

# **Francoism to Democracy**

## **Three media and their effect on Spanish progress**

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Today it is hard to discuss Spain without discussing the economic crisis currently plaguing the nation. The history of Spain is a convoluted one and has everything to do with its current predicaments. A tumultuous past of filled with drastic fluctuations between wealth, control and disillusionment can be traced through modern Spanish history, illuminated through the development, suppression and manipulation of mass media over the years.

This paper attempts to re-examine the background of Spain by studying three media: radio, newspapers and cinema, focusing on the formative years under dictator Francisco Franco. Contemporary changes in national structure that affect the current country began to surface in the mid-twentieth century, a key time of development for complementary nations of the European Union. Together with Portugal and Greece, Spain entered the EU tightly bound to the lifestyle of rigidity imposed by 40 years of dictatorship (Machin & Papatheodorou, 2003). It is no coincidence that these three countries are again sharing a similar experience of financial distress within the EU and global market. Distinguishing these three countries from the rest of Western Europe is that in recent history, each of them has experienced more or equivalent time under dictatorship as under stable democracy.

Focusing on Spain's media production during the era of Francisco Franco's authoritarianism, 1936-1975, uncovers the connection between mass media and the perception of isolation and disconnection from the core of Western Europe (Machin & Papatheodorou, 2003). These media represent and shape modern Spain and can lend insight into the uncertain future of the country.

## **Political Background**

Spain has been a country experiencing a tumultuous transition since the loss of its remaining, and richest, American colonies in the late nineteenth century. A crumbling in old structure rippled throughout the country, exposing latent fractures in loyalty and cohesion. Citizens were divided and frustrated after years of revolt, interim dictators and a devastatingly short-lived leftist Republic in the 1930s (Carr, 1980, p. ix). In 1936, a well-orchestrated army revolt against the newly elected government seized upon Spain, capturing Canary Islands, Balears Islands and Mallorca but failing to overthrow the remaining government. The army coup ignited a “spontaneous revolution of collectivization” (Carr, 1980) within the country, supported on the rebellious right by fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, and on the left by the Soviet Union and international volunteers. General Francisco Franco lead the charge for the capital, inciting the bloodiest and most devastating war in Spanish history (“Spanish Civil War” 2012).

### **Fighting the War with Radio**

Peripheral provinces of Catalonia, Galicia, Basque and Valencia exacerbated the instability of the situation for Nationalists (Machin & Papatheodorou, 2003). Protests advocating the restoration of ancient liberties and autonomy evolved from regional conflicts into a cause to support Republican fight, as it represented a means to independence (Carr, 1980). The shifty political climate in 1936 inspired the formation of first Basque language radio station in Bilbao, a means of political defiance as much as a commitment to culture and recognition of the Basque people (Agirreazkuenaga, 2012, p.500). Although the Basque providence was viewed by the regime of Franco as an irritating peasant’s revolt, the

broadcasting was a direct affront to the chosen Castilian language of the Franco empire. In a war between many small groups, language was a clear symbol of identity. Radio broadcasts carry a shared sense of identity among listeners (Morris, 2008), reinforcing cultural ideals and values. Almost overnight, Republicans followed the Basque lead, seizing control of scattered small and amateur radio stations outside Madrid, specifically station EAJ5 in Seville, broadcasting initial cries of victory and propaganda.

Nationalists were well-versed in the power of radio, with successful military experience using broadcast communications in the northern African wars and quickly retaliated the radio wave seizures. Uncontrolled, independent broadcast risked empowering further separation by regions like Catalonia. Catalonia already did not consider itself Spanish, its liberal-minded residents were a stronghold for the Republican cause.

Thus, the dominant form of mass media, radio, rose to prominence as a weapon. Nationalists radio broadcasted war cries used higher powered radio stations from Madrid to overpower democratic messages. A war of propaganda saturated the airwaves, as opposing sides vied for the loyalty of listeners caught in the fight. According to T.E. Goote, a reporter for *Radio News* at the time, “music and entertainment was forgotten in the effort to promulgate this propaganda...opposing sides would "blanket" the other's transmission by sending out an "empty" carrier wave at the same frequency as the opposing station's transmission” (“Radio’s Role in the Spanish War,” 1937).

The battle for the airwaves was a battle for Spain itself. It was for this reason that when he was named Head of Government for the Spanish State, Franco chose to proclaim his new position over the airwaves, claiming he “embodied the national will to unity” (Carr, 1980, p.

145).

As the war escalated, the entire country suffered a severe recession. Food shortages were rampant, citizen morale was bleak and the economy was at times, bordering on a barter system for lack of infrastructure (Carr, 1980). Republicans, equally broke, many starved and injured, continued broadcasting promises of liberty and democratic hope. Meanwhile, the middle class was being lost by citizens “listening in secret” to Nationalist promises of ‘the white bread of Franco’” (Carr, 1980, p.137).

As Basque was a leader in capitalizing upon radio to unite its listeners, it also became an example of treason and fertile ground of flexing Franco’s Nazi-enabled muscle. In 1937, an aerial bombing of the Basque city of Guernica marked a change from the radio-mediated banter for power into a larger scale attack of suppression. A stepping stone to capturing the northern coast and suppressing independent regions, surrender by the Basque signified surrender of the insurgent pro-democratic subculture against Franco’s Spanish ideals.

### **Franco’s Dictatorship and his Newspapers**

With the rise of Franco, the welfare of newspapers deteriorated. A scattered population across a wide geography, often separated by extremes such as mountains, discouraged distribution. Low literacy rates across the country also hindered distribution, and regional dialect distinctions added to barriers of mass producing newspapers. Many newspapers shut down with the arrival of civil war. The surviving small but influential newspapers followed the lead of radio, becoming megaphones of propaganda for their owners. These owners,

usually politically elite groups, were strong supporters of the Nationalist right, transforming their publications into political pamphlets (Machin & Papatheodorou, 2003).

The attack on Guernica ushered in the age of unabashed news manipulation, alluding to the fascist agenda of Spain's future. The attack was known by Spaniards to be the work of Franco's alliance with Germany, other European countries acknowledged the attack as an act of unparalleled barbarism. However, Nationalist press perpetuated the idea that the town had been demolished by "red incendiaries." Despite evidence to the contrary, the press maintained this message as a means to direct the "charge of barbarism back against their enemies" (Carr, 1980, p. 151).

Eventual victory by Franco and his Catholic-supported regime forced the entire country - Basque, Galician, Valencian and Catalan included - into one nation to be assimilated and homogenized. Unity imposed by Franco was the result of forceful repression of free speech and promotion of far right-wing ideals of religious fascism. Essential to implanting his ideology and consolidating his power was complete control over the media (Bengoa, 1997).

Franco's army troops conducted the largest confiscation of newspapers in the history of the nation. As they marched through each dominated territory, troops sought out and seized all printed media unaligned with the dictatorship. Entire printing operations and buildings were taken over and shut down or consolidated into what eventually would be a forty newspaper strong propaganda machine called the "Chain Press of the Movement." (Bengoa, 1997, p. 157).

Newspapers, and printed media as a whole, became inextricably dependent upon government control and approval, resulting in a severe decline in print media production by

non-government organizations (Carr, 1980). Stifled expression removed citizen's desire to create any material, government approved or not (MacKay, 2010). Thus, an era of strict censorship and its accompanying intellectual mediocrity became a daily exercise in humiliation for Spaniards. Suppression and control would linger for years after Franco's death, fostering a disconnect from other cultures, including surrounding European countries.

Despite its best efforts of suppression and bombastic pro-government proclamations, Franco was never able to replace an inert spirit of idealism. Instead, overly bureaucratic controls on in-country publications and censorship on imported materials created a vacuum of creativity in Spain. The forty year dictatorship "controlled the historical landscape, by omission if not by commission" (MacKay, 2010, p. 199).

### **The End of Franco and Beginning of Cinema**

Continuing through to the tail end of Francosim, cinema is the icing on the cake of Spanish mass media progression, one of the most compelling examples of Spain's identity evolution. Although Francoist propaganda extended to cinema, the effects were more subliminal than newspaper and radio. Between 1940-1950s, Spain contained more cinema seats per capita than any other country at the time (Carr, 1980, 164); the medium was the most popular form of entertainment for Spaniards despite strict censorship. Government-sponsored films portraying ideal Catholic behaviors were dominant cinematic productions between 1940 and 1970 (Gil-Gascón & Gomes-García 2010), as expressive filmmakers such as Luis Buñel left the country to continue work abroad (Kinder, 1997). Cinema reinforced behaviors of traditional patriarchal society, a medium to replace, or at least neutralize, any sentiments left

by the prior five-year Republic. A favorite film of Franco, and the only one permitted to tell the story of the civil war, was a 1941 production titled *Raza* (Race). It was a tale of Spanish revolution based on a script written by Franco himself. Attempts to screen films contrary to approved standards often met aggressive suppression, or even violence. As late as 1974, a Barcelona screening of *La Prima Angelica* (Cousin Angelica), a film by director Carlos Saura depicting the civil war from a Republican perspective, was interrupted with a fire bombing of the theater by fascist supporters (Archibald, 2000).

