JAPAN JOURNAL OF NURSING SCIENCE

Japan Journal of Nursing Science (2019) **16**, 103–114 doi:10.1111/jjns.12218

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

International nurses to the rescue: The role and contribution of the nurses of the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War

Isabel ANTON-SOLANAS [1], Ann WAKEFIELD[2] and Christine E. HALLETT[3]

[1]*Department of Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences, San Jorge University, University Campus Villanueva de Gállego, Zaragoza, Spain,* [2]*Division of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work, University of Manchester, Manchester and* [3]*The University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, UK*

Abstract

Aim: To describe the life and work of the international nurses of the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War and to examine their role in relation to their contribution to Spanish nursing in this period.

Methods: This historical study is based primarily on the memoirs of the international nurses who joined the war health services of the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War. The evidence that was elicited from these sources was compared and contrasted with other contemporary documents in order to compare their perspectives with those of other contemporaries.

Results: The nurses of the International Brigades joined the front line health services as part of the mobile medical and surgical teams that were attached to the fighting units. They lived and worked under extreme conditions, often under fire. Their work while in Spain was not limited to care delivery but also included managerial and educational aspects. The international nurses' observations of Spanish nursing at the time were not always accurate, which might be explained by a lack of contact with qualified Spanish nursing staff due to a shortage of fully qualified nurses.

Conclusion: In the absence of the voices of the Spanish nurses themselves, the written records of the international nurses were invaluable in analyzing Spanish nursing in this period. Their testimonies are, in essence, the international nurses' legacy to the Spanish nurses who stayed behind after the departure of the International Brigadists in 1938.

Key words: diaries, history of nursing, international cooperation, warfare.

INTRODUCTION

> *I was going to Spain to play my little part towards shaping a decent world … Save Spain, save democracy, fight Hitler, stop fascism in Spain. Of this we talked and sang* (de Vries, 1979, pp. 189–190).

In this way, American nurse Lini de Vries explains her personal reasons for going to Spain. For British nurse, Noreen Branson, "fighting for freedom was, by that time, something she'd become completely convinced about the need to do" (Jackson, 2002, p. 42). What compelled these women to leave their home and family and join the Spanish Republic in their struggle against General Franco's forces? What was their contribution to Spanish nursing in this period? Whatever their motivations, the response of many nursing professionals from all over the world to the Spanish people's call for help was overwhelming, and their work and support for the cause of the Republic was highly valued. Eighty years after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War (SCW) (1936–1939), their generosity, courage, and professionalism are still fresh in the memory of Spain.

Correspondence: Isabel Anton-Solanas, Facultad de Ciencias de la Salud, Campus Universitario Villanueva de Gállego, Universidad San Jorge, Autovía A-23 Zaragoza-Huesca, Km. 299, 50830 Villanueva de Gállego, Spain.
Email: ianton@usj.es

Received 16 June 2017; accepted 4 April 2018.

This article will offer an insight into the life and work of the nurses of the International Brigades (IB) during one of the most sanguinary conflicts of the twentieth century and to examine their role in relation to their contribution to shaping and developing Spanish nursing during this period.

BACKGROUND

The causes of the SCW are extremely complex and are deeply rooted in the history of Spain. After a rather convulsive nineteenth century, where liberal and traditionalist governments succeeded each other in an incessant pendulum-like movement, by the beginning of the twentieth century Spain was in a precarious position. For the working classes, poverty was so significant that thousands emigrated to America in search of fortune and a better life for themselves and their family (Carr, 2001). The gap between the landless laborers and the urban proletariat, and the privileged classes, was wider than ever. From an ideological point of view, the influence of the radical left on the working classes, and subsequent radicalization of the right, polarized Spanish society. Thus, war started to appear as the inevitable consequence of a long and painful period of internal fighting and disagreement between the social classes, political groups, military, King, and Church. Outright war began on July 18, 1937 after a failed military coup that was led by General Franco (Beevor, 2007; Brenan, 2003).

The SCW was not just an internal affair but had global social and political repercussions. Chronologically placed between two world wars, politically situated between two rising powers, communism and fascism, ideologically loaded and religiously significant, the SCW did not leave the international community indifferent (Forrest, 2000; Jackson, 2004; Moradiellos, 2002).

Most international volunteers who went to Spain in aid of the Republic did so as part of the IB (Graham, 2005; Requena, 2004; Richardson, 1976): almost 40,000 men and women from 52 countries. The IB originated in the decision of the Comintern's executive committee, an international organisation that advocated world communism, to recruit volunteers with military experience among volunteers of all countries to fight in the civil war for the democratically elected leftist Spanish government against Franco (Jackson, 1994; Kirschenbaum, 2015; Kowalsky, 2006; Zaagsma, 2017). Both international and local communist parties were charged with the recruitment and training of volunteers (Beevor, 2007). On arrival in Spain, the international brigadists were sent to the IB headquarters in Albacete, where they completed their training and were allocated to a brigade (McLellan, 2004).

Foreign involvement in the SCW was not limited to fighting and many men and women took part in the conflict in non-military positions. Among the non-military volunteers who went to Spain were nursing staff:

> *About this time, anti-Fascist countries who could not make up their minds to send men were sending money and medical aid at last. Nurses and ambulances came from England … All this was done with money given by the English workers in their poverty* (Low & Brea, 1937, pp. 174–175).

In contrast to the Spanish nurses, who left virtually no written record of their work during the war, the international nurses left an invaluable wealth of material documenting their roles and responsibilities, feelings, experiences, observations, and personal opinions while in Spain. These documents offer a new and fresh insight into the evolution of nursing during the SCW and are a faithful testament to these women's solidarity, courage, and commitment.

Spanish nursing at the beginning of the twentieth century

Compared to other European countries like the UK, the professionalization of Spanish nursing in 1915 was a relatively recent feature of nursing's development (Collantes, 1915). This phenomenon can be explained by briefly revisiting the history of the profession. Although no official curriculum existed prior to this date, Catholic religious orders were able to maintain a steady and sufficient workforce of privately trained nurses. Furthermore, the degree to which nursing was visible within the Spanish health service and society in general was minimal, due primarily to the rather limited role of women in society. As a result, nursing was seen as a nurturing, mothering, caring occupation, as opposed to a scientific discipline.

To further complicate matters, at the beginning of the twentieth century a so-called "auxiliary" healthcare profession that was practiced mainly by men, and now extinct, coexisted with nursing in Spain. Hierarchically placed below medicine and above nursing, the profession of *practicante* emerged in Spain as a result of the combined events of a series of unique sociocultural characteristics, including Spain's strongly gendered social environment and a continuing dominance of traditional values, where the Catholic Church played a key role not only in religious matters, but

also in the political and social spheres. This had an impact on the way nursing work was divided between nurses and *practicantes*. Hence, aspects such as caring were designated to women and religious nurses (e.g. tasks involving nutrition management and hygiene), while technical skills were assigned to *practicantes* (e.g. minor surgery, bandaging, and i.v. access).

Between 1915 and 1936, nursing continued to develop insidiously, although it never grew to the extent that it was able to challenge *practicantes'* hegemony, either professionally or socially. This probably was related to a number of firmly set boundaries that transcended the professional sphere and encroached on class, sex, financial, and even religious aspects.

METHODS

Aims of the study

The aim of this article was to describe the life and work of the British and American nurses of the IB during the SCW and to examine their role in relation to their contribution to shaping and developing Spanish nursing in this period.

Study design

The research underpinning this article was undertaken using the historical method, which has been described as a valid tool for nursing history research (Lusk, 1997; Sarnecky, 1990). As part of the study, it was necessary to examine the social history of Spain in order to contextualize the research and to understand the cultural values, beliefs, and other factors that were relevant to this investigation. This preliminary review of the contextual elements unearthed a number of issues that then shaped the analysis and interpretation of the sources, namely religion, sex, and the sociopolitical ideological milieu extant at the time. Hence, a conscious effort was made to not constrain the evidence that was collected with the inflexibility of a predetermined model. Instead, it can be argued that this investigation was built from below; that is, from the sources themselves (Willig, 2001). In this case, the research translated into a conscious and systematic attempt to recover a somewhat hidden chapter in the history of the SCW, as depicted in the international nurses' memoirs of the war.

Primary and secondary sources

The secondary data, defined as "works that interpret or analyze an historical event or phenomenon" (Munhall, 2012, p. 387), were obtained from a variety of libraries and scientific databases that specialized in health care, history, and sociology.

The primary sources, including diaries, photographs, autobiographies, and papers that were published in contemporary journals and magazines, were collected from three major Spanish archives: the *Archivo General Militar de Ávila,* the *Archivo General de la Guerra Civil Española*, and the historical database, *Gazeta*, of the *Boletín Oficial del Estado*. Additionally, a search was carried out at the Royal College of Nursing Archive in Edinburgh, UK, where early volumes of the nursing journal, *The Nursing Mirror*, are kept. The issues that had been published between 1936 and 1939 contained articles and news that had been written by nurses about the SCW. They provided interesting descriptions of nursing care and nursing training during the conflict.

Of especial interest were the first-person accounts of the life and work of the nurses of the IB during the SCW. Among these there were documents that had been written and published at the time of the events that are described in this article (Low & Brea, 1937; Martin, 1937): a personal diary that had been written by Australian nurse, Agnes Hodgson (1988), during the war but was published some years later by Judith Keene; an autobiography by American nurse, Lini de Vries (1979); and several first-person accounts that had been written during the war period but published some years later (Inglis, 1987; Murray, 1986). These sources were retrieved from public libraries and are publicly available.

Several volumes from three periodic magazines, namely *Sanidad Popular*, *Ayuda Médica Internacional* and *La Voz de la Sanidad de la XV División,* edited by the health service of the IB and published during the SCW, were reviewed. Kept in the *Archivo General de la Guerra Civil Española*, these journals were published in various languages, namely Spanish, English, German, and French, as the public that was targeted by the journal was the international volunteers themselves. Their historical value lay in the fact that they were an educational tool as much as an information dissemination one. In many cases, the articles included pictures, drawings, and diagrams representing life at the front and offered vivid and detailed descriptions of the various stages in the military health service of the IB, as well as news and articles about the war, and very especially about the organization and functioning of the frontline health services (Núñez Díaz-Balart, 2006).

Given the ideological nature of some of the consulted sources, whenever possible, the information that was collected throughout this investigation was

contextualized and triangulated with other primary sources and secondary material (Lundy, 2008).

Personal reflexivity

According to Ratner (2002, p. 1), "qualitative methodology recognizes that the subjectivity of the researcher is intimately involved in scientific research." Therefore, recognizing the researchers' potential for their own contribution "to the construction of meanings throughout the research process" (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999, p. 228) was key in the writing of this article.

In order to elucidate how the authors' personal subjectivity might have influenced the research, they first had to understand their own "position and positioning" (Macbeth, 2001) with respect to the events that are discussed in this article (Gerstl-Pepin & Patrizio, 2009). As a Spaniard, the SCW is a topic that cannot, and does not, leave the first author (I. A.-S.) indifferent. More specifically, she sympathizes with the Republican cause. As British nationals without any previous in-depth knowledge of the SCW, the co-authors' (C. E. H. & A. W.) perspective was somewhat more neutral.

