Amplifying Antifascism:
Loudspeakers as a technology of war in Spain, 1936–9

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Introduction

The loudspeaker-lorry makes its entrance twelve minutes into *The Spanish Earth*, an antifascist film produced in 1937 to mobilise international support for the Second Republic during the Spanish Civil War. The size of the machine makes it cartoonish and science-fictional, yet ominous in its promise of sonic power: an oversized, rectangular speaker horn yawns over the rear of an armoured flatbed truck and tapers over the top of the cab. The English voiceover explains: this is the 'loudspeaker of the People's Army'. Over the following frames, the invention trundles to the frontline, a technician sets a record spinning, and the loudspeaker blares into life, though not with political speeches but with the song from a late nineteenth-century *zarzuela* (a Spanish form of popular musical theatre). The loudspeaker-lorry makes two further appearances: briefly as a mouthpiece that broadcasts a speech by the Communist leader La Pasionaria and more at length as a platform for a deserter from the opposing Francoist army. The latter appeals to his former comrades to join him in the Republican zone as the camera pans across University City in Madrid. Vision and voice are fused together and command the landscape: nothing moves or makes a sound as the deserter's words roll across no man's land and reverberate through ruined buildings.[1] The Spanish Civil War was the first in which loudspeakers were employed to broadcast wartime propaganda in this way and mobile sonic propaganda has remained a feature of wars since, from Korea to Iraq. It was also the first conflict in which mass broadcasting technology existed for domestic and international audiences, and over the course of 1936-9 foreign audiences tuned into unmediated voices from the opposing Republican and Francoist zones.[2]

The Spanish Civil War was sparked by a right-wing military coup which sought to overthrow the existing Republican government. As a coup it failed, thanks to opposition from loyal police and military units, and left-wing trade unions and political parties. But the rebels

[1] Joris Ivens, *The Spanish Earth* (Contemporary Historians, inc., 1937): reel 2, 5:13 to 6:00, reel 3 3:27 to 3:42 and 6:44 to 7:04 https://archive.org/details/gov.archives.arc.5717241.1 (last accessed 9 May 2023). On the music in *The Spanish Earth*, Carol A. Hess, 'Competing Utopias? Musical Ideologies in the 1930s and Two Spanish Civil War Films', *Journal of the Society for American Music*, 2, no. 3 (2008): 319–54.
[2] For a contemporary commentary, O.W. Riegel, 'Press, Radio, and the Spanish Civil War', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1, no. 1 (1937): 134–5.

enjoyed sufficient support – both domestically from conservatives, fascists and Catholics and internationally from Germany and Italy – for it to develop into a war. The rebels – soon led by Francisco Franco – slowly won territory from the Republic, which eventually collapsed in March 1939. Radio played an important and recognised role in this conflict. Franco declared an end to the war over the radio, just as rebel officers had used radio stations to declare their rebellion three years earlier. Many politicians and generals spoke via the radio at the front and in the rear-guard, including La Pasionaria's famous *No pasarán* ('they shall not pass') speech and rebel General Gonzalo Queipo de Llano's obscene, violent harangues.[3] But radio was only one of the weapons in the arsenal employed in psychological warfare. Written propaganda, in the form of flyers and newspapers, were launched over no man's land using small rockets or even stones.[4] In the Republican zone, these initiatives ranged from the founding of dozens of trench newspapers coupled with literary campaigns to agit-prop theatre, the rewriting of school textbooks to the re-modelling of fiestas, which drenched the frontline and the rear-guard in antifascist political messages.[5] In the trenches, a new figure – the political commissar – was tasked with ensuring the correct political education and spirit amongst the rank-and-file and played a key role in launching propaganda at the enemy.[6] All of these efforts were directed at constructing a Republican antifascist community and mobilising the population for war.

[3] For Queipo de Llano, Ian Gibson, *Queipo de Llano: Sevilla, verano de 1936 (con las charlas radiofónicas completas)* (Barcelona, 1986).

[4] As emphasised by Daniel Arasa, *La batalla de las ondas en la Guerra Civil española: protagonistas de la guerra psicológica en la radio* (Maçanet de la Selva, 2015) and José Manuel Grandela, *Balas de papel: anecdotario de propaganda subversiva en la Guerra Civil española* (Barcelona, 2002).

[5] For example, Gema Iglesias Rodríguez, 'La propaganda política durante la Guerra Civil Española', (Ph.D. thesis, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1993); Mirta Núñez Díaz-Balart, *La prensa de guerra en la zona republicana durante la guerra civil española* (1936-1939) (Madrid, 1992); Christopher Cobb, *Los milicianos de la cultura* (Bilbao, 1995); Miguel Ángel Gamonal Torres, *Arte y política en la Guerra Civil española: El caso republicano* (Granada, 1987); Emilio Peral Vega and Francisco Sáez Raposo (eds.), *Métodos de propaganda activa en la Guerra Civil: literatura, arte, música, prensa y educación* (Madrid, 2015); Carl-Henrik Bjerstrom, *Josep Renau and the Politics of Culture in Republican Spain, 1931–1939* (Brighton, 2016); ídem, 'Entrenching Democracy: Education and Cultural Participation in the Spanish Republican Army, 1936–1939', *European History Quarterly*, 50, no. 3 (2020): 438–63. For music, for example, Marco Antonio de la Ossa Martínez, *La música en la guerra civil española* (Madrid, 2011).

[6] On commissars, see James Matthews, "'The Vanguard of Sacrifice'? Political Commissars in the Republican Popular Army during the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939," *War in History*, 21, no. 1 (2014): 82-101, esp. 93–4 for the commissars' speeches. For the forging of the Republican war effort, a useful starting point is James Matthews (ed.), *Spain at war: society, culture and mobilization, 1936-44* (London, 2019).

For all the importance accorded to radio during the war, there has been little direct focus on the use of loudspeakers. Amplifying technology is mentioned in the context of radio or is the subject of a passing reference while analysis focus on content or the organisation of propaganda.[7] Giles Tremlett's brief, acerbic depiction of the 'monstrously comical' loudspeaker-lorries akin to a 'slumbering Eiffel Tower' is unusual for paying attention to the loudspeakers themselves.[8] The lack of attention to loudspeakers mirrors their relative absence in the interdisciplinary field of sound studies until recently, Kyle Devine attributes to their ubiquitousness: loudspeakers are so successful and embedded in twentieth-century listening experiences that they are overlooked.[9] Yet reframing sound in terms of frequency and attending to how it can be used to mobilise, but also repress and overwhelm bodies has started to fill this lacuna.[10]

The employment of sound in warfare has a long history rooted in the understanding of its affective power– bloodcurdling war cries, screaming Stukas or sonic booms – and scientific advances in understanding the nature of sound. Experiments in stereo sound were harnessed for the purposes of navigation and acoustic surveillance as well as facilitating the invention of Long-Range Acoustic devices (or 'sound cannon'), use of sonic booms to inspire fear and inflict physical damage, and speculation as to use of infrasonic waves to attack US diplomatic personnel in Cuba – so-called 'Havana syndrome'.[11] Sound can therefore be an

[7] For example, brief sketches in Alan Davies, 'The First Radio War: Broadcasting in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 19, no. 4 (1999): 473–513; Grandela, *Balas de papel*, 177-–81; Emilio de la Peral Vega, *Retablos de agitación política: nuevas aproximaciones al teatro de la Guerra Civil Española* (Frankfurt am Main, 2013), 54–6. See also mentions in Armand Balsebre, *Historia de la radio en España*, vol. 1 (Madrid, 2001) 465–6; Arasa, *La batalla de la radio*; Carmelo Garitaonaindía, *La radio en España (1923-1939): de altavoz musical a arma de propaganda* (Bilbao, 1988), 204; Iglesias, 'La propaganda política', 128; and, in a different historiographical conversation, Eduardo Comín Colomer, *El quinto regimiento de milicias populares: historia de la unidad político-militar que fue cuna del ejército popular y del comisariado político* (Madrid, 1973), ch. 8.

