

Doctrines of Information in the Spanish Dictatorship (1939-1975)

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General Francisco Franco's dictatorship had a wide temporal extension (1939-1975), but the basics of the regime's official ideology were formed during the Spanish Civil War and the following two decades. The crucial and determinant decisions in case of the policy concerning information were made in the 40s and 50s, but from 1959 until the end of the dictatorship various politicians modified the basic principles. The gradual "softening" in the 1960s corresponded to the changing mechanisms of the regime's internal and foreign policy. The regime's two essential pillars were the Catholic Church and the Army, while its ideology was based on excessive nationalism, the notion of *Hispanidad* and the hypothesis of the superior Hispanic race.

Obtaining and spreading information have always been a central issue for dictatorial regimes, involving propaganda and censorship. Although radio and cinema gained unexpected popularity from the 1930s, still newspapers were the most common channels through which information could reach the different layers of society. The aim of my paper is to highlight some characteristics of the Spanish dictatorship's techniques concerning information, paying special attention to Gabriel Arias-Salgado, the man who coined such concepts as "doctrine of information" and "theology of information".

With the Italian model established in the 1920s and the German paradigm designed by Joseph Goebbels, General Francisco Franco's *New Spain* only had to imitate the foreign steps, modify some peculiarities that were more appropriate to the Spanish characteristics and apply them. Franco and his regime were fully aware of the objectives, they made use of all the possibilities that mass communication offered, and they set up a comprehensive model defined by state control. As a starting point, they could rely on the Italian and German legislative background. The control over information and the effective machinery of propaganda were crucial in order to maintain the regime. The Press Law of 1938, introduced in the territories occupied by the nationalist troops during the Civil War, revealed the basics of the media's new structure. Ramón Serrano Suñer, General Franco's brother-in-law, minister of the interior (later minister of foreign affairs), was the key figure behind this law. Admirer of Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler, he was in charge of the *Press and Propaganda Department* of Franco's ruling party (*Spanish Falangist Party*), and he designated the key figures of the media during the war years and the immediate postwar. The regime, like its

European counterparts, enacted a legal framework that made freedom of speech or freedom of information impossible. Several principles were established regarding this issue. They condemned the liberal regulation of the press as conceived throughout the revolutionary proceedings of the nineteenth century. The regime thought that the readers' common sense had been damaged by the democratic freedom of speech, just as it had happened on the political level due to the calling of elections. According to their theory, journalism constituted the State's particular instrument which was used in order to satisfy the national interests. Furthermore, the journalist had to become an advocate of the nation's principles during the noble mission of regaining its destiny.

Following the example of other authoritarian regimes, one of the first steps was to create the *Official Registry of Journalists (Registro Oficial de Periodistas)* and soon (in 1941) the *Official School of Journalism (Escuela Oficial del Periodismo)*. Various official unions were formed, like *Spanish Union of Journalists (Unión Española de Periodistas)*, which was destined to achieve the moral improvement and political education of its members. The major supporter of the new principles was the *National Catholic Association of Propagandists (Asociación Católica Nacional de Propagandistas)*, it maintained that mass media had to place at the society's disposal the instruments of education in order to redeem the threatened souls.

The aforementioned Press Law of 1938 (the so-called "Serrano Suñer Law") imposed total control over mass communication. This model involved a centralized and pyramidal organization led by a superior body that planned and regularized all actions around the media. It also required the prevalence of propaganda in journalism in order to subdue the masses. According to Matilde Eiroa San Francisco, "it was a common and effective tool in dictatorships to spread their ideas or doctrines through the projected emotional suggestion to exert some coercion on the recipients."

Censorship was omnipresent in the postwar period and included publicity, advertisements, photographs, film reviews, drawings. The main fields of censorship were the national policy, the omission of people who had been outstanding figures of the Republican era, such as the famous philosopher and essayist, José Ortega y Gasset. In addition, they disapproved of advertisements that reflected the shortage of housing or supplies, articles about the international political situation, etc. When World War II ceased in 1945 with the triumph of the Allies, Franco's Spain was left alone with an exