

# The Rise of a New Field:

## Researching Communication History in the Iberian Countries

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### Abstract

The article demonstrates how Communication History developed in Portugal and Spain demonstrating that, despite the fact both countries were ruled by dictatorships between the 1930s and the 1970s, the field of media studies in general received totally different treatment from the two authoritarian regimes. Moreover, it also demonstrates that after the implementation of democracy Communication History continued mostly on two different paths in the Iberian countries due to the distinct ways in which media studies were integrated in the academia. The different stages of development achieved by the field in the two countries are also explained. Nevertheless, despite all the differences, the author points out common themes that have been researched on both sides of the Iberian border and demonstrates that, despite media history being mostly dominated by nation-bound approaches, today there are common patterns on how it is produced in Portugal and Spain with clear similarities to the work also being carried out in other European countries.

This article aims to present an overview of the development of Communication History in the Iberian countries, focusing on how the field emerged in both Portugal and Spain. It will demonstrate that the development of media studies in general, and Communication History in particular, followed two different paths in the two countries, which explains the fact that, even today, one cannot speak of a common Iberian tradition of research. In order to achieve its goal, the article relies on historical research highlighting the main landmarks of the development of Communication History in both countries.<sup>1</sup> Since the aim is not to present an updated state of the art, most of the sources that support the article were produced during the emerging period of this new field.

### Iberian Media Policies under the Dictatorships

To understand the peculiar emergence of media studies in the Iberian Peninsula, one must have in mind that Portugal and Spain were both ruled by dictatorships from the 1930s to the mid-1970s. Led by Salazar and Franco respectively, the two regimes suppressed press freedom and controlled the media, not only through repression and cen-

sorship, but also through the control of ownership. The most important newspapers and radio stations were owned by the State, the Catholic Church, or by families that had close connections to the regimes in power. Later on, television appeared to be placed under the direct control of the government, although in Portugal, the State only owned one-third of RTP's (public service television) capital, while the other two thirds belonged to private radio stations and financial institutions (Carvalho, 2009, p. 36). Nevertheless, the regime interfered directly in the station's output.

This tight control of the flow of information helps to explain why Communication History is still a new field of research in the two Iberian countries. Before the implementation of democracy, not only were the media submitted to censorship, but it was also difficult to conduct objective research on Communication History so as not to reveal the connections between the media and the political powers. Moreover, the teaching of journalism and communication at a university level only became relevant in the 1980s in Spain, and in the 1990s in Portugal, despite the existence of official journalism schools under Franco's regime and the emergence of a university dedicated to the subject in the late 1950s.

<sup>1</sup> I thank Carlos Barrera del Barrio and Rogério Santos for their insights and discussions concerning the development of

research in Communication History in Spain and Portugal.

In fact, the two Iberian dictatorships had totally different approaches for the teaching of journalism. Following in the footsteps of Mussolini, who, in 1928, created the official *Scuola di Giornalismo da Federazione della Stampa* in Rome, the Franquist regime, in 1941, created the *Escuela Oficial de Periodismo* (Official School of Journalism) in Madrid (Correia, 2007, p. 30). This would become the school for many of those who would work as journalists during the dictatorship.<sup>2</sup> Similar schools would follow, dedicated to cinema, advertising, and radio & television.<sup>3</sup> These official schools, which primarily offered a practical approach to the professions, teaching students how to use technical equipment, would remain the only schools providing an education in the field of communication until 1958. Then, for the first time, the teaching of journalism reached the academy with the creation of the *Instituto de Periodismo* (Institute of Journalism) at the University of Navarra, (a Catholic church-run institution). Later on, the first communication and information departments would be created in 1971, mostly inspired by the American model of journalism instruction. The new courses would then offer “practical training in the techniques and skills necessary for future practitioners, along with liberal arts and humanities subjects” (Barrera del Barrio, 2011).

While Franco created official schools for those who intended to work in the media and advertising business that later allowed the emergence of communication departments, the scenario was quite different in Portugal. Despite the ideological connections between the two dictators, Salazar never supported the teaching of journalism, or other areas within the media. In fact, it was not until 1979, after Portugal was already a democracy, when the first degree in Communication Sciences was offered at the Nova University of Lisbon. The first degree specifically in journalism would be created much later, in 1993, at the University of Coimbra.