[8] Giles Tremlett, *The International Brigades: Fascism, Freedom and the Spanish Civil War* (London, 2020), 259.

[9] Kyle Devine, 'A Mysterious Music in the Air: Cultural Origins of the Loudspeaker', *Popular Music History*, 8, no. 1 (2014): 5–28. See also Seth Cluett, 'Loudspeaker: towards a component theory of media sound', Ph.D. Thesis, Princeton University, 2013. A notable exception is Huub Wijfjes, 'Spellbinding and Crooning: Sound Amplification, Radio, and Political Rhetoric in International Comparative Perspective, 1900–1945', *Technology and Culture*, 55, no. 1 (2014): 148–85.

[10] E.g. Julian Henriques, *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques, and Ways of Knowing* (New York, 2011); Toby Heys, *Sound Pressure: How Speaker Systems Influence, Manipulate and Torture* (London, 2019).

[11] Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect and the Ecology of Fear* (Cambridge, MA, 2012); Gascia Ouzounian, *Stereophonica: Sound and Space in Science, Technology and the Arts* (Cambridge, MA, 2020); Yaron Jean, ''Silenced Power' Warfare Technology and the Changing Role of Sounds in Twentieth-Century Europe', *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, 8 (2011): 178–97. See also Martin Daughtry's

instrument to exercise power over bodies thanks to the potent physical and psychological effects that are believed to emerge from manipulating sound.[12] The use of loudspeakers in the Spanish Civil War was not underpinned by such sophisticated scientific or medical theories about sound and its effects, but rather were determined by the political need to broadcast propaganda. This was more akin to the use of loudspeakers during the Second World War, such as German attempts to demoralise French troops in 1939-40 or the American use of sound recordings to simulate the existence of fake forces in France after the allied invasion. Mobile propaganda units have been a feature of war since the 1930s: US forces in Iraq used loudspeakers to broadcast public information and mounted them on Humvees to taunt enemy combatants.[13]

This chapter seeks to elucidate the different ways in which loudspeakers were imagined and employed as a technology of war drawing on fragmentary references from military archives and the press. The use of loudspeakers was moulded by pre-war patterns but reshaped for the purposes of forging an antifascist army and rear-guard. They were a means of public communication, a way of trying to encourage desertion amongst the enemy ranks, and a means of generating conspicuous antifascist publics in the streets. Loudspeakers responded to a logic of total war, yet this existed in tension with the imagined affective power of the loudspeaker, which reached into combatants' bodies and pulled at their heartstrings.

Before the War

José-María Gil Robles, leader of the Confederation of Right-wing Autonomous Groups (CEDA), recalled that it was only on his election to parliament in 1931 that he first heard the famed rhetorical skills of veteran politician Niceto Álcala-Zamora.[14] Five years later a similar remark was impossible. Broadcasting technology had become a fundamental part of cultural and political life by 1933 that there were allegedly few political or cultural events without the

rich dissection of sound in warfare in *Listening to War: Sound, Music, Trauma, and Survival in Wartime Iraq* (New York, 2015). On sound and torture, for example, Suzanne G. Cusick, '"You are in a place that is out of the world…": Music in the Detention Camps of the "Global War on Terror"', *Journal of the Society for American Music*, 2, no. 1 (2008): 1–26.

[12] And not just in contexts of war: see Julian Henriques, *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques, and Ways of Knowing* (New York, 2011) for an exploration of the physical, vibrational experience of sound.

[13] Daughtry, *Listening to War*, 51–2, 178.

[14] José María Gil Robles, *No fue posible la paz* (Barcelona, 1968), 48.

'cold, mechanical ear' of the microphone, though likely this comment only applied to the capital.[15] The development of radio was constrained by reliance on advertising and by 1936 there were only just over 300,000 radio licences in a country of 24 million.[16] Yet – and because of the low density of radio ownership – radio listening was often a collective public event, whether in a bar, or political or cultural centre. Amplification also facilitated large-scale events with voices broadcast through loudspeaker systems. The council of San Sebastian installed loudspeakers at the city's beach which 'blasted dance music and riveted advertisements into the democratic consciousness' while the country's most important radio station had experimented with radio cars mounted with loudspeakers to take amplified sound to the people.[17] On the eve of elections in 1936, Gil Robles himself gave a radio address from his office that claimed to have reached 800,000 people thanks to practices of collective listening.[18] In contrast, the Fascist invasion of Ethiopia was broadcast through squares and streets across Italy to an estimated audience of 10 million.[19]

The growth and familiarisation with the experience of electroacoustic amplification coincided with a democratic experiment in Spain. The Second Republic (1931–6) was invested by its supporters with the power to deliver democracy and social justice through state-led reform, but governments struggled to implement ambitious reforms in areas including labour legislation, welfare, the Catholic Church, education, the military, and landownership. There was a marked politicisation of the public sphere as supporters and detractors of the Republic mobilised in defence of their respective political projects. Faced with the increasing politicisation of airwaves and public spaces, the government moved to restrict the radio usage for electioneering ahead of the 1933 general elections. Political broadcasting was restricted initially to the retransmission of speeches, although even this was banned during the next election campaign in 1936.[20] Political sound was to be enclosed in theatres and meeting halls – at least in theory. In practice, the CEDA bought licences to broadcast from abroad while loudspeakers positioned at doors and windows allowed the sound of rallies to spill out into the streets. The CEDA even attempted to use loudspeakers mounted on cars to sway

[15] *Ondas*, 2 Sept 1933.
[16] Garitaonaindía, *La radio en España*, 136–7.
[17] George Steer, *The Tree of Gernika* (London, 1938), 16.
[18] *El Debate*, 16 Feb. 1936.
[19] John Foot, *Blood and Power: The Rise and Fall of Italian Fascism* (London, 2022), 212.
[20] Garitaonaindía, *La radio en España*, 75–6.

undecided voters – a tactic akin to the Nazi *Lautsprecherwagen* used in 1932 – despite a pre-emptive ban by the authorities.[21]

Republican governments sought to restrict broadcasting for electioneering purposes, but nevertheless increasingly used radio for public (political) communication. Microphones were installed in ministries in Madrid and at the Catalan government in Barcelona. Radio provided regular updates on ballot counting or to issue appeals for calm in the face of threats to the Republic.[22] Indeed, the power of broadcasting technology was recognised by those who sought to destabilise or even overthrow the Republic.[23] Two years later, during a two-week revolutionary insurrection in October 1934, militants seized control of radio technology in order to broadcast their own version of events to the local population, via loudspeakers. The director of a captured arms factory later claimed that the revolutionaries 'constantly broadcast that they were in absolute control of most of Spain'.[24] The broadcasts preyed on the uncertain context and lack of news of the wider situation.[25] Even after the insurrection was quashed, the government grappled with rumours spread by a French radio station that Spain's president had resigned and that Franco, who was involved in repressing the insurrection, had installed a military dictatorship.[26]

The uses of amplification during the Second Republic provided the foundations for its employment during the Civil War. The power of radio was recognised, and amplified sound became an increasingly common experience in urban areas in particular. Broadcasting became an important and recognised political tool to facilitate communication to a mass audience that prefigured its use during the war. Tensions over the sonic politicisation of public space would be radically changed by the exigencies of the war.

