "I was told"; "you hear"; "the man in the street"; "a person of some authority" were repeatedly the most important reference regarding her sources (Gaffney, February 22, 1937, February 23, 1937, February 24, 1937, March 06, 1937, October 26, 1937). Her official escorts were probably important sources, but she referred to them only occasionally as "a Requeté" or "the Captain", with no more detail.

Moreover, she did not reflect at all the partiality of her sources.

Only once Gaffney complained about the difficulty in getting "authentic news" (Gaffney, February 25, 1937). In part, this lack of sources was mitigated by her status as an eyewitness, but she could not replace qualified and diverse sources, a circumstance which she did not reflect in her texts. Accordingly, her conclusions followed official explanations or repeated stereotypes. When Gaffney, for instance, saw destroyed houses, which were a recurring image in her stories, these devastations were exclusively attributed to the "Reds" on the retreat (see for example Gaffney, March 05, 1937, March 06, 1937, March 08, 1937, October 27, 1937, October 30, 1937). However, she never saw any Republicans burning or plundering houses. The only Republicans she saw were "contented prisoners" of Franco, looking "bronzed, healthy, well-fed" (Gaffney, October 29, 1937). Without citing a source she stated that, depending on the nature of their level of commitment on the Republican side, the prisoners were either released immediately or sent to prison, or in case of "clear evidence of the terrible crimes that have been perpetrated under the Red regime" received a public trial with "able counsel for the defense" (Gaffney, October 29, 1937). Without questioning anything, she accepted both the murders of "so many innocent people" by the Republicans and the fairness of the trial they received as facts.

From today's perspective, it is impossible to verify the accuracy of much of the information about occurrences along the way. Nevertheless, the fact that background information about the war was often not based on facts but twisted according to Gaffney's own wishes can still be shown today. Following the Nationalists's propaganda, she wrote that Franco long refused "to accept proffered outside help" but was finally forced to, due to international support for the Republic (Gaffney, February 24, 1937). However, only few days after the coup, the rebels asked for and received help from Mussolini and Hitler (Beevor, 2006, 152–55; Graham, 2008, 45).

#### 4.2.3. Independence

The question here was Gaffney's willingness to reflect on her own partiality, to show personal initiative by presenting own topics, different perspectives, and distance from official propaganda. Such attempts can only be identified in few cases. The story Gaffney told about the war was simple: order and chaos, good and evil, God and demon faced each other in Spain. Thus, she followed the narratives of the Nationalists (Pérez Bowie 1988; Pérez Ledesma 2006; Pizarroso Quintero 2005).

On one day Gaffney could enjoy the "Charms of Beautiful Basque Country" (February 23, 1937) held by Franco, the next day she felt pity for refugees on their "Flight from Fury of the Reds" (Gaffney, Feb-

<sup>6</sup> So her series were promoted by the *Irish Independent* in other newspapers, see e.g. In War-Torn Spain (February 23, 1937, Evening Herald).



ruary 24, 1937). The stories “Historic Salamanca Visited” (Gaffney, February 25, 1937) and “Motor Break-Down” (Gaffney, February 26, 1937) which had a strong touristic component were followed by the war adventure story “We are Attacked by Reds” (Gaffney, February 27, 1937).

This dichotomy of dark and light, black and white, was systematically continued in the articles without changing the perspective. The characteristics of the Nationalists’ discourse, disguising rhetoric and simplifying stereotyping of reality (Pérez Bowie 1988, 364), are clearly perceptible in her coverage. This pattern is even reinforced by the religious context in which Gaffney placed the conflict. While discovering a “biblical flavour” in Nationalist street life (Gaffney, February 24, 1937), and praising the Irish Brigades’ fight “For the Faith” already in a sub-headline (Gaffney, March 02, 1937), Gaffney refers to the Republicans as “Godless” and “mad demons” (Gaffney, March 08, 1937) who let their rage of destruction run free.