The fact that I. A.-S.'s knowledge of the SCW was certainly quite limited before commencing this investigation contributed to minimizing any initial partiality that she might have exhibited. This was related to the fact that she was born in the1980s, 5 years after Franco's death, with the Pact of Oblivion firmly in place. The Pact of Oblivion or Pact of Forgetting was an unwritten agreement by all major political groups and parties to "bury" the events that took place during the SCW after Franco's death, in an attempt to avoid personal vendettas and reprisals, and to facilitate a peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy. Respected by most, the Pact of Oblivion facilitated a peaceful transition to democracy and shielded the younger generations from the memory of war. This a priori lack of knowledge of the SCW allowed the authors to begin this research without any prior political or ideological inclination for one or another party.

Having said this, it has been suggested in the literature that it is, in fact, impossible for historians to be totally dispassionate and that history writing is at its most convincing when the historian gives a clear indication of his or her own position or perspective on the issues under study (Cheng, 2008; Jenkins & Munslow, 2003). Therefore, it cannot be denied that all, but especially I. A.-S., felt quite passionately about this period. In order to maintain the focus of the research on the evolution of nursing practice during the SCW, a conscious effort was made to not divert from the sources and thus end up favoring one side over the other.

RESULTS

First impressions

> *Volunteer [Spanish] nurses are requisitioned to assist, but from pictures which reach us it would seem that a great many women, and even young girls, prefer the role of belligerent to that of nurse, and their behavior reminds of the tricoteuses at the time of the French Revolution. … But no foreigners are able to enter Spain at the present time, and English nurses, however much they would like to go to the rescue of the wounded men, can do nothing* (Anonymous, 1936, p. 37).

This quotation is an extract from an article published in The Nursing Mirror shortly after the beginning of the SCW. Women's involvement in the SCW, particularly on the Republican side, was unprecedented in Spanish history (Durgan, 2007). In fact, the image of militia women taking up arms against fascism has become one of the most characteristic features of the SCW. However, most of them were sent back to the rear guard after the first weeks of fighting, with nursing becoming one of the most popular occupations of women to take up in order to continue to play an active part in the conflict.

International nurses started to arrive in Spain not long after the above note was published in *The Nursing Mirror*. After a long and difficult trip from their country of origin, many international nurses recorded their first impressions of nursing and the Republican hospitals. Most of them were appalled at the state of the field hospitals and shocked by the "horrible wounds awaiting attention" (Inglis, 1987, p. 149) that were arriving directly from the front lines. de Vries (1979, pp. 204–205) described the first field hospital that she was appointed to as follows:

> *It was obviously a new school building, and we watched the children and teachers moving out desks, maps and books … There was no heat, no plumbing facilities, no water, no electricity, no kitchen, no stove.*

Reality of working on the front line

Descriptions of the work of the healthcare teams in the field hospitals were surprisingly varied, mostly

depending on the type of publication, target audience, and intentions behind the author's work. According to an article that was published in *Ayuda Médica Internacional*, the multilingual periodical of the healthcare services of the IB, Francoist field hospitals were nothing short of dreadful:

> *The fascist hospital-infirmary was a long, dark, dreary room (which used to be [a] bakery). Eighty fascist wounded had been left behind, huddled together, two on a mattress made for one. The floor was damp and slimy with blood, foul-smelling sputum and vomitus. The air stank of urine and fetid pus. Every wound was infected. The dressings were hard, blood-stained. Tourniquets had been left on for 5–6 days, converting living human limbs into swollen claws purple black – hideous with huge blisters from which a thin stinking serum exuded. One of the wounded had gone mad with misery and pain, others cowered away from expected blows* (Pike, 1938, pp. 13–14).

…Whereas, it seemed to be rather more serene in the operating rooms of the IB, according to an article from *La Voz de la Sanidad de la XV Division*, the journal of the health services of the XV International Brigade:

> *The operating nurse is sorting the operating instruments on a glass-covered stand. While the surgeon is pulling on his rubber gloves, the nurse paints the region of the body that is about to be operated on with iodine. The operation begins. The instruments are handled with a slight tinkling noise. The assistant opens the skin and holds it open with clamps. 'Hurry, sister another clamp'. The intestines are exposed. 'Here, sister', and a piece of a shell falls into a basin with a metallic sound. The intestines are put back again. Now the sewing up of the incision begins. 'Sister, the clamps'* (Anonymous, 1937a, pp. 6–7).

A description of Sonia Merims' work as nurse in charge of the American field hospitals in the Tarancón sector tells a different story altogether and is probably the closest to reality:

> *The daily arrival of wounded made an indelible impression on me. During the period of a battle, ambulances kept rolling in constantly. The doctors, nurses and stretcher bearers are very busy. Up at 7 am to start the work; no one grumbles. Then the fascists came to interrupt our work. Two bombardments in one week … The second invasion so completely demolished our hospitals, garage and storehouse, that we had to set up new hospitals in another town. It was terrifying, it was ghastly, it was a nightmare. The personnel and wounded were saved. I was slightly wounded when leading a patient to safety* (Merims, 1938, p. 12).

Training nurses in the battle line

Unlike, for example, the WWI Western Front, which was a war of trenches and therefore relatively stationary, the fronts of the SCW were extremely mobile due to modern warfare. As a result, the field hospitals that were attached to the fighting units had to be dismantled, relocated, and reinstalled within different sites, including theatres, churches, caves, tunnels, trains, and tents (Coni, 2008). As the international nurses recorded in their memoirs, soon after arrival at a new location, girls from the nearby villages were recruited as temporary staff to help on the wards:

> *Wherever I have worked I have always had to help to train the young Spanish girls to be nurses. They were usually very adept in the practical work, although not so quick in the theoretical side of nursing* (Urmston, 1939b, p. 435).

May Levine (1938, p. 19), a theatre nurse from New York, described the work of the Spanish girls, as follows:

> *Most of the Spanish 'chicas'* [Chica is the Spanish term for "girl"] *had not had previous training in the field of nursing. They had to learn their jobs while doing their duty. To them, even more than the international nurses, should be given the greatest credit for the excellent work they have done in caring for the wounded and sick of the People's Army.*

Furthermore, evidence was found that the international nurses helped to train the Spanish girls not just informally in the field hospitals and surgical units, but also in nursing schools:

> *The University Hospital has one American head nurse Ruth Epstein who helped organize and taught at the first nurses' training school* (Anonymous, 1938a, p. 11).

Working alongside war-trained nurses and voluntary aides

As outlined before, Spanish war-trained nurses and aides often were praised by the international nurses for

their learning capacity, efficiency, and enthusiasm. For some international nurses, their shared work and camaraderie with the Spanish nursing staff developed into something more than a mere teaching and learning relationship:

> *Modesta and I vied with one another as to who could give the best backrub … The other girls had not liked her much at first, because she was insistent and opinionated. I liked her for those very qualities and was delighted when she was assigned to me. I had studied three years to become a graduate nurse. In no time at all she had picked up the nursing skills and was invaluable. Despite our language barrier, we were close* (de Vries, 1979, pp. 211–213).

However, the sources revealed that the international nurses' feelings about these girls were mixed. Some of them praised the girls' attitude and work capacity:

> *A base hospital was established in a small village about 30 kil. from the front and really could almost compare in its well set-up organization to one of our American hospitals at home. New nurses arrived to organize it, and with a staff of Spanish girls whose sincerity and willingness to work was really remarkable, the hospital started functioning* (Freeman, 1938, p. 9).

…Whereas, others complained about how difficult it was to work alongside non-trained staff and how one had to keep an eye on them continuously:

> *We have thirteen Spanish girls whom we are trying to train but the results have been pretty hopeless up to now. Most of the actual work was done by our handful* (Martin, 1937).

In fact, their relationship was not entirely free from conflict, as Hodgson (1988, pp. 144) recorded in her diary:

> *A meeting of nurses today to protest against various irregularities in the distribution of work and to clear up a slight misunderstanding between Spaniards and ourselves. All amicably settled.*

Working alongside Spanish qualified nurses and *practicantes*

The international nurses rarely discussed the professional figures of *practicantes* and qualified Spanish nurses in their diaries, letters, and memoirs. Only Hodgson (1988, p. 118) mentioned *practicantes* in her war diary, although as she clarified in parentheses, she was not very clear about what their role was:

> *We sleep in a loft with mattresses on the floor. The two male members keep on the other side partitioned by a Union Jack. The Spanish doctors and practicantes (medical students) sleep in another dormitory.*

Hodgson (1988) did not consider herself to be hierarchically below *practicantes* and thus did not accept these professionals' authority over her. Thus, in a further reference to four *practicantes*, she wrote:

> *Four practicantes arrived – awful bums and sissies. Everyone disliked them on sight and resented their intrusion. Practicantes at work – one told me I could give a lad Pantofon.* (Hodgson, 1988, p. 138).

References to qualified Spanish nurses proved to be extremely difficult to find. This might explain why some international nurses returned to their country of origin convinced that there was no trained nurse in Spain (other than the nuns) prior to their arrival in the country:

> *We had many little Spanish nurses. Spain had no real trained nurses. They used the nuns. So these little girls only had about three months' training. But they were very keen and very good for the time they had trained* (Murray, 1986, p. 69).

Withdrawal of the International Brigades and the end of the war

On September 21, 1938, with the war nearly lost, the Spanish Government officially announced the unilateral withdrawal of the IB, along with their medical units (Alpert, 1994). An emotive farewell parade, witnessed by thousands of Spanish citizens, was held in Barcelona on November 1 (Junco, 2014). As the remnants of the IB reached the reviewing stand, they saluted Dolores Ibarruri, also known as Pasionaria, whose farewell speech perhaps best reflected the feelings of the Spanish persons towards the brigadists:

> *They gave up everything, their loves, their countries, home and fortune; fathers, mothers, wives, brothers, sisters and children, and they came and told us: 'We are here. Your cause, Spain's cause, is ours.' … You can go proudly. You are history. You are legend* (Carroll, 1994, p. 20).

Many nurses left unwillingly, with some even articulating that the SCW was the most significant event of their life (Murray, 1986; de Vries, 1979).

The end of the SCW was declared on April 1, 1939 (Alpert, 1994). Honors and decorations were awarded to those who helped Franco to achieve victory, including nurses. A very different fate, which included prison sentences, death, and exile, awaited those who fought for the Republic (Mangini, 1995).

DISCUSSION

It is clear that, throughout their time in Spain, the nurses of the IB lived and worked under extreme circumstances, sometimes under fire. As described by the nurses themselves, the international healthcare teams, along with their ambulances and mobile hospitals, followed the IB that they were officially attached to along the front lines, where they treated not just their fellow countrymen but also Spanish soldiers and even civilians in the quiet periods between battles (Murray, 1986). The field hospitals were established a short distance behind the lines and were able to accept patients within 24 h of their arrival to a new post (Irving, 1938b).

On arrival to a field hospital, the patients were admitted and care was provided by the qualified nurses and doctors, aided by the auxiliary personnel, some of whom were recruited and trained from among the local population (Urmston, 1939a). This organizational scheme was replicated on the Nationalist side, as confirmed by war-trained nurse, Priscilla Scott-Ellis, in her war diary:

> *Here we have no girls to help as there is no village near, so we will have much more tiresome work, like having to get up early so as to give the breakfast and being continually in the wards to fetch bedpans or glasses of water, etc* (Scott-Ellis, 1995, p. 158).

This cyclical process of recruitment and training might have contributed to widening the gap between reality and the international nurses' perception of Spanish nursing during the Civil War. Often, their opinion of the aptitude and professionalism of the Spanish nurses was not the best, to the point that some of them concluded that there was no qualified nurse in Republican Spain (other than the nuns, who sided with General Franco) at the time of their arrival.

Whereas, practically no evidence was left behind by the Spanish nurses to support or refute such observations, other documents suggested that there were qualified Spanish nurses working in both zones during the war and who were capable of performing their work to a high standard (Coni, 2008). In fact, it is known that not only religious, but also secular, nurses had graduated from the Spanish nursing schools since 1915, the year when the first official nursing curriculum was endorsed. In particular, from 1915 to 1936, there was a total of 6829 nursing student registrations in public universities across the Spanish territory (National Institute of Statistics, 1943).

It is undeniable that there was a shortage of qualified nurses on both sides when the war broke out. This was related not only to the late professionalization of nursing in Spain, but also to the drastic increase in healthcare necessities and demands that emerged from the war situation itself (Lannon, 2002). In order to alleviate this situation, short training courses aimed at providing basic nursing knowledge and skills were organized for the volunteer women on both sides (Hernández-Conesa & Segura-López, 2013). However, as argued by Nash (1995), the shortage of Spanish qualified nurses on the Republican side was more pressing than on Franco's side. This was related to the fact that, traditionally, "nuns and religious institutions had formed the main core of nursing staff in many medical institutions" (Nash, 1995, p. 151). Thus, with the Catholic Church supporting Franco's cause, "most trained religious nurses abandoned their institutions in the territory under the republic" (Nash, 1995, p. 151) and joined the Nationalist war health service (Díaz-Sánchez, 2005). Other contemporary accounts of nursing care at the beginning of the war describe a very similar picture:

> *Before July, 1936, as in England before the 16th century, nursing was regarded largely as a form of religious devotion undertaken by monks and nuns. Some of these monks and nuns went over to General Franco's territory at the beginning of hostilities, others fled abroad, and Government Spain was left with practically no nurses* (Anonymous, 1939, p. 54).

The arrival of the fully qualified and experienced international nurses must have been welcomed by the Republican authorities who, understanding the value of a qualified nursing workforce, would have ensured that only unqualified personnel were assigned to support the work of these professionals. A list of personnel from the international hospital of Mataró (Catalonia) constitutes a good example of the above. It contains the names, sex, nationality, and job description of 56 individuals, among whom there were 12 doctors, two *practicantes*, 22 qualified international nurses, seven auxiliary nurses,

one of whom was not Spanish (nationality not given), one Spanish orderly, and 13 allied health professionals (Anonymous, 1938c). Additionally, as suggested by Casas and Miralles (2008), the medical and surgical teams of the IB were attached to the international fighting divisions and had their own nurses and services, which would have further prevented the nurses of the IB from sharing their workspace with a fully qualified Spanish nurse.

With regard to the relationship between the nurses and the *practicantes*, evidence of conflict was found not only on the part of the international nurses, but also on the part of the Spanish nurses themselves. For the international nurses, who were neither familiar with the figure of *practicante* nor accustomed to taking orders from a fellow healthcare professional (other than a physician perhaps), the presence of *practicantes* in the field hospitals must have been, first, a surprise and, second, an offense, especially if they attempted to exert any authority over them. This was clearly reflected in Hodgson's resentful diary entry detailing her encounter with one *practicante*. For the Spanish qualified and war-trained nurses, the chaos and carnage that arose in the settings where they worked contributed to a dismantling of the practice boundaries between them and the profession of *practicante* and encouraged the first to extend their roles to the detriment of the second:

> *The incessant and continuous intrusions of the so called qualified Nurses into the professional area of Practicantes of Medicine and Surgery, to the extent that the first group clearly intends to displace the second from its current position, has put us in the position of having to appeal to you for help in order to establish clear limits between these auxiliary professions, which the obstinate nurses are not willing to acknowledge* (Cordero & Momeñe, 1937).

Although the professional development of nursing in Spain at this time cannot be explained simply by the hard work of the international nurses as trainers and educators, as other events and the exigencies of war also played their part, it is important to acknowledge their unique contribution to Spanish nursing, not just through their professional example but also through their efforts to encourage Spanish girls to become both competent nurses and independent women. Hodgson's description of a meeting between the international nurses and the Spanish war-trained staff constitutes a good example. It was interesting to observe that the main reason behind the emergence of conflict in this case centered on the division of labor. This could suggest that, as their knowledge increased and their nursing skills improved, the Spanish war-trained nurses started to see themselves as more than mere auxiliaries. More importantly, it can be argued that this emergence of conflict between the Spanish and the international nurses is proof in itself of the development of Spanish nursing. Although these Spanish women might have been influenced by the revolutionary climate of the Republic, they had become confident enough to challenge the way in which more experienced qualified nurses distributed the workload. Similarly, the fact that the international nurses openly acknowledged both the general evolution of Spanish nursing and the personal development of the Spanish women they had themselves trained reveals a qualitative change in nursing services as the war evolved.