The Beginning of the War

[21] Carolyn Birdsall, *Nazi Soundscapes: Sound, Technology and Urban Space in Germany, 1933-1945* (Amsterdam, 2012), 39.
[22] As emphasised by Garitaonandía, *La radio en España*, passim.
[23] For example, the attempted coup in August 1932 or the declaration of a Catalan republic within a federal Spain. Balsebre, *Historia de la radio*, 357, 359.
[24] *Heraldo de Madrid*, 29 Oct. 1934.
[25] On uncertainty, news and propaganda during the insurrection, see Matthew Kerry, *Unite, Proletarian Brothers! Radicalism and Revolution in the Spanish Second Republic, 1931–6* (London, 2020), 145–7.
[26] *La Voz*, 22 Oct. 1934.

The proclamation of the uprising over the radio waves was one of the distinguishing features of the 1936 coup compared with nineteenth-century military rebellions. Rebel officers prioritised gaining control of local radio stations as part of the uprising and military orders were broadcast from the balconies of town halls.[27] The coup itself was a live radio event. Abel Paz describes the experience of hearing the coup transmitted live over the radio thanks to loudspeakers in the central Barcelona. This was joined by wailing waves of factory sirens and blaring ship horns that alerted the city to the rebellion.[28] Radio became the most important source of news. Crowds gathered in the streets to hear the latest bulletins and newspapers printed news gleaned from radio stations from across Spain.[29] Radio suddenly occupied an important role in holding together a Republican state whose authority and legitimacy was questioned by the coup, while enabling listeners to imagine themselves as part of a national community standing together in a crisis. As *La Libertad* explained, 'the whole of Spain was informed by radio every quarter of an hour of the course and crushing of the rebellion'.[30]

Amplification was also employed to help stymy the rising. In Barcelona, where the rebellion failed, General Goded was forced to speak on radio to convince would-be rebels to surrender.[31] Where rebellious soldiers and rightists were besieged by Republican militias and police, like in Madrid, Gijón or Huesca, the Republicans used loudspeakers to broadcast repeated calls to lay down their weapons and surrender. The Chilean ambassador travelled to Republican-held Toledo to mediate via a loudspeaker broadcast between the rebel soldiers besieged inside the fortress of the Álcazar and the Republicans.[32]

Radio meant that the uprising was not a narrow military event, but rather had broader, mobilising, popular effects and it served as a focal point for constructing the war effort. In the early turmoil, the most prominent radio station in Madrid, Unión Radio, became a key vehicle for communicating public information and connecting Republican citizens. The station received dozens of typed or handwritten notes for broadcast, from reports of stolen cars or

[27] Balsebre, *Historia de la radio*, 370ff.
[28] Cited in Balsebre, *Historia de la radio*, 384–5.
[29] Madrid in *Política*, 24 July 1936. Malaga and Cordoba, for example, respectively in *El Socialista*, 19 July 1936 and *El Sol*, 11 Aug. 1936.
[30] *La Libertad*, 21 July 1936.
[31] Davies, 'The First Radio War', 473–4.
[32] *El Socialista*, 15 Sept. 1936. There was similar communication with besieged troops at the Virgen de la Cabeza sanctuary, near Cordoba, months later.

lost objects to announcements of improvised hospitals, care for children whose parents had volunteered or that simply individuals far from Madrid were safe and well.[33] With the Republican state thrown into crisis, power devolved to the hands of left-wing political parties and trade unions at the local level, many of whom clamoured for a radio station under their own direct control. The situation shifted from chaotic initial phases – which Balsebre describes as a 'babel' – in which there was a fight for frequencies, to attempts at sabotage.[34] Davies counts fifteen different radio stations in Madrid in the winter of 1936-7. Only three answered to the Junta tasked with defending the city.[35] Barcelona claimed two stations at the beginning of the war, but this soon changed as anarchist, Communist and socialist organisations set up their own.[36] The flourishing of grassroots initiatives – and overlapping, competing desires for control – mirrored the wider effects of the coup and developing war in the Republican zone. The coup caused the disarticulation of state structures and the mushrooming of grassroots militias and a centrifugal reordering of power. From autumn 1936 onwards, the Republican state and centralised authority were rebuilt.

Amplification at the Front

The Spanish Civil War was a battle of words, as well as arms. A 'verbal and music traffic' in the form of speeches, songs, slogans and insults passed between the lines, as well as slingshots, balloons and small rockets that delivered payloads of propagandistic flyers and newspapers.[37] As the fronts began to stabilise, opposing soldiers engaged in debates across no man's land that built on the tradition of *controversias* – verbal duels – and were an opportunity to exhibit rhetorical flair and engage in masculine one-upmanship, 'in which wit played a central role'.[38] As a militiaman from the Communist-organised Fifth Regiment boasted to a journalist:

[33] See the notes filed in Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica (hereafter CDMH), Politico-Social (PS) Barcelona, box 164, file 31.
[34] Balsebre, *Historia de la radio*, 468ff; Arasa, *La batalla de las ondas*, 37–8.
[35] Davies, 'The First Radio War', 475.
[36] Ferran Aisa, *ECN 1 Radio CNT-FAI Barcelona* (Barcelona, 2017), 20.
[37] The quotation in Ossa Martínez, *La música en la guerra civil*, 119. For an overview of the different strategies, see Grandela, *Balas de papel*.
[38] The quotation is from the Cuban writer and political commissar Pablo de la Torriente, 'En el parapeto', in *El periodista Pablo: textos y crónicas, 1930–6* (Havana, 1989), 458. For a sketch of pre-war *controversias*, see Kerry, *Unite, Proletarian Brothers!*, 36–7.

> Last night we asked them if Mola [the chief conspirator behind the rebellion] had removed his cowbell before sleeping and, very annoyed, they launched insults at us. A comrade told them they were impolite gentlemen and they responded, irritated, "we are not gentlemen". "Well, what are you?" he asked. And they said "workers". You could have heard the laughter in Sevastopol![39]

Evidently it did not reach Crimea, but soldiers made use of gramophone horns, megaphones, and loudspeakers to amplify their voices from the early stages of the war. By mid-August, the Fifth Regiment had already developed their own trench 'radio' loudspeaker system; similar initiatives appeared on other fronts, from Bilbao to Barbastro.[40]

George Orwell was perplexed by shouting through a megaphone as a 'method of warfare' (though he later recognised its effectiveness when lacking artillery).[41] Republican propaganda, on the other hand, embraced amplification as a technology of war, frequently describing loudspeakers as a weapon. Loudspeakers fired 'mortal truths' or 'truths' like bullets; they were 'cannon[s]', 'artillery' or 'machine gun[s]', while broadcast songs were 'grenade[s]'.[42] *La Libertad* juxtaposed words and shells: 'Our heroic soldiers […] alternate the effective use of the rifle and machine gun with the no less effective loudspeaker'.[43] In one radio speech, Chief Political Commissar Julio Álvarez del Vayo referred to 'loudspeaker cannons [*cañones altavoces*]' rather than the linguistically very similar loudspeaker-lorries [*camiones altavoces*]. Whether an unconscious slip of the tongue, a typographical error, mishearing by the journalist, or exactly what Álvarez del Vayo wanted to say, it is impossible to know, but it nonetheless shows the identification of trench loudspeakers with artillery.[44] This association was also reflected in visual culture. The caption to a photograph of a militiaman speaking through a gramophone cone published in Carleton Beals, an American journalist, echoed a similar sentiment: 'Perhaps more than in any other war, the printed and spoken word is used today in Spain along with bullets and often more effectively. Loud-speakers bellow from the trenches […] The loud-speaker battles the cannon for supremacy'.[45]