Imposition of extreme Catholicism successfully suppressed authentic cultural expression, driving out artists and filmmakers alike. Thus, once the dictatorship fell, a flood of cinematic creations were unleashed. Compelling audiovisual storytelling played a crucial role in awakening a dormant and repressed psyche of Spanish culture. Refiguring of culture and testing individual freedoms burgeoned into a vibrant counterculture, from which one of Spain's most influential directors rose to fame. Pedro Almodóvar is known for rewriting the history of Spain through films that replace the macho patriarchal stereotype with outrageous melodramas heavy with sexual tones (Kinder, 2010, p.3). Relegated to a background figure during the transformative years of the 1950s and 1960s, Spain was catapulted by Almodóvar to the global spotlight. Emphasizing its spirit of artistic liberation, he imbued audiences with a taste for sexiness and Spanish allure, drawing attention to the fresh, open-minded attitude of his country.

Though Spain was isolated from several generations of artistic exploration and international collaboration, the surge of self-discovery in post-Franco years most benefited Spain in the visual arts. In 1987, Almodóvar's *La ley del deseo* (The Law of Desire) in many

ways solidified Spanish cinema as a serious commercial success, capturing rave reviews at the Berlin Film Festival and from audience in other foreign markets. At the time, the Spanish Socialist Party was in power, heavily subsidizing the film industry in hopes that global success would carry images of newly liberated Spain to the world. An improved image paired with a thriving film industry were crucial to the Spanish argument to join the European Union in the following years (Kinder, 1997, p. 8).

### **Lingering Press Control in a Constitutional Monarchy**

Major effects stem directly from the repressive state of Francoist Spain, all of which continue to have immeasurable influence on the country, affecting perceived culture, sense of identity and ultimately, Spain's ability to adapt and compete in a modern global market.

### **Radio Today**

Deregulation of radio signified a move to deregulated television broadcasting. As such, the independent group, National Council for Radio and Television, was formed to oversee broadcasting and licensing. The council was a thinly veiled attempt by the government to withhold broadcasting control from media barons moving into the newly opened-Spanish market. Additionally, the council was extremely politicized, controlled by the governmental minister of information.

The radio was wielded by Franco as a weapon of suppression by imposition. As such, the language of the Galicians, the Basque, the Catalonians, etc., was not replaced by Franco's approved Castillian Spanish, rather they were dominated; forced into hiding. True

decentralization in radio broadcasting surfaced through small stations returning to their respective cultures in the familiarly autonomous of Catalonia, Basque and Valencia. In 1980, the region of Basque began broadcasting programming 24 hours a day in Basque language (Agirreazkuenaga, 2012).

### **Newspapers Today**

The end of Francoism in the 1970s created a rush of democracy-driven activity similar to that of a nation undergoing modern development (Schramm, 1964, p. 48). In the newspaper sphere, the effect is especially pronounced. Franco's newspaper coalition, the Chain Press of the Movement, was to be dismantled into small, private publications. But for nine years after Franco's death in 1975, the interim government could not agree on the constitutionality or desirability of releasing control at all. Even so, in 1979, in preparation for auction to private parties, the government ordered the closing of many papers, citing economic reasons. However, many of these papers were already publishing independently, such as *Unidad* and *La Voz de Espana* in Basque province, and there is evidence to show that they were closed not for economic reasons, but to suppress criticism of the government. The 1978 Constitution recognized the rights of semi-autonomous regions, removing central power of the country, and thus, central power over media originating in these autonomous regions (Bengoa, 1997, p.159) - direct power over the regions themselves was dissolved. A legacy of control left the transition government wary of fully releasing the influence of media, fearful it would create a "break down of national unity" (Bengoa, 1997, p.160).

While France and Germany, for example, had been evolving their communication infrastructure for decades prior, Spain tentatively began restructuring in the 1980s, struggling to maintain the liberties of its peers while withholding a centralized economic infrastructure. In the words of Wilbur Schramm (1964), in a period of national development, “when the channels of information are tight and controlled by the few” - Franco, then an insecure interim government - “changes are difficult to make and often lead to a worsening of the factions” (p. 49).