The above, however, are only indicators – and not proof in themselves – of the impact of the international nurses on Spanish nursing development. It will be difficult to prove the extent to which the nurses of the IB contributed to the advancement of Spanish nursing, partly because of the lack of testimonies from the Spanish nurses themselves. It is likely that plenty of individual Spanish nurses and aides, both war-trained and unqualified, were inspired by the example of the highly trained international nurses, and that such an influence was recorded in their own diaries and memoirs. This, however, might never be demonstrated as there are scarce diaries, personal testimonies, and other materials that are available to researchers from that time. This could be related to a lack of interest on the Spanish nurses' and aides' part in writing about their experiences or perhaps to a conscious effort to not disseminate the contents of such documents, especially considering that those who worked within the healthcare services of the Republic were persecuted and prosecuted as "traitors" by the establishment (Atenza-Fernández, 2008; Barona-Villar & Bernabeu-Mestre, 2008; Stafford, 2015). Collecting information from oral sources might have been an alternative, but the idea was discarded when it was realized that it was too late, as all of the potential participants would have been well over 90 years of age.

Likewise, no trace of the presence of the nurses of the IB in Spain was found in the consulted postwar documents. This does not necessarily mean that their contribution to Spanish nursing as part of the medical and surgical teams was strictly limited to the conflict. Rather, it means that their impact on the nursing profession as a whole perhaps was limited by the unfavorable outcome of the war. The withdrawal of the

international volunteers towards the end of the conflict, and the fact that they served on the losing side, meant that their work during the conflict was somewhat obviated when the nursing profession was restructured in the postwar period. Moreover, the longevity of Franco's dictatorship prevented the international volunteers from claiming any sort of achievement until many years after the bitter end (Carroll, 1994).

The impact and significance of war can bring about deep changes in the social, economic, and political conditions of the areas involved, extinguishing pre-established values and founding new ones in the gaps left by the first (Franco Rubio, 1982). In accordance with this idea, war almost could be represented as a bridge that connects the before and after circumstances of a particular society, human group, or even a profession such as nursing. The nurses of the IB played their part in shaping and advancing Spanish nursing through their work and example; the necessities created by the war situation did the rest.

Limitations of the study

Although a considerable number of primary sources was reviewed, there is a wealth of material that was written by, or related to, the nurses of the IB that could not be accessed due to both time and financial limitations at the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives at New York University's Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, NY, USA. The archives included a number of objects, including a nurse's cape and pin, photographs, both written and audio-recorded interviews with nursing (and other medical personnel) veterans of the SCW, diaries, and letters that had been written during and after the war. The materials are contained in 27 files and boxes that are classified by the veteran's name they relate to and are available for consultation at the library on request (Tamiment Library & Wagner Labour Archives, 2018). It is likely that these documents would be extremely useful in the future when looking at the sociopolitical status of the nurses of the IB and their involvement in issues other than health care.

According to Telge (1937), Head of the Medical Service of the IB, the medical service comprised 220 doctors, 580 nurses and assistants, and 600 stretcher bearers from over 25 different countries. Nevertheless, this research is based mainly on the testimonies of American, British, and one Australian nurse, which might have limited the scope of this investigation. This was related to the impossibility of accessing any source that was written or published by nurses from other nations. There could be a number of possible explanations for this. One, that the said sources were written in the nurses' mother tongue and were never translated into English or Spanish; this would have significantly complicated the identification and access to these materials. Another reason is that, like the Spanish nurses themselves, these nurses did not choose to write or publish their letters, diaries, and memoirs. However, this is unlikely, as most of them would not have seen in themselves the need to hide their past as brigadists, except perhaps in the case of those whose country of origin was ruled by a radical right-wing government after the war (i.e. Germany and Italy). Finally, the identification and collection of the primary source materials that pertained to the role of the IB during the SCW was (and continues to be) led by individuals and organizations with a particular interest in, or political affinity with, the IB. This is the case of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (2018) from the USA and the International Brigade Memorial Trust (2018) from the UK.

Much has been written about the volunteers of the IB and their involvement in the SCW. However, the voices of the international nurses are not so often heard, nor interpreted in the light of the ideological, sociopolitical context of the time. Similarly, the historiography of Spanish nursing during the Civil War is scarce and has been influenced heavily by what still is, in essence, an open wound in Spain's history. This complicated the discussion and interpretation of the results in the light of the literature.

CONCLUSION

Towards the end of 1938, with the war nearly lost, the Spanish Government sent the IB, along with their medical units, out of Spain. Many nurses left unwillingly, with some even articulating that the SCW was the most significant event of their life (Murray, 1986; de Vries, 1979).

It is known that these courageous women lived and worked under extreme conditions, often under fire. Their observations were mostly accurate and confirmed the cruel injuries that had been received by the soldiers and civilians alike, paired with the lack of much needed medical supplies and other resources. This situation persisted throughout the war.

Analyzing the testimonies of the nurses of the IB was extremely interesting, not only because they clearly described their role and responsibilities while in Spain,

but also because they provided invaluable material to help analyze Spanish nursing during this period.

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that the nurses of the IB did contribute to the training of Spanish nurses during the SCW and thus to their professional development. However, their absence from the sources after 1939 is most significant. It is suggested in this article that their achievements and possible impact on professional Spanish nursing were obviated by Franco's regime after the war.

This historical account is, in essence, the international nurses' legacy to the Spanish nurses who stayed behind after the international volunteers were removed from Spain. It is uncertain whether the Spanish nurses' own voices will ever be heard. However, after Franco's rule of oppression and the subsequent instigation of the Pact of Oblivion, which even today still exerts some degree of power over the Spanish population, the possibility that the lost generation of nurses will remain forever silent cannot be discarded.