[39] *La Libertad*, 30 Aug. 1936.
[40] E.g. Bilbao in *La Libertad*, 27 March 1937; Barbastro in *Mundo Obrero*, 23 Oct. 1936.
[41] George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (New York, 1952 [1938]), 41–3.
[42] E.g. *Heraldo de Madrid*, 20 July 1936; *Verdad*, 23 Dec. 1936; *Mundo Obrero*, 19 Nov. 1937.
[43] *La Libertad*, 7 March 1937.
[44] *El Socialista*, 4 Aug. 1937.
[45] *The New Republic*, 2 June 1937.

Loudspeakers were folded into the logic of total, industrial war. Mass production was the key to victory, as Communist publications, in particular, enthused. Political commissars demanded more loudspeakers and megaphones: more frequent and greater sonic bombardment would overcome the enemy's resistance by drowning them in industrially-produced resources.[46] Propaganda similarly needed to be 'sufficiently concentrated', in a way akin to artillery fire.[47] 'Power' was also the prized characteristic of loudspeaker. Boasting of the power of a loudspeaker – which 'hyperamplified' rather than simply 'amplified' voices – whether on the home front or in the trenches, was a claim to the technical prowess of Republican engineers.[48]

What 'power' meant was never explicit, but it appears to refer to both the loudness and the reach of the loudspeaker. In separate articles from March 1938, power was defined in terms reach ('a loudspeaker with three kilometres of reach. There are more powerful ones') and sonic force or loudness ('…the powerful cry of the loudspeakers […] The loudspeakers fired truths like bullets').[49] These different characteristics were often understood as fundamentally the same in journalistic or propagandistic descriptions of loudspeakers – the louder the sound, the greater its reach – but the latter was prioritised, even if this was only implicit. The fantasised objective was sonic dominance over the landscape such that propaganda would become inescapable.[50] According to an article republished in a Communist pamphlet, the enemy

> has to hear and listen, even if they cover their ears, even if they bite their fists with rage, even if they babble the crudest insults and threats. The voice of "radio" Buitrago dominates everything and echoes through the mountains and valleys, through the trenches and redoubts, through the batteries and machine gun nests.[51]

[46] E.g. *Mundo Obrero*, 12 June 1937; *Nuestro Ejército*, April 1938.
[47] 'Plan de propaganda en las filas del enemigo', undated [after April 1938], CDMH, PS Madrid, box 1202, file 6.
[48] *La Voz*, 11 March 1937.
[49] *Frente Rojo*, 2 March 1938; *Verdad*, 11 March 1938.
[50] *La Voz*, 11 March 1937.
[51] *Agitación entre el enemigo* (Madrid, [1937]), 11–2.

Shouting and the use of rudimentary speaking cones did not disappear, but the pages of newspapers placed much greater emphasis on electroacoustic amplification thanks to the way it facilitated these fantasies of power and reach.[52]

The invention of the loudspeaker-lorry in December 1936 represented an attempt to perfection this fantasy. The lorry was founded on the pre-war use of vehicles for broadcasting by Arturo Fraile and Andrés Carlos, who prior to the war had run a 'modest radio workshop' in Madrid. As *La Libertad* explained, the first three lorries were 'equipped with loudspeakers, radio systems, a printing press and technicians' for their frontline mission.[53] Within a year, as many as 20 had been built by a seven-strong team. The armour-plating enabling operation at the front and – so it was claimed – the ability to enter enemy territory.[54] There were competing claims as to the reach of the loudspeaker mounted on top of the armoured lorry, whether four, 10 or even the implausible 25 kilometres at night.[55]

The folding of amplified propaganda into the logic of the war was also evident in the way that improvisation and creativity in broadcasts gave way to the logic and pressures of war. Improvised rhetorical duels were eroded by an increasing emphasis on discipline and centralised control which came with the creation of the Popular Army in autumn 1936. This formalised military structure replaced the militias that mushroomed at the beginning of the war, placed a much greater emphasis on discipline, and established the figure of the commissar, who was responsible for the political education and wellbeing of Republican troops. Propaganda required careful handling and control. Guidance for commissars emphasised structured programming and avoiding improvised arguments across no man's land. At a meeting in August 1938, a commissar expressed concern that enemy propaganda went unanswered and was only countered by a short talk to soldiers the following day, which had little effect on morale. The division's commissar responded that propaganda was organised this way because previously it had degenerated into a 'heated' argument. He also noted that propaganda by individuals was banned.[56]

[52] For the continued use of megaphones, e.g. *La Voz del Combatiente*, 14 June 1937.
[53] *La Libertad*, 8 Dec. 1936.
[54] *El Sol*, 19 Oct. 1937.
[55] The figure of 25km is from Davies, 'The First Radio War', 489, who does not cite a source. For the other figures: *Estampa*, 6 March 1937; *Gaceta del Norte*, 5 December 1936.
[56] 'Acta de la reunión celebrada por el comisario de la segunda división con los comisarios de brigada, batallón y grupos divisionarios', 2 August 1938, CDMH, PS Madrid, box 512, file 3.

Yet the bombastic propaganda elided the significant problems that amplification faced. Not only were their few loudspeaker-lorries but loudspeakers faced technical and climatological difficulties. Broken equipment, dead batteries or exhausted valves could mean it took months to fix amplifiers.[57] Even if a battalion possessed functional equipment, poor weather could foreclose broadcasts.[58] If loudspeakers were a weapon, then they were very much an auxiliary weapon that could not replace ballistics.

In contrast to other weapons, broadcasting entailed close attention to the enemy's reaction. While each army had systems for monitoring and reporting enemy propaganda, they also noted and fantasised about opposing soldiers' reactions to their own side's propaganda.[59] Broadcasts were often met with bullets, which reinforced the message that the Republican had superior reason, whereas the only language of Francoism was violence (though this did not prevent Republicans responding to Francoist propaganda with mortars). Bullets were interpreted as impotent rage or as a response demanded by Francoist officers.[60] On other occasions, enemy soldiers listened to broadcasts and shouted 'that's not true!' in response.[61] Francoist heckles even changed in tone, according to one report in *El Comisario*: the term '*rojo* [red], which at the beginning had sounded like an insult, in the end acquired a sympathetic tone'.[62]

Silence was invested with different meanings. Silence was a space to be filled, but it was also eloquent in its own way. This was expressed in terms of atmosphere: a silence could be 'close, dense and deep', which was 'broken' by the power of loudspeakers.[63] But silence was also associated with an affective response which revealed propaganda's effectiveness, at least in the Republican imagination. At Christmas 1936, near Bilbao, the Republicans set up a loudspeaker so that both sides could listen to a speech by the Basque leader José Antonio Aguirre. This was listened to 'in the greatest silence', rather than the shots that were the