Despite technical freedom of expression, Spanish newspaper readership remains a symbol of status and political involvement. Readership has nearly doubled in the past decade but is still lower than Western European counterparts (Machin & Papatheodorou, 2003); in 2010, the ratio of daily newspaper copies was 144 per 1000 inhabitants, compared to 267 in Germany, 289 in Great Britain and 516 in Norway (“Institute for Statistics,” n.d.). Certainly the press is becoming more objective but polls show many Spanish constituents do not trust the media as a source of information, and distrust is growing (Edelman, 2012).

### **Cinema Today**

The realm of cinema shows the least remnants of government controls and the greatest commercial growth because of it. Initially, the release of censorship also released decades of films to Spanish audiences dating back to the 1920s. For the first time, foreign films such as Charlie Chaplain’s *The Great Dictator* (1940) was available to viewers in Spain. The undercurrent of World War II genre films also entered the country, accompanied by American movie stars. Through film, half a decade of international pop culture flooded the country.

Cinema was the vehicle used to catch Spain up with the rest of world, culturally and economically (Higginbotham, 1988) Directors and journalists collaborated, developing a string of political satire unfit for release before 1975. However, the *estética franquista* - the lingering esthetic of repression - still found its way into new films. Film was widely regarded as the only medium providing consistent cultural information to the nation, playing a vital role in societal modernization. As such, directors neglected to address the topic of the dictatorship itself, on the reason that it is not popular with audiences. As a result, even modern film resurrects a practice exercised by Franco himself, silence on the cruelties of Spanish conflict and the dictator who orchestrated them (Higginbotham, 1988, p. 135).

After the gilded 1990s of film, government subsidies vital to international exposure were determined to be unsustainable. Producers contested the economic measures, convinced increased in production costs would open the Spanish film market to domination by Hollywood giants. However, the precedent of Almodóvar had already been established. He helped jumpstart the international popularity of such actors as Antonio Banderas and Penelope Cruz and create national stardom for actresses Carmen Maura and Marisa Paredes. The creative grip had been loosed enough to open cinema to topics taboo only years earlier, then push the envelope further. Though Spanish cinema does not have the lineage of its European peers, France and Germany, it is arguable that the industry is stronger than other markets today (Pulver, 2011).

### **Implications for the Future of Spain**

Press freedom is an essential element to the formation and maintenance of democracy. In the 1980s, this wave of media freedom and the expression that accompanied spiked individualism and experimentation. An anagnorisis of true Spanish potential struck the country, temporarily overwhelming regionalism, bolstering nationalism through the hope for independence and liberty in a free Spain. Another forty years later, we are seeing the ends of this hope-fueled era as the ancient differences and weak infrastructure are brought into focus yet again. In many ways, Spain is still adapting to a lifestyle of free society; still partially entrenched in old behaviors and communication theories imprinted upon the national identity by *franquismo*, though superficially focused on democratic, socioeconomic development.

The twenty-first century is an entry point of the first generation of Spaniards to grow up without Franco in power. With the opening of free communication, semi-autonomous regions quickly resurrected their native heritage, ingraining local language into independent radio stations, newspapers, school textbooks, public broadcasts. Ergo, the first Franco-free generation is one that is raised alongside, or within, a specific non-Castilian lifestyle. Release from four decades of strict dictatorship government transformed Spain into a “highly devolved regional government,” that, somewhat obstinately, continues centralized economic practices and laws decreed by Franco (Palacio, 2012). However, the loose collecting of small nation-states unwilling to be lumped into a uniform whole, may be the “most proximate cause of Spain’s identity politics” (Gardner, 2012). Until Spain can reconcile its culturally disparate regions into a cooperative unit and openly address the civil and economic offenses of its past, it will be forced to deal with long-term issues greater than its current debt.

In the interconnectedness of today's electronic global village, a European-integrated country like Spain cannot compete without offering a legitimate and transparent attempt at democracy according to its citizens. Spain's discontent and unemployed masses of under-35s, remarkably the first generation born after Franco's death, are taking to social media to voice concerns of political and economic oppression by the government. Will the government look to its own past to remember the result of opaque, restricted communication with its public? Curiously, the elder class of Francoism survivors are finding empathy in the disquiet unemployed youth, reviving the flag of the 1931 Republic to demonstrate an era of overdue reform in favor of the middle class (Blitzer, 2012). If history dictates the future, the next mass communication media to influence Spain will be online. The makings of the next wave of popular unrest is surfacing in blogs, social networking websites and video sharing sites. One thing, however, is different from the reorganization of 1931 - this time the world can watch it unfold live, through the social media tag, "#SpanishRevolution."

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