DISCLOSURE

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

I. A.-S., A. W., and C .E. H. contributed to the conception and design of this study; I. A.-S. carried out the documentary search, analyzed and interpreted the results, as well as drafted the manuscript; and A. W. and C. E. H. critically reviewed the manuscript and supervised the whole study process. All the authors read and approved the final manuscript.

REFERENCES

Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives. (2018). [Cited 14 Apr 2018.] Available from URL: http://www.alba-valb.org/about-us/about

Alpert, M. (1994). *A new international history of the Spanish Civil War*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, Ltd.

Anonymous. (1936). News from the nursing world: War conditions in Spain. *The Nursing Mirror*, August, 37–38.

Anonymous. (1937a). *Midnight operation*. In: *La Voz de la Sanidad de la XV División*, 7, 6–7. *Archivo General de la Guerra Civil Española* (Hemeroteca, MF/R. 2266, Rev. 261). Salamanca, Spain: Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica.

Anonymous. (1938a). Americans in Murcia. In: *Ayuda Médica Internacional*, 9, 11–12. *Archivo General de la Guerra Civil Española* (Hemeroteca, MF/R. 310). Salamanca, Spain: Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica.

Anonymous. (1938c). List of personnel who are able to remain at the Mataró's international hospital. In: *Archivo General Militar de Ávila* (Caja. 1092, Cpt. 6, Doc. 1, Folio. 2–3). Avila, Spain: Instituto de Historia Cultural Militar. (in Spanish)

Anonymous. (1939). Nursing in Spain. *The Nursing Times*, January, 54.

Atenza-Fernández, J. (2008). Franco's repression of healthcare professionals at Talavera de la Reina. *Alcalibe*, *8*, 235–275. (in Spanish)

Barona-Villar, J. L. & Bernabeu-Mestre, J. (2008). Health and State: The International Health Movement and the Spanish Administration (1851–1945). Valencia: Universitat de Valencia. (in Spanish)

Beevor, A. (2007). *The battle for Spain: The Spanish Civil War 1936–1939*. London: Phoenix.

Brenan, G. (2003). *The Spanish labyrinth: The social and political background of the Spanish Civil War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Carr, R. (2001). *Modern Spain: 1875–1980*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Carroll, P. N. (1994). *The odysey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigades: Americans in the Spanish Civil War*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Casas, M. F. & Miralles, T. (2008). Nursing during the Spanish Civil War. *Híades*, *10*, 867–872. (in Spanish)

Cheng, E. K.-M. (2008). *The plain and noble garb of truth*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press.

Collantes, E. (1915). Royal order approving the educational program for both lay and religious nursing professionals. *Gazeta de Madrid*, *141*, 484–486. (in Spanish)

Coni, N. (2008). *Medicine and warfare: Spain, 1936–1939*. London: Routledge.

Cordero, M. & Momeñe, J. M. (1937). Practicantes' denunciation of nurses who are encroaching into their area of practice. In: *Archivo General Militar de Ávila* (PS Santander C, C. 19, Leg. 19, Exp. 14, Doc. 1–4). Avila, Spain: Instituto de Historia Cultural Militar. (in Spanish)

Diazdeneira, A. (1937). The nurse comrade. In: *Sanidad Popular*, *5*, 2. *Archivo General de la Guerra Civil Española* (Hemeroteca, MF/R. 2266, Rev. 263). Salamanca, Spain: Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica. (in Spanish)

Díaz-Sánchez, P. (2005). War nurses: Other ways of women's involvement in politics. *Temperamentvm*, 2. [Cited 14 Apr 2018.] Available from URL: http://www.index-f.com/temperamentum/tn2/t0611.php. (in Spanish)

Durgan, A. (2007). *The Spanish Civil War*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Forrest, A. (2000). *The Spanish Civil War: Questions and analysis in history*. London: Routledge.

Franco Rubio, G. A. (1982). Spanish women's contribution to contemporary politics: From the restoration to the Civil War (1876–1939). In: R. M. Capel Martínez (Ed.), Women and society in Spain (1700–1975) (pp. 239–264). Madrid: Dirección General de Juventud y Promoción Socio-Cultural. (in Spanish)

Freeman, H. (1938). American nurses in Southern Spain! In: *Ayuda Medica Internacional*, *9*, *9*. *Archivo General de la Guerra Civil Española* (Hemeroteca, MF/R. 310). Salamanca, Spain: Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica.

Gerstl-Pepin, C. & Patrizio, K. (2009). Reflexivity in qualitative research. Learning from Dumbledore's pensieve: Metaphor as an aid in teaching. *Qualitative Research*, *9*, 299–308.

Graham, H. (2005). *The Spanish Civil War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hernández-Conesa, J. & Segura-López, G. (2013). Training the Lady Nurses of the Red Cross during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). *Index de Enfermería*, *22*, 180–183. (in Spanish)

Hodgson, A. (1988). Diary of Agnes Hodgson In: J. Keene (Ed.), *The last mile to Huesca: An Australian nurse in the Spanish Civil War* (pp. 79–174). Sydney, NSW: New South Wales University Press.

Inglis, A. (1987). *Australians in the Spanish Civil War*. Wellington: Allen & Unwin.

International Brigade Memorial Trust. (2018). [Cited 14 Apr 2018.] Available from URL: http://www.international-brigades.org.uk

Irving, B. (1938). Peoples front at the front. In: *Ayuda Médica Internacional*, 9, 20-21. *Archivo General de la Guerra Civil Española* (Hemeroteca, MF/R. 310). Salamanca, Spain: Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica.