These two different histories in neighbouring countries were a consequence of different media policies implemented by the two dictatorships. Franco used the media to mobilize the masses to

support his regime, even before his rise to power. During the Spanish Civil War, he created the *Delegación para Prensa y Propaganda* (Delegation for Press and Propaganda) in January 1937, with a specific mission: to use the press, radio, and all other media to “disclose the nature of the National Movement” (Sinova, 2006, p. 96). In order to accomplish this mission, the organization’s function was “to guide the press, coordinate radio services, define the rules to be followed by censorship and direct propaganda through film, radio, newspapers, pamphlets and conferences” (Ibidem: 97).

In Portugal, Salazar considered the continuation of his regime more dependent on the elites than the masses. The Portuguese Head of Government distanced itself from the masses-orientated visions of other contemporary authoritarian regimes. This explains the low level of investment from the Estado Novo dictatorship in broadcasting from the 1930s through the 1950s (Ribeiro, 2011, p. 128). In fact, it was only after the outbreak of the colonial wars that the Portuguese government started to invest more intensively in shortwave broadcasts to the colonies, which had not previously been considered a priority investment.

This background is important in order to understand why, unlike Spain and Italy, (and despite several attempts by the Journalists’ National Union), no schools of journalism were created until the end of the 1970s. Nonetheless, a few training courses were offered during the 1960s, though held inconsistently, by the *Instituto Superior de Estudos Ultramarinos* (Institute of Overseas Studies) and the *Diário Popular* newspaper.

Despite the historically different approaches to the teaching of communication by the two Iberian dictatorships, both countries acquired university level research only after the implementation of democracy. However, interest in research in the field existed in the first decades of the 20th century, prior to the establishment of communication studies as a field. In Portugal and Spain, we find studies on newspaper history dating back to the 1800s, this being one of the main areas of research within the field of communication history.

<sup>2</sup> This was not the first journalism school to appear in Spain. The pioneer had been the *Escuela de Periodismo* (Journalism School) founded by the newspaper *El Debate* in 1926 (Cf. Vigil y Vázquez, 1987; Cf. Tapia López, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> The Official School of Cinema was established in 1947 under the name *Instituto de Investigaciones y Experiencias Cinematográficas* (Institute of Cinematographic Experiences

and Investigation). Later on in 1962 it would change its name to *Escuela Oficial de Cinematografía* (Official School of Cinematography). *Escuela Oficial de Publicidad* (Official School of Advertising) was created in 1962 and *Escuela Oficial de Radiodifusión y Televisión* (Official School of Radio and Television Broadcasting) in 1967.

## The Origins of Journalism and Press History

The liberal and nationalist ideas that spread throughout Europe during the 1800s coincided with a strong development of the press that, by the end of the century, had acquired a massive transnational audience in Northern countries. This led to the emergence of the first studies on the history of journalism, based on a positivist methodology, which extolled the press at a national level. Alexander Andrews' *History of the British Press*, and Eugène Hatin's *Histoire Politique et Littéraire de la Presse en France* (Political and Literary History of the Press in France) were two of the most influential works in the field published in the mid-1800s, both of which became references for those in Portugal and Spain who were interested in the history of the press.

In Southern Europe, despite the fact that newspapers were far from achieving a mass audience, interest in journalism and press history also dates from the mid-19th century. In 1857, Tito de Noronha published *Ensaio Sobre a História da Imprensa* (Essays on the History of the Press) (Sousa, 2008), which was the first book to be printed on the history of the press in Portugal. Nevertheless, it would not be until the 1890s that more publications appeared, coinciding with the discussions of journalism at the 1898 International Press Conference held in Lisbon.

In conjunction with the interest gained in Portugal, several articles and books were written in Spain about the history of the press. Those publications included the Boletín of Madrid University, which published, in 1869, a text by Professor Pascual Gayangos entitled „Del origen del Periodismo español“ (The Origins of Spanish Journalism), and, in 1894, Eugenio Hartzenbusch, best known for his literary work, *Apuntes para un Catálogo de Periódicos Madrileños*. Hartzenbusch produced a catalogue of all newspaper titles printed in Madrid from 1661 to 1870 (Checa Godoy, 2008, p. 72). In 1885, journalism was also the theme of Eugenio Selles's speech, an attempt to gain membership in the Spanish Royal Academy (Altabella, 1988, p. 17). Most of these pioneering works, published mainly in Spain and Portugal, presented an inventory of newspaper titles and descriptions of anecdotal facts, focusing neither on content nor on reception.