[57] E.g. First Army Corps, Second Division, Commissariat, 'Balance de existencias de material de propaganda', 30 December 1938, CDMH, PS Madrid, box 512, file 9.
[58] 45th Mixed Brigade, 'Parte de Propaganda', 19 Oct. 1938, Archivo General Militar de Ávila (hereafter AGMAV), box 1027, folder 6
[59] There are many fragmentary records of this from both sides. For example, AGMAV, box 1027, folder 6; box 1497, folder 36; box 1669, folder 4; CDMH, PS-Madrid, box 2001, file 60.
[60] E.g. *La Voz*, 11 March 1937.
[61] *CNT*, 30 Nov. 1936.
[62] *El Comisario*, 19 May 1937.
[63] *Mundo Gráfico*, 17 March 1937.

response to 'news that does not please them. The words of Mr Aguirre must have caused a great impression on the rebels'.[64] The Cuban writer and commissar Pablo de la Torriente claimed that his words 'affected them, because when I finished they did not start braying or cawing, but rather remained silent' – though this soon gave way to a rageful salvo.[65] Rage or silent introspection were the only two responses imagined of the Francoists, which reflected their own self-understanding as to the reasonable and correct side in the war. No thought was given to inaudibility – at least in written records – despite their own recognition that at times they 'could not make out what [the Francoists] said, only managing to distinguish the ending of *vivas* to Franco and Falange'.[66]

The affective response to waves of propaganda rolling across enemy lines was understood in distinct embodied ways. The power of the loudspeakers lay fundamentally in their ability to convey an inescapable message, rather than overwhelming the enemy with deafening sound. The advantage of sonic propaganda lay in its ability to affect the head and heart in a subconscious, direct manner. Loudspeakers "fired" on the enemy with 'mortal truths [that] sought out the hearts of those' in the opposing trenches.[67] As one political commissar theorised – or fantasised – propaganda sparked a 'psychological phenomenon caused by the struggle between the oppression imposed by their superiors and the desire for freedom that springs from their hearts'. Rockets and pamphlets were not as effective as loudspeakers in stimulating this affective response.[68] The enveloping sound of the loudspeaker would connect with deep-seated desires for emancipation and a love for the values of Republican Spain. The assumption that loudspeaker propaganda had this effect was confirmed by reports report like the effect of music on two Francoist deserters. They claimed that music in particular sparked a bodily effect: it triggered 'the desire to start running and running' towards the source of the sound.[69] The physical effects could also be produced in Republican troops. Communist journalist Eusebio Cimorra portrayed soldiers as scarcely able to contain their emotions while listening to the daily war report: the commander, tense with

[64] *La Libertad*, 24 Dec. 1936.
[65] Torriente, 'En el parapeto', 461–4. In a similar vein, *Agitación entre el enemigo*, 26–7.
[66] 45th Mixed Brigade, 'Parte de Propaganda', 17 Oct. 1938, AGMAV, box 1027, folder 6.
[67] *Verdad*, 23 Dec. 1936.
[68] *Octubre*, 6 Aug. 1937.
[69] *La Voz del Combatiente*, 30 Jan. 1937.

emotional energy, embraces his fellow soldiers and want to 'melt' into them: a 'tactile sensation that [will allow him] to absorb what the report says into his heart'.[70]

The affective impact of sound was underpinned by the assumption that the message was irresistible. Or so an article in *La Voz* claimed. When a megaphone broadcast '*ultrapowerfully*' the 'hyperamplified voice' of *The Internationale* over the Francoist trenches, forty men stood up and raised their fits in an antifascist salute. Their officer's initial anger crumbled as he too revealed himself to be a closeted leftist. Their antifascist pose was a brave one for it exposed their bodies to Republican guns, but in doing so they showed their true Republican mettle. Not that they had a choice in the matter – or so the article claimed – the song had stimulated an instinctive bodily response.[71] Pre-war political identities were embodied in a way that Francoism could not easily erase. Even by the standards of wartime propaganda, the anecdote is barely plausible. Rather, it was a fantasy that reflected the Republican message that the war was one of liberation from a foreign fascist occupation and terror kept the Francoist soldiers in line. Deep down, Francoist soldiers had a desire to be free and to join with their compatriots. Amplified propaganda stimulated fantasies – of range and power, of reason and the possibility of reuniting brother Spaniards – due to the way sound waves facilitated the reach of ideas across space, but also the particular affective dimension of sonic propaganda.

Despite the emphasis on power and artillery, loudspeakers were destructive insofar as they targeted morale. There was not the dehumanising logic of total war, but rather a desire to sway the enemy into deserting to join the Republicans. Speakers were warned not to insult or irritate, but rather to build an attractive programme formed of music, war reports, news and speeches, to both entertain and inform. The content had to be patriotic: programming should begin and end with the Republican national anthem and the war should be framed in terms of an invasion by foreign fascist powers while also emphasising repression and deplorable material conditions in the Francoist rear-guard.[72] Scripts were produced and guidelines issued in the press and through internal army reports, which recommended

[70] *Adelante* [Mahón], 6 Oct. 1938.
[71] *La Voz*, 11 March 1937.
[72] On the patriotic framing of the war by Republican propaganda, Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas, *¡Fuera el invasor! nacionalismos y movilización bélica durante la guerra civil española (1936-1939)* (Madrid, 2006), ch. 2.

predictable, identically-structured broadcasts on a punctual nightly basis.[73] Indeed, broadcasts usually took place in the evening or at night – sometimes very late – when the guns were silent and often lasted for a couple of hours.[74] The regularity was envisaged as generating expectation, but also, consciously or otherwise, mirrored the banal normality of peacetime broadcasting. They should be tailored to the opposing troops, which meant avoiding elaborate rhetoric when facing peasants and speaking in the troops' language.[75] The voices of deserters were prized, revealing a tacit understanding of the importance of voice and the shortcomings of Republican propaganda.

The emphasis on culture, literacy and enlightenment – educating soldiers would emancipate them – means that an underlying faith in reason made sense. All that was needed was to unmask the reality and reveal the "true" nature of Francoism for soldiers' morale to plummet. In propaganda broadcasts at the front, enemy soldiers were not presented as ardent fascists who must be crushed as they were in posters pasted on walls in the rear-guard. Instead, Francoist soldiers were subjugated by their officers and the wider repressive state apparatus. By this logic, the propaganda effort was not to re-educate, but to reach out to subjects understood to be sympathetic to the Republican cause. Orwell admitted that he was 'amazed and scandalized' at the 'idea of trying to convert your enemy instead of shooting him'.[76] In this way, rather than soldiers seeing themselves as part of the same humanity despite the propaganda, as Pedro Corral has claimed, the content of propaganda itself played a role in framing rank-and-file soldiers as part of a common humanity, with the wider conflict depicted as a foreign invasion and betrayal by Francoist elites.[77]

The gaping mouths of loudspeaker-lorries were positioned to face the enemy, yet amplification technology also affected Republican soldiers. Loudspeaker propaganda also produced antifascist soldiers. As a commissar explained:

> It is easy to adapt any of these topics so that at the same time as they propagate the magnificent power, organising genius [and] justness of our struggle amongst the

[73] E.g. AGMAV, box 834, folder 3; *Comisario*, Sept. 1938.
[74] There is substantial evidence for the regular rhythm and structure of broadcasts, see, e.g. reports from the 45th Mixed Brigade contained in AGMAV, box 1027, folder 6.
[75] 'Plan de propaganda en las filas del enemigo', undated [after April 1938], CDMH, PS Madrid, 1202, 6.
[76] Orwell, *Homage*, 42.
[77] See Pedro Corral, *Desertores: los españoles que no quisieron la Guerra Civil* (Cordoba, 2017).