Jackson, A. (2002). *British women and the Spanish Civil War*. London: Routledge.

Jackson, G. (2004). Multiple historic meanings of the Spanish Civil War. *Science & Society*, *68*, 272–276.

Jackson, M. (1994). *Fallen sparrows: The International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War*. Philadelphia, PA: The American Philosophical Society.

Jenkins, K. & Munslow, A. (2003). *Re-thinking history*. London: Routledge Classics.

Junco, V. (2014). "Say to them, they are no longer young": The US left and the cultural response to the Spanish Civil War. In: C. Alsina Risquez & C. Stretch (Eds), *Innocence and loss: representations of war and national identity in the United States* (pp. 77–102). Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Kirschenbaum, L. A. (2015). *International communism and the Spanish Civil War: Solidarity and suspicion*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kowalsky, D. (2006). The Soviet Union and the International Brigades, 1936–1939. *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, *19*, 28–32.

Lannon, F. (2002). *Essential histories: The Spanish Civil War 1936–1939*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing Limited.

Levine, M. (1938). Anglo-American nurses in Benicassim. In: *Ayuda Médica Internacional*, 9, 19. *Archivo General de la Guerra Civil Española* (Hemeroteca, MF/R. 310). Salamanca, Spain: Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica.

Low, M. & Brea, J. (1937). *Red Spanish Notebook: The first six months of the Revolution and the Civil War*. London: Martin Secker and Warburg, Ltd.

Lundy, K. S. (2008). Historical research. In: L. M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*. London: Sage.

Lusk, B. (1997). Historical methodology for nursing research. *Image*, *29*, 355–359.

Macbeth, D. (2001). On 'reflexivity' in qualitative research: Two readings, and a third. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *7*, 35–68.

McLellan, J. (2004). *Antifascism and memory in East Germany: Remembering the International Brigades 1945–1989*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Mangini, S. (1995). *Memories of resistance: Women's voices from the Spanish Civil War*. London: Yale University Press.

Martin, F. (1937). The American hospital unit. In: M. Acier (Ed.), *From Spanish trenches*. London: The Cresset Press.

Merims, S. (1938). The Taracón sector. In: *Ayuda Médica Internacional*, 9, 12. *Archivo General de la Guerra Civil Española* (Hemeroteca, MF/R. 310). Salamanca, Spain: Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica.

Moradiellos, E. (2002). The British image of Spain and the Civil War. *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, *15*, 4–13.

Munhall, P. L. (2012). *Nursing research: A qualitative perspective*. London: Jones & Bartlett Learning.

Murray, A. (1986). Annie Murray. In: I. MacDougall (Ed.), *Voices from the Spanish Civil War: Personal collections of Scottish volunteers in Republican Spain 1936–39* (pp. 69–76). Edinburgh: Polygon.

Nash, M. (1995). *Defying male civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War*. Denver, CO: Arden Press, Inc.

National Institute of Statistics. (1943). Spain's annual directory. *INEbase Historia*, 296. [Cited 14 Apr 2018.] Available from URL: www.ine.es/inebaseweb/hist.do. (in Spanish)

Nightingale, D. J. & Cromby, J. (1999). *Social constructionist psychology: A critical analysis of theory and practice*. Buckingham: Oxford University Press.

Núñez Díaz-Balart, M. (2006). Blood and text, raw materials on health care in the International Brigades. In: M. Requena Gallego & R. M. Sepúlveda Losa (Eds), *Health care in the International Brigades* (pp. 205–224). Cuenca, Spain: Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha. (in Spanish)

de Quesada, A. (2015). *The Spanish Civil War 1936–39 (2): Republican forces*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing, Ltd.

Pike. (1938). A doctor sees the work of the fascists in Belchite. In: *Ayuda Médica Internacional*, 9, 13–14. *Archivo*

General de la Guerra Civil Española (Hemeroteca, MF/R. 310). Salamanca, Spain: Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica.

Ratner, C. (2002). Subjectivity and objectivity in qualitative methodology. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *3(3)* [Cited 14 Apr 2018.] Available from URL: file:///C:/Users/Nombre%20Apellido/Downloads/829-2561-1-PB.pdf.

Requena, M. (2004). The International Brigades: A historiographical approach. *Ayer*, *56*, 11–36. (in Spanish)

Richardson, R. D. (1976). Foreign fighters in Spanish militias: The Spanish civil war 1936–1939. *Military Affairs*, *40*, 7–11.

Sarnecky, M. T. (1990). Historiography: A legitimate research methodology for nursing. *Advances in Nursing Science*, *12*, 1–10.

Scott-Ellis, P. (1995). Diary of Priscilla Scott-Ellis. In: Raymond Carr (Ed.), *The Chances of Death: A Diary of the Spanish Civil War* (pp. 5–236). Norwich: Michael Russell.

Stafford, K. (2015). *Narrating war in peace: The Spanish Civil War in the transition and today*. New York: Palgrave.

Telge, O. (1937). What is our organisation? In: *Ayuda Médica Internacional*, 1, 1. *Archivo General de la Guerra Civil Española* (Hemeroteca, MF/R. 310). Salamanca, Spain: Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica. (in Spanish)

Urmston, L. (1939a). English nurse in Spain. *Nursing Mirror*, *13*, 231–234.

Urmston, L. (1939b). Training nurses in the battle line. *Nursing Mirror*, *24*, 435–436.

de Vries, L. (1979). *Up from the cellar*. Minneapolis, MN: Vanilla Press.

Willig, C. (2001). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Zaagsma, G. (2017). *Jewish volunteers, the International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, Plc.