Gaffney argued only from the point of view of the Nationalists in which the “Reds” were the enemies as the analysis of partiality also revealed. Her reporting was dominated by the “us-them” pattern that is characteristic in Galtung’s definition (2003) of war-mongering “war journalism” (in contrast to “peace journalism”). It makes the out-group “them” a problem, dehumanises “them” and raises its own voice propagandistically for “us”. Whereby “us” in the case of the Irish journalist are the Spanish Nationalists with whom she herself identified.

The main values applied here were taken over from Meier (2019a) as mentioned above. They are widely recognised and considered as indispensable in the international academic debate on journalistic quality (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2014; Deuze, 2005). Moreover, they were already accepted in Gaffney’s time. In the 1920s, they were acknowledged as decisive for journalism by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (Kaplan, 2006, 181) and also discussed in Europe where Bücher (1926) called for independence and incorruptibility in reporting. Until today, they are essential in quality journalism.

Regarding this international debate, Gaffney’s articles lack relevance due to little background knowledge and the focus on herself. The processing and contextualisation of information to give the audience orientation would have been crucial (Teramo, 2006). Attractive storytelling, including features such as gripping teasers, engaging introductions, comprehensibility, and lively presentation (Haller, 2008; Yanes Mesa, 2004), is important in the genre of reportage. However, Gaffney hardly changes narrative perspective or scenes, her descriptions often seem monotonous, her dry humour seldom shines through, and not always in adequate places. She also rarely quotes sources in direct speech, not even indirectly, which would have been not only beneficial for the narration but essential for the facticity. Just as the attempt to

achieve independence, even if neutrality is not demanded. However, open-mindedness and autonomy in research and topic setting, as well as reflecting and managing the own bias (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2014, 128) are indispensable. In contrast, Gaffney’s efforts to achieve at least a certain autonomy are only rudimentary.

## 5. Discussion: Comparing Gaffney’s war reporting with female colleagues

Our initial hypotheses were:

- H1. Gertrude Gaffney, in accordance with the editorial line of the *Irish Independent*, showed great sympathy for General Franco and the Nationalists in her coverage.
- H2. This partiality does not necessarily mean poor journalism. Decisive is the handling of the bias and the sincere effort to give a truthful account of the events.

As the results of the analysis show, H1 is clearly confirmed. Gaffney’s reporting shows an obvious bias.

Regarding H2, the findings reveal that in this case high partiality is accompanied by rather poor journalistic quality. Gertrude Gaffney neglected journalistic standards, such as an open-minded choice of topics, own initiative in research, and diversity of sources. Not every weakness has to be due to partiality, but some of it may be owed to a lack of journalistic competence as for example the scarce background knowledge and the often lengthy-writing style. Nonetheless, a substantial part can be attributed to partisanship.

That a differentiated reporting would have been possible was proven by her female colleague Virginia Cowles (Cowles, October 17, 1937, October 20, 1937, January 09, 1938). The U.S. journalist was the only woman who reported from both sides of the front; she doubted official versions and made inquiry more transparent, not only in her later published memoirs (Cowles, 2011a, 2011b) but already in her articles (Cowles, October 17, 1937, January 09, 1938, April 10, 1938). While Gaffney pointed to the well-fed prisoners of war who could expect fair trials (Gaffney, October 29, 1937), Cowles reported summary trials in which most of the accused were sentenced to death (Cowles, January 09, 1938). Following the rhetoric of the Francoists (see Pérez Bowie, 1988), Gaffney stressed the harmony of the heterogeneous Nationalist union of Falangists, Requetés, Monarchists, Catholics (Gaffney, November 4, 1937). In contrast, Cowles recognised: “While the dissenting views of Republicans, Socialists, Communists and Anarchists... have been widely publicized, little is known of the wide discords in the Franco ranks” (Cowles, January 09, 1938).