<sup>4</sup> Other foreign researchers had previously been interested in the history of the press in Spain, namely Henry Frank Schulte who considered that the history of the Spanish press

Despite the interest that existed, writing about the press was not easy under the dictatorships. In addition to the political restraints, the non-existence of Communication History at a university level could not guide the development of new approaches and research methods, and, consequently, the published works continued to present only newspaper inventories and stories about the emergence and daily life of the different newspapers. It would not be until the late 1960s that a new form of research would emerge. It was then that French historiography would significantly influence the development of a scientific approach to the history of the press. This was inspired by works from authors such as „Jean-Michael Desvois, author of an in-depth interpretative analysis of the Spanish press in the first three decades of the 20th century“ (Yanes Mesa, 2003, p. 245)<sup>4</sup>, and the contribution of Spanish researchers exiled in France. Both played a relevant role in the methodological renaissance that primarily occurred during this period, and would be more visible after the establishment of democracy, when issues like censorship and political control over the media became topics that could be addressed.

Although it would develop more rapidly when the authoritarian regimes ended, the transition to a more scientific approach to the history of media began during the last decade of the Iberian dictatorships. This is illustrated in José Manuel Tengarrinha's book published in 1965, a book that remains a reference work for those interested in studying journalism during the period of the Monarchy. Entitled *História da Imprensa Periódica Portuguesa* (History of the Portuguese Periodical Press), it addresses the history of the press from the 1620s until the end of the Monarchy in 1910, although the last chapter contains references to the First Republic and the Estado Novo dictatorship:

*In contrast to the relative ease with which a newspaper used to be founded, it now requires, among other conditions, heavy capital investments that then have to be defended. That fact and the legal obstacles (...) (which include, in particular, prior censorship, difficulties in obtaining permits and the accuracy in recognising the „intellectual and moral propriety of those responsible for the publication“) thus reducing the freedom of movement of our current press to a very narrow range (Tengarrinha, 1965, p. 248)*

was the history „of the oscillations between strict controls, rigorously applied, and libertine freedom“ (Schulte, 1966, p. 2).

For Tengarrinha, who was persecuted by the political police, the history of the media should not be reduced to a mere inventory of titles. On the contrary, he explained in the introduction to his book, one must avoid the “trap of making an overly long list of periodicals (a temptation that is sometimes difficult to avoid in this field), which seems to be (...) a dominant feature of the work published so far” (Tengarrinha, 1965, p. 24). The history of the press could only be written by taking into consideration its context, in the sense that the media were a product of the culture in which they emerged:

*Unless all they want to do is mere journalistic reviews or collections of anecdotal facts, the history of the Portuguese press may not be seen as an isolated and sui generis phenomenon, but as an aspect - perhaps one of the most lively and expressive - of the history of our culture.*  
(Tengarrinha, 1965: 248)

This need to contextualize the press in the culture from which it is produced (which Tengarrinha defended in the 1960s) seems in accord with Raymond Williams’s alert: that it is misleading to try understanding a technology separated from the cultural forms in which it originated and is employed (Williams, 1976). Michael Schudson also underlined how important it is for those who engage in Communication History research to understand the media in the context of cultural, political and social history. It is this approach to research, defined by Schudson as “history proper”, which enables us to answer the question: “how do changes in communication influence and how are they influenced by other aspects of social change?” (Schudson, 1991, p. 177). Nevertheless, this approach still tends not to be present in many recent studies that are published on the history of the media.