> enemy, they are [also] useful to the Unit disseminating the propaganda by making our soldiers understand the enormous effort that the Spanish people are undertaking in every way, and whose success depends on their effort and bravery.[78]

Involving soldiers in the production and diffusion of propaganda also sought to raise morale and build the Republican war effort.[79] Frontline sonic propaganda would produce the ideal soldier of the Popular Army. The broadcasts were a way of reinforcing antifascist ideals and a way of explaining the war to soldiers. This was especially important given the reliance on conscripts and the problem of desertion.[80] Loudspeaker propaganda formed part of a panoply of initiatives, including battalion newspapers, literacy campaigns and travelling theatres, that sought to construct an antifascist Popular Army formed of engaged, emancipated, educated citizen-soldiers.

The songs and use of music are difficult to establish. The Republican national anthem opened and closed loudspeaker broadcasts, but scripts often simply inserted the word 'music' between speeches without further elaboration. Elsewhere there are references to 'dance' or 'popular' music and an article describing a loudspeaker-lorry broadcast mentioned 'black music' – presumably a form of jazz – alongside Schubert.[81] The loudspeaker-lorry that appeared in *The Spanish Earth* blared out an incongruous, lively *seguidilla* sung by washerwomen in the 1890 *zarzuela El Chaleco Blanco*. The 112th Mixed Brigade claimed to broadcast 'varied music' to alleviate the 'monotony' for the enemy.[82] These glimpses, alongside the production of revolutionary songbooks and gramophone records, suggest that the Republican army drew on political songs and a variety of musical styles.[83]

Loudspeakers were therefore a form of entertainment for both sides. Songs and speeches could be irritating, but they also whiled away the hours of darkness. Some commissars recruited musicians from the rank-and-file who played songs across the lines.

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[78] *Comisario*, Sept. 1938. See also the use of loudspeakers to propagandise amongst Republican soldiers and civilians in *Guadalajara!* (Madrid, 1937), 18–20.
[79] E.g. by taking advantage of their musical talents. *Comisario*, Sept. 1938.
[80] On these topics, see the important work by James Matthews, *Reluctant warriors : Republican Popular Army and Nationalist Army conscripts in the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939* (Oxford, 2012); Corral, *Desertores*; Michael Seidman, *Republic of Egos: A Social History of the Spanish Civil War* (Madison, 2002).
[81] *Nosotros*, 15 Aug. 1938.
[82] 112th Mixed Brigade, 'Charla que mediante el altavoz de dará esta noche, 16 de mayo de 1938, dirigida al campo enemigo', AGMAV, box 1027, folder 10.
[83] For a report on Communist Agit-Prop records, 'Informe de la Comisión Nacional de Agitación y Propaganda del Partido Comunista de España', 26 Aug. 1937, Archivo Histórico del Partido Comunista de España, folder 18.

Producing music provided a distraction from the drudgery of the day-to-day labours of trench life. It plausibly aided comradely feeling amongst Republican soldiers, and reinforced the Republican identification of their cause with culture and enlightenment. Opposing soldiers also found the music and speeches entertaining. When a broadcast was late on the front near Elorrio, Francoist soldiers reportedly shouted across the lines: 'is there no radio tonight?'[84]

The broadcasts were probably more successful as a form of entertainment than In causing desertions. The overall effectiveness of amplified propaganda is hard, if not impossible, to judge. The success of sonic propaganda, whether amplified or not, was frequently affirmed in the press and related to desertions to the Republic, right from the beginning of the war.[85] Álvarez del Vayo claimed that 'declarations by numerous prisoners' had attested to the influence of 'the voice of the commissars' on Francoist trenches.[86] It made little sense to say anything else. To propose that the propaganda was ineffectual would place the Republican cause in doubt. It was also logical that deserters would cite loudspeaker propaganda when explaining their decision to cross the lines. Pointing to the influence of propaganda flattered the Republican war effort and avoided citing personal or material reasons for switching allegiance while minimising the risk of making an erroneous declaration of political faith: loudspeaker broadcasts were their only awareness of the nature of the wartime Republic. Claims of propaganda's efficacy should therefore be treated with caution. Yet it also seems likely that broadcasts would have had some effect, particularly amongst soldiers with little ideological motivation who had been coerced into serving and had families in the opposing zone. José María Gárate Córdoba, who fought in the Francoist army, recalled hearing the 'very powerful' Republican loudspeaker 'filling' the valley in which they were stationed for the first time; while the 'deep, hollow voice' aroused 'a certain suspicion' in him, he thought 'some inexperienced little soldier could be truly affected [by it]'.[87]

The Rear-guard

[84] *CNT*, 30 Oct. 1936. See also Carleton Beals' remarks on the Francoist reaction to Pablo de la Torriente's speeches – 'Let the Cuban talk!' *The New Republic*, 2 June 1937 and also Martha Gellhorn, *The Face of War: Writings from the Frontline, 1937–85* (London, 1993), 33–5.
[85] Examples include, *Agitación*, 11–2; *La Voz del Combatiente*, 28 April 1937; *Política*, 1 May 1937.
[86] *El Socialista*, 4 August 1937.
[87] José María Gárate Córdoba, *Mil días de fuego: memorias documentadas de la guerra del treinta y seis* (Barcelona, 1972): 167.

Radio has been described as the 'most important everyday instrument for popular mobilisation' by the Republic during the war.[88] This was not achieved through mass private ownership of radio sets, but rather public broadcasting. The sound of propaganda added to the proliferation of newspapers and posters that politicised public spaces during the Civil War and sought to construct the antifascist Republican war effort.

Whereas before the war Republican authorities had sought to restrict or even ban amplified political sound in public spaces, there was a radically different attitude during the war. In the early days of the rising, the government asked Spaniards to turn their radios to maximum volume. It was their patriotic duty to fill the streets with sound.[89] This policy aimed to counteract rumours by ensuring the government's message was communicated directly to as wide an audience as possible in the uncertain early days, despite the rebel seizure of certain broadcasters, including, famously, Radio Seville. The use of public amplification for the purpose of political communication was extended through the war. From the beginning of the war, loudspeakers were installed in public squares and employed to broadcast council meetings, announcements and – later – to call up men for military service.[90] Such broadcasting provided a public information service for passers-by. In Castellón they were used to appeal 'constantly' to the local population for donations to aid the 'heroic population of Madrid'.[91]

Mass public broadcasting encouraged the public consumption of news and Republican messages. The sound of loudspeakers broadcasting appeals, harangues and announcements filled public spaces in Republican towns and cities and marked a distinct change from the attempts to restrict amplified public political noise towards the end of the Republic. Crowds gathered to hear the latest news at the beginning of the war; radio played the central role in forging the Republican crowd in both physical and imagined ways. Placing loudspeakers in public places served to generate conspicuous publics and materialise Republican support for the war. Listeners in streets raised their voices in acclamation at the end of a broadcast.[92] But it was not just the authorities. In a way not permitted in February 1936, loudspeakers

[88] Balsebre, *Historia de la radio*, 420.
[89] E.g. *La Libertad*, 23 July 1936.
[90] For example, in Tabuernes de Valldigna and Santander. *Verdad*, 13 Aug. 1936; *Gaceta del Norte*, 20 Aug. 1936; Matthews, *Reluctant Warriors*, 43. The Francoists also established a similar system.
[91] *La Libertad*, 24 March 1937.
[92] *Política*, 24 July 1936.