Even female journalists who kept a less critical distance than Cowles, such as the American Martha Gellhorn or the English Hilde Marchant, showed more professionalism than Gaffney. Gellhorn had clearly taken sides for the Republicans, while Marchant reported with empathy from Madrid but did not take an open political stand. The works of both of them (Marchant, March 01, 1937, March 05, 1937; Gellhorn, July 17, 1937, January 15, 1938) are characterised by something that Gaffney's texts lack: the sincere interest and sympathy for the civilian population. Like Gaffney, they wrote their articles in the first person. This was nothing unusual even for male war reporters at the time, but with female correspondents the inclusion of the author was particularly emphasised. Since women were usually kept away from the front and all military concerns, it was already a story that they made it to war. They were expected to give a certain human touch to her stories (Lugschitz and Kraus, 2020; Deacon, 2008a; Jackson, 2010).

Both Gaffney and Marchant, as well as other female colleagues such as the US-American Josephine Herbst, were to write their articles from a "woman's angle" (Sebba, 2013, 91) at the explicit wish of their editors, which was then highlighted accordingly on publication (Lugschitz, 2019). "Girl from Madrid to Tell All She Saw" (February 27, 1937), is how the *Daily Express* advertised Marchant's reportages. Female war correspondents were part of the story. Nevertheless, most of them played the role of a committed observer and not of the protagonist (Gellhorn, July 17, 1937, April 02, 1938; Marchant, March 01, 1937, March 02, 1937, March 05, 1937).

## 6. Conclusion

The qualitative content analysis of the 23 articles published by Gertrude Gaffney in two series about

the Spanish Civil War reveals evident shortcomings for all three journalistic values examined here. The following patterns could be identified:

Concerning *relevance*, she sought to be close to the audience but gave too much space to Irish volunteers and provided little background knowledge on the conflict. Even though her reportages were intended to have the character of personal travel reports, there would have been space for relevant information. In gathering information, she relied on official, often unspecified sources and showed hardly any initiative to conduct her own research, which has a decisive negative impact on the *facticity* of her work. Throughout her coverage, there is no clearly identifiable attempt to present perspectives different to those of the Nationalists and to doubt official versions of the warfare that would have been indispensable for the value of journalistic *independence*.

The comparison of Gaffney's reporting with that of Cowles, Gellhorn and Marchant highlights these deficiencies, which are mainly due to the way she dealt with her partiality, and to her self-conception as a reporter, which made her adventures the focus of the stories. Gaffney is neither *properly detached* like Virginia Cowles nor *properly attached* like Gellhorn or Marchant. Instead, she subordinated her journalistic work to the politics of the Nationalists. As a propagandist and protagonist, she remained on the fringes of the actual events of the war, in which she seemed to take little interest.

Gaffney's political background and the unprofessional way she dealt with her bias obstructed an open view on what was happening, which led to poor journalistic work. Therefore, the readers of the *Irish Independent*, the largest Irish daily newspaper at that time, received a very limited and distorted picture of the Spanish Civil War.

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Renée Lugschitz studied history at the University of Vienna. After many years in journalism, she has been working on research projects at Medienhaus Wien since 2005. From 2014 to 2019 she was researcher at the Austrian Academy of Sciences / University of Klagenfurt. Her main areas are media history, gender studies and

the Spanish Civil War. In 2012 she received for her book “Spanienkämpferinnen” (Female Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War) the Bruno Kreisky Recognition Prize for the political book. ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9127-9785>

José A. García-Avilés is Full Professor of Journalism and head of the Journalism Department at the Miguel Hernández University (Elche, Spain), where he lectures at the Master Program in Journalism Innovation. He is *Bachelor of Arts* (National University of Ireland), Graduate in Journalism and Ph. D. in Communication (School of Communication, University of Navarra). He was visiting scholar at the *Media Studies Center* based in *Columbia University* (New York). Prof. Garcia-Avilés has carried out comparative research on the influence of digitalisation in television news and on newsroom integration and journalism innovation. He directs the *Communication Research Group GICOV*. He is founding member of InnovaMedia.Net a network of researchers on journalism innovation. He has published many research articles and papers about journalism. His books include: *Trends in journalism innovation* (2018); *Communication in the Network Society* (2015); *Globalization and Pluralism. Reshaping Public TV in Europe* (2010); *The Convergence Challenge for Broadcast News* (2006); and *News Standards at ABC, CBS and NBC* (1996). ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7854-3476>