Tengarrinha’s perspective was, in fact, innovative at the time, and his *História da Imprensa Periódica Portuguesa* (History of the Portuguese Periodical Press) became a seminal book that would be considered, to the present day, a reference for all those who study the history of Portuguese journalism. The same cannot be said of *Historia del Periodismo Español* (History of Spanish Journalism) written by Pedro Gómez Aparicio, which also appeared

in the latter days of the Iberian dictatorships. It was published in four volumes, between 1967 and 1981. Not only is it mostly a compilation of stories, something Tengarrinha criticized, but Gómez Aparicio’s ideological connections with Franco makes his work less objective when analyzing Spanish journalism between the 1930s and the 1970s. For this reason, while Tengarrinha’s book remains a reference today, it is not until the 1980s when we find a classic handbook on the history of Spanish journalism: *Historia del Periodismo en España* (History of Journalism in Spain), published in three volumes by María Cruz Seone and María Dolores Saíz. The first two volumes, published in 1983, deal with the 18th and 19th century respectively, while volume three, published in 1996, covers the period from 1898 to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. Furthermore, it would take until the end of the 1980s for new handbooks to appear covering the period of Franco’s dictatorship.<sup>5</sup>

In Portugal and Spain, journalism and the press have been the main objects of research for those interested in the History of Communication for 20 years. Julio Montero Díaz and José Carlos Rueda Laffond observed in their *Introducción a la Historia de la Comunicación Social* (Introduction to the History of Social Communication):

*For a long time, the only means of social communication in the West, where it existed, was the mass media. It is not, therefore, so strange that communication history was initially the history of the press (Montero Díaz & Rueda Laffond, 2001, p. 18-19).<sup>6</sup>*

Although Communication History paid more attention to the press than to other media, in the Iberian countries it was not until the second half of the 20th century that newspapers reached a mass audience. This was mainly due to the high level of illiteracy (Candeias & Simões, 1999; Pizarroso Quintero, 1996, p. 305), and to the fact that newspapers were targeting an educated elite, interested in politics (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 95). Contrary to that which happened in Northern Europe where a stratified press market emerged, in Southern Europe, “the roots of journalism lay more strongly in a literary public

<sup>5</sup> Two of these handbooks were published by Jesús Timoteo Álvarez (1989) and José Javier Sánchez Aranda and Carlos Barrera del Barrio (1992).

<sup>6</sup> A similar idea is expressed by Carlos Barrera del Barrio who considers that the interest for Communication History

became a reality during the 20th century “firstly in relation to the press – the doyen and veteran par excellence, then followed by radio and television, and finally all media that can be seen as forms of public communication” (Barrera del Barrio, 1996, p. 15).

sphere, dominated by aristocratic interests, rather than the bourgeoisie” (Hardy, 2008, p. 36). The fact that newspapers were written to the few, and not to the masses, made them interesting objects of research for their “elitist bias against studying the mass media” (Douglas, 2008, p. 67), a bias that existed within the humanities until the late 1970s.

Dominique Wolton’s description of how the French academy and elites first reacted to television, considering it mostly negative and responsible for the proliferation of low culture (Wolton, 2006, pp. 54-55), can also be applied to Iberian countries. Despite the huge importance and impact that broadcasting had from the 1930s, it would take several decades for the academy to start studying both radio and television. On the contrary, newspapers, particularly those that gave particular attention to political discussions, would continue to be, until the last two decades, the main objects of research in Media History in both countries. Moreover, when considering radio and television as objects of research, most studies, even today, still focus on news or political control – normally considered serious research topics – and not on entertainment.

## Communication History in the Academic Sphere

Although historical analysis of the press was a founding discipline of communication studies, Communication History is still very recent in the academic world of the Iberian countries. Moreover, the way the discipline was incorporated was totally different in Portugal versus Spain. Different strategies were adopted by universities in the 1970s, when teaching programs were defined for the communication field. While departments of communication or information were created in Spain, in Portugal the new communication courses were placed within the humanities and social sciences faculties. In addition to the different ways in which universities dealt with communication, the development of media systems also followed two different paths in Portugal and Spain in the 1960s, as well as in the years that followed the collapse of the dictatorships.

In Spain, the last decade of Franco’s regime brought a new press law “that formally abolished censorship but maintained control of the media in other, more subtle ways” (Arboledas, 2010:, p. 148). In Portugal, control over the media would continue as ferociously as in the past. Not only

did Salazar’s successor, Marcello Caetano, not open up the regime, but he had to deal with the colonial wars, which created extra concern with content published in the press or read on the air, for both radio and television. Furthermore, as described by Luis Arboledas, after the implementation of democracy in 1974 and 1975, the two countries would follow two different policies concerning the media.