mounted on cars drove around Barcelona appealing to the local population to contribute food to the columns that were heading to fight the rising in Aragon.[93] In September, a military parade to celebrate the formation of a new government was accompanied not only by a band, but also a 'lorry with a gramophone and a loudspeaker which broadcast the Republican national anthem and the *Internationale*'.[94] At the same time, the pre-war practice of retransmitting political events to other theatres or cinemas and thereby enabling larger audiences was extended.[95] Loudspeakers were also installed to enable passers-by to listen to rallies organised in nearby theatres and cinemas.[96] The noisiness of public space was remarked upon by foreign visitors and volunteers, particularly the sound of loudspeakers blaring pro-Republican or revolutionary songs, speeches or instructions.[97] This was perhaps due to the novelty of the sonic politicisation of public space and the loudspeakers' role in contributing to the sensorial experience of otherness.[98]

The sonic politicisation of public space was particularly evident during moments of more intense political mobilisation. In late October and early November, as the Francoist army neared Madrid and amidst widespread expectations that the capital would fall, the construction of defences was accompanied by feverish political campaigning. Further campaigns followed. For example, in March 1938 a Communist Party propaganda campaign organised 'lightning' rallies in cinemas, theatres, the metro and queues, as well as loudspeaker broadcasts from cars while young women walked the streets shouting through megaphones. The official party newspaper claimed that the 290 talks broadcast from cars were heard by 96,000 people.[99] The Altavoz del Frente was a key protagonist in the mobilisation of the rear-guard. This organisation, whose name meant the 'Loudspeaker of the

[93] Quoted in Hans Magnus Enzensburger, *Anarchy's Brief Summer: The Life and Death of Buenaventura Durruti*, trans. Mike Mitchell (Calcutta, 2018 [1972]), 142.
[94] *El Socialista*, 5 Sept. 1936.
[95] E.g. in Gandía (Granada), *Verdad*, 16 Dec. 1936; and Valencia, *Mundo Obrero*, 23 Aug. 1937. For the anarchists in Barcelona, see Aisa, *ECN 1 Radio CNT-FAI Barcelona*, 49–50.
[96] E.g. *CNT*, 21 Sept. 1936; *El Socialista*, 26 Oct. 1936.
[97] Mary Low and Juan Breá, *Red Spanish Notebook: The First Six Months of the Revolution and Civil War* (London, 1937), available at https://www.marxists.org/history/spain/writers/low-brea/red_spanish_notebook.html [last accessed 13 Apr. 2023]; Langdon Davies, *Behind the Spanish Barricades*, 125-6. See also Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 5 and Dutch fighter Jef Last, *The Spanish Tragedy* (Abingdon, 2010 [1939]), 127–8.
[98] On the experience of war, with an emphasis on visual culture, Gerd-Rainer Horn, 'The language of symbols and the barriers of language: foreigners' perceptions of social revolution (Barcelona 1936-1937)', *History Workshop Journal*, 29, 1 (1990): 42-64.
[99] *Verdad*, 19 March 1938.

Front', was founded within the Communist movement in August 1936 in order to mobilise and educate soldiers and civilians. The loudspeaker-lorries were developed under the auspices of the Altavoz del Frente, but it also had a wider range of activities, including nightly radio broadcasts, film showings, exhibitions of war materiel captured from rebel troops, street theatre, posters and the production of new children's books, as well as the production of the loudspeaker-lorries.[100] Altavoz del Frente was later folded into the Communist Party's Agit-Prop arm.

The name 'Loudspeaker of the Front' reflects a deeper concern with the metaphors of voice and shouting that were a common feature of Republican propaganda. *Verdad* waxed lyrical about the 'people's voice […] resonating' through the streets of Madrid while *Frente Sur* told readers that

> Long live the Popular Front! must be the cry that erupts from the chest of every honourable antifascist who wants to win the war. And it must be the cry of every antifascist, because it was the Popular Front that has improved living conditions for the masses, in the face of brutal attacks by Fascist reaction.[101]

Shouting was an outpouring of patriotic and pro-Republican feeling. It combined the necessary performance of allegiance, but with a strong affective underpinning. Shouting was an expression of pure feeling. The metaphor of the shout (or cry or scream, for there is no distinction in Spanish) extended to visual propaganda. Posters were widely described as 'shouts', even 'revolutionary shouts that shake […] every wall in Madrid'.[102] Republican Spain trembled and vibrated with political feeling, whether the shouts were audible or simply metaphoric, carrying echoes of democratic political representation.

It can be difficult to distinguish reality from myth in these reports, for the idea of a loud, active, engaged and mobilised populace was vital to constructing and legitimising Republican resistance. Despite the intensity of the propaganda drive, it seems implausible that 1,000 political meetings took place in the days before the Francoist army reached Madrid. And over the following months, Madrid's resistance was exalted and mythologised in a way

[100] On the Altavoz del Frente, see Iglesias, 'La propaganda política', 127–9 and Emilio Peral Vega, 'Altavoz del frente: una experiencia multidisciplinar durante la Guerra Civil española', *Hispanic Research Journal*, 13, no. 3 (2012): 234–49.
[101] *Verdad*, 17 March 1938; *Frente Sur*, 21 March 1937.
[102] *Crónica*, 21 Feb. 1937. See also *Mundo Gráfico*, 7 Oct. 1936.

that often emphasised political sound in the streets.[103] Beneath the mythmaking, such remarks reveal sound as an important barometer of support. This was true from the beginning: when Spaniards were asked to keep their radios switched on and audible from the street, Madrid's Salamanca neighbourhood – a rich and conservative district – was decried for the silence of its streets, a silence understood as undermining the Republic.[104] Support for Republican legitimacy was signalled through activity and sonic expression. War required public, political manifestation, which was to be realised through sound, whether shouting through a megaphone, turning up one's radio or congregating before a loudspeaker in the street. The aversion to silence had another level, with a more implicit political dimension. The clamour of the city – the symphony of the urban soundscape – revealed the morale, the energy and the relative normality of the city, or at least this was the desire. *El Socialista* approvingly quoting from the French newspaper *Le Petit Journal* about the sound of Madrid at war: 'The shouts, the songs, the bells of the trams, the horns of the cars cover the sound of battle, which is fought so closeby'.[105]

Yet the incessant, inescapable chatter of the loudspeaker was not agreeable to all. There were complaints that hospital radios chattered from 8 o'clock in the morning until midnight. Those recovering from war injuries were subjected to speeches and all kinds of music: 'what about rest and recovery?'[106] The anarchist newspaper *La Noche* criticised the excessive use of loudspeakers. Wars were not won with 'paper bullets'. The 'abuse' of amplified sound ran the risk of people missing important information amongst the chatter. They compared it to the boy who cried wolf.[107] There were also anarchist appeals for more action and less talking and one veteran journalist criticised the emphasis on oral propaganda. Education was a better mean of forging a free-thinking subjects; the spoken word fed on 'gullibility' and 'monstrously-large rallies were a competition of monsters to see who could

[103] E.g. Francisco Anton's speech at the plenary of the PCE Central Committee in spring 1937 quoted in Iglesias, 'La propaganda política', 163. See similarly *Comisario*, Nov. 1938. On this mythmaking, e.g. Mirta Núñez Díaz-Balart, 'No pasarán! La batalla de Madrid. Imaginario y realidad de la resistencia antifascista', in Alberto Reig Tapia and Josep Sánchez Cervelló (eds.), *La guerra civil española, 80 años después: un conflicto internacional y una fractura cultural* (Madrid, 2019), 271-286.
[104] E.g. *Mundo Obrero*, 23 July 1936.
[105] *El Socialista*, 10 March 1937.
[106] *La Libertad*, 11 Feb. 1937.
[107] *La Correspondencia de Valencia*, 9 Aug. 1937.

be the most monstrous of orators'.[108] Such criticisms point to differences in understanding the role of sound in the war effort. Whereas Communist activists sought the politicisation of society by flooding the streets with antifascist symbols and language, anarchists preferred more circumscribed, less all-encompassing propagandising.

As the war progressed, the Republican authorities introduced more restrictions on radio which contrasted with the early orders for radio to blare from balconies and windows. The Spanish Civil War was the first international conflict in which it was possible to access enemy propaganda with ease, and from the comfort of one's home, though this depended on owning a radio.[109] As the Republic lost territory to the Francoist forces, the authorities paid increasing attention to policing radio. Radio ownership was regulated through licences even before the war and there had been attempts during the war to control radio broadcasts and listening. In summer 1937, the government closed the radio stations in Barcelona controlled by trade unions and political parties, which left two official stations remaining.[110]

Further measures followed in 1938 and accelerated towards the end of the war. A ban on vehicles broadcasting propaganda or the announcement of political events in Madrid was followed by a government order that prohibited broadcasts by parties or unions, though this does not appear to have been enforced.[111] In December 1938, just before the final Francoist offensive in Catalonia, the General Commissariat of Public Order in Lleida informed the Ministry of the Interior of 'rumours' spread by Francoist radio, which led to the decision to seize radios. Radios were restricted to locales under the control of the state or political parties.[112] A month later, when a third of Catalonia was already in the hands of the Francoists, the government gave the civilian population four days to hand their radios to the for sealing.[113] A further desire to control news underlay a renewed drive to install loudspeakers in public spaces in 1939.[114] The desire to control the consumption of political sound had

[108] Felipe Alaiz in Iglesias, 'La propaganda política', 290. On the anarchist youth appeal for action, e.g. Juan Manuel Fernández Soria, *Cultura y libertad: la educación en las Juventudes Libertarias (1936-1939)* (Valencia, 1996), 19, 24–5.
[109] On clandestine listening, e.g. Javier Cervera Gil, 'La radio: un arma más de la Guerra Civil en Madrid', *Historia y comunicación social*, 3 (1998): 263–93.
[110] Aisa, *ECN 1 Radio CNT-FAI Barcelona*, 120–1.
[111] *La Libertad*, 4 Sept. 1938; Ángeles Afuera, *Aquí, Unión Radio: Crónica de la primera cadena española* (Madrid, 2021), 486–7.
[112] General Commissariat of Public Order, Lleida Commissariat, to Ministry of the Interior, 16 Dec. 1938, CDMH, PS-Barcelona, 550, 110.
[113] *Gaceta de Madrid*, 17 Jan. 1939.
[114] *La Libertad*, 4 Feb. 1939.

echoes of Republican policy prior to the war, yet it was also much more ineffectual. In a context of crumbling morale, material deprivation and the erosion of territory during the final months of the war, it is difficult to imagine that such orders were followed or made any practical impact.

Conclusion

Republican propaganda did not exist in a vacuum. Many of the uses of amplification described here were also employed by the Francoist army, which also disposed of loudspeaker equipment and mobile loudspeakers at the front and in the rear-guard.[115] Francoists also installed '*altavoces del frente*' in Madrid and described the broadcasts and their reception in similar ways to the Republicans. They emphasised 'powerful', 'clear' voices, noted the reaction of the Republicans – including frustrated 'shrieking' and celebrated that Francoist victories in a 'battle of ideas' waged by opposing loudspeakers was due to the 'solidity' of Francoist arguments.[116] Loudspeakers were also used in streets and squares behind the lines, although with less of a focus on entertainment. The 'austerity' of wartime meant that the continuous 'strident' broadcast of songs and entertainment was inappropriate; the only night-time amplified sound in Palencia was Francoist radio, and this was limited to the official war report.[117] Loudspeakers for religious and political acts, including transmitting to cinemas and prisons. Public establishments were obliged to broadcast the daily war report alongside the national anthem.[118] Residents of Valladolid out for an evening stroll could listen to the nightly war report through speakers in the Plaza Mayor.[119]

Republicans employed loudspeakers as a technology of war to forge an antifascist war effort, both at the front and in the rear-guard. Fantasies of amplification responded to a logic of total war that emphasised volume – both sonic power and the sheer quantity of propaganda – yet this existed in tension with the desire to convince Francoist soldiers to desert. The message did not seek to dehumanise like posters away from the front, but rather

[115] E.g. reports from the Transmissions Regiment, AGMAV, box 1202, folder 7.
[116] *La Almudaina*, 14 Oct. 1938.
[117] *El Diario Palentino*, 27 Aug. 1938.
[118] Nelly Álvarez, 'Anthems, Identity and Mobilisation in the Francoist Rearguard: Valladolid, 1936–9', in Gemma Pérez Zalduondo and Iván Iglesias (eds.), *Music in the Spanish Civil War* (Berlin, 2021), 196.
[119] *Libertad* [Valladolid], 25 Aug. 1938.

followed the format of radio programming and sought to reveal the alleged 'true' nature of Francoism to soldiers who had been fooled or coerced into fighting against the Republic.

In the rear-guard, in contrast, loudspeakers were a means of public information and a way of generating conspicuous publics. Political sound functioned as a barometer of public support for the Republic, while silence was to be avoided, though not everyone agreed with the drive to fill the streets with amplified sound. Yet the nature of broadcasting – the fact that radio waves did not respect battle lines – meant that it was dangerous and brought under tighter control. Indeed, in exploring the fantasies associated with loudspeakers, the practical challenges, which ranged from the weather and technical problems to the growing material deprivation, were very real. It is hard to imagine that loudspeaker propaganda in early 1939 sounded anything but hollow.

Sound had great affective abilities, or so Republican propagandists enthused. The power of sound lay not its sonic force as explored in recent work on the contemporary use of amplification. For Republican reporters and commissars, loudspeakers allowed propaganda to enter the heart and mind, to pull at the heartstrings and affect the subconscious. Sound resonated with deeper aspects of soldiers' bodies and could induce movement, but it did not overwhelm them with the force of soundwaves, despite the emphasis on powerful loudspeakers.

Some of these practical issues have not disappeared despite advances in technology, including the risks posted by enemy fire and unfavourable weather, as noted in a twenty-first century guide to psychological warfare produced by the US army. The authors point out the advantages of loudspeakers, including direct communication, the ability to respond to a developing situation, and their range and reach. Such ideas would have made familiar reading for veterans of loudspeaker broadcasting during the Spanish Civil War. Even the US army's preference for recorded broadcasts reveals a desire to control messaging that echoes attempts during the Civil War.[120] The loudspeaker-lorry and wider use of amplification technology at the front was pioneering in the Spanish Civil War, but has become a common feature in wars since. Even as scientists probe the efficacy of acoustic weapons, it seems likely that loudspeakers will continue to be a key component of frontline psychological warfare.

[120] *Tactical Psychological Operations: Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures*, Department of the Army, Field Manual No.3-05.302 (2005), esp. 7.34-48.