In Portugal, the majority of the newspapers and radio stations were nationalized, meaning that, in the years that followed the implementation of democracy, the State directly owned a larger number of media companies than it had during the *Estado Novo*. At the same time, “in Spain a communication system was built, based around a reduction of State interference, (...) private sector expansion in the radio and the press and the appearance of the first media groups (Arboledas, 2010, p. 154). In practical terms, the Spanish media system would follow the pattern of most European countries, with deregulation and commercialisation becoming dominant. This would only become a reality in Portugal in the early 1990s, when several newspapers and radio stations were and private television channels were launched.

Anticipating the market’s need for a new type of communication professional, in Spain, the first communication or information faculties were created in 1971, in Madrid, Barcelona and Navarra. Other departments would follow, and, consequently, there were more researchers focused on the communication field in Spanish universities, as well as a swifter and more widespread specialization of academic work, with university staff focusing on the field of Communication History, in particular. This created the necessary conditions for the historiography of communication to undergo “not only unquestionable expansion but also relentless methodological renewal” (Yanes Mesa, 2003, p. 243).

Journalism History or Communication History were taught mostly by History professors during the initial years of these new faculties, who saw the media as historical sources and not as objects of study (Román Portas, 2000, p. 126). Gradually, an evolution would take place with the emergence of new types of research, in particular, some that did not focus on a specific medium, but went beyond, addressing the impact of mediated communication on society. Moreover, instead of focusing only on production and the message, some research projects also paid particular attention to the history of reception, which, as pointed out by



Michael Schudson, has been “by far the most elusive” of the research areas within Communication History (Schudson, 1991, p. 176).

Other impacts arising from the creation of the new faculties were the organisation of several congresses intended to discuss new historiographical perspectives, and the publication of the book, *Historia de los Medios de Comunicación en España. Periodismo, imagen y publicidad (1900-1990)* (History of the Media in Spain. Journalism, picture and advertising), coordinated by Jesús Timoteo Álvarez. Published in 1989, it presents a synthesis of the history of communication during the 20th century in Spain, and it resulted from several doctoral theses and research projects conducted within the new faculties of information and communication (Álvarez, 1989). This functioned as proof that the field not only existed, but had the ability to produce knowledge in a period when the media were already considered an essential component of contemporary societies, and not just perceived as sources for historical analysis.

Another important characteristic of the development of Communication History in Spain was the production, initiated in the 1960s, of continuous research on local and regional press. Inspired by the Italian micro-history approach, histories of the press in the different autonomous communities were published mostly in the 1970s and 1980s. Local histories of the cinema, radio, and television have also been published in the last two decades. Although this provides a large number of studies concerning local and regional media markets, it is also true that some of these works lack methodology and are motivated by the authors’ passion on the subject, which means that their main focus is the promotion of local media, and not the development of scientific knowledge:

*Micro-histories normally flow from love for the source, the love of mother. The spontaneous micro-historian works towards the certainly morbid objective of returning time gone by, to the roots, the illusory Eden, the enclosure within the womb” (González, 1991).*

In the last two decades, the growing development of faculties of communication, which started in the 1970s, has made the Communication History

research landscape richer and more multi-faceted than ever before. In fact, after these new departments achieved stability, they became responsible for the proliferation of handbooks, monographs, articles and research projects in Communication History, enabling the field to achieve academic recognition.

A completely different reality is found across the border in Portugal, where the field of communication has never emancipated from the Humanities and Social Sciences departments. This has led to a much slower development of Communication Studies in general, and Communication History in particular. Hence, a substantial portion of the literature has been produced by historians, and not by communication scholars, despite the fact that today there is clearly a mix of backgrounds of researchers in the field. In fact, as in most countries, the number of researchers from the communication field engaging in Communication History analysis is increasing, despite the fact that „the mainstream of communication research relates hesitantly to history“ (Zelizer, 2008, p. 5).

When looking at the volume of Portuguese production on the history of communication, it is much smaller compared to Spanish production. Despite the publication of a few books in the final years of the Estado Novo which addressed censorship and its history,<sup>7</sup> it was not until the 1990s that scientific research in the field flourished. The first PhD thesis of Communication History was defended in 1993, and published a few years later. It analyses the news broadcast of the public service television station (RTP) under the Estado Novo dictatorship between 1957 (year of the inauguration of RTP) and 1974. In his introduction, the author, Rui Cádima, defines himself as a historian (Cádima, 1996), which also reflects the lack, at the time, of a concept of communication historiography similar to the one that had been adopted by several Spanish researchers. In 1995, Josep Gómez Mompert had distinguished historians of communication by their focus on communication as the fundamental object of study (Checa Godoy, 2008, p. 11).

Such differentiation has only recently started to be discussed in Portugal, with the emergence of a few research projects in the last two decades. The majority focus on specific media and specific time

<sup>7</sup> In 1971, Alberto Arons de Carvalho and António Monteiro Cardoso published *Da Liberdade de Imprensa* (Press Freedom). The former would publish two years later *A Censura e*

*as Leis da Imprensa* (Censorship and Press Laws)

periods belonging to what Michael Schudson defines as institutional history (Schudson, 1991, pp. 178-179). Despite a significant increase in the number of monographs and articles produced in the last decade, a lack of handbooks continues to exist, and, still today, there is no general history of Portuguese media available. Accordingly, the periodization of the different phases of Communication History in Portugal is still to be defined. It is clear that in the last few decades the field is still emerging in Portugal, while it has been developing swiftly in Spain. Additional proof of this is the fact that, while the Spanish created the Association of Communication Historians in 1991, the Portuguese Association of Communication Studies (SOPCOM) was created later in 1998, and still does not have an interest group in Communication History.

## Conclusion

The different paths of development that Communication History has taken in the Iberian academic world, combined with the dominant nation-bound approach, explains why there seems to be a complete absence of research adopting an Iberian perspective. Despite some Spanish books that focus on the international level, the nation-bound approach is still dominant, which, as in other regions, explains the lack of transnational research in the field, making it more difficult to compete with “techno-histories that soar across territorial frontiers” (Curran, 2008, p. 48). In the case of Iberia, common research projects would certainly enlighten similarities and differences in the development of media systems.

Despite these different paths, on both sides of the border, the common experience of living under dictatorships suggests common themes that attract the attention of researchers in the field of Communication History. Such themes most notably include the propaganda strategies implemented by the dictators, the relationship between the media and the political sphere, and the role of national and international broadcasting in undermining the Franquist regime and the Estado Novo. These studies have been conducted by authors who have diverging backgrounds for both history and communication studies. While the historians tend to approach the media as one more element of society, communication studies scholars tend to “emphasize the role of communication as a social articulator” (Yanes Mesa, 2003, p. 242). The combination of these two perspec-

tives might help advance the understanding of the role of the media in society since, according to Juan Antonio Garcia Galindo, it is „the explanatory convergence of social communication with the general progress of historiography that permits the history of communication to be contextualized as part of the general historical process“ (Garcia Galindo, 1996, p. 37).

The mixed background of those who conduct research in the field seems to be a common pattern in Europe. Furthermore, going beyond the scope of this article, one can find other similarities the development of the field on the continent, starting with the fact that Communication History -- namely the history of journalism and the press -- was the founding discipline of media studies in most countries. Moreover, the concern today is that further studies will emphasize to the study of media impacts and effects to the exclusion of historical research. This seems to be the trend in Europe, including the Iberian Peninsula. Research that looks at media and technology in the context of the cultural forms in which they are produced has enabled Communication History to further distance itself from such technologically deterministic approaches.

While one must acknowledge the lack of a single European perspective on Communication History, it is also true that the research conducted in several countries has been influenced by the work produced in other European regions. Taking the case of the Iberian Peninsula as an example, one can speak of the influence by French historiography during the 1970s and 1980s, as well as of British (and also American) influence in the last two decades, especially the focus on reception and the cultural history of the media.

Although the distinct political situations that existed in Europe during the 20th century have meant different developments in media systems, the emergence of nation-bound approaches creates for Communication History an increasing number of research questions and concerns. This can lead to an increase in the volume of studies with a European perspective, a perspective that sheds light on common patterns and peculiarities that exist in different regions. Such work should in turn produce transnational handbooks with a European perspective on Communication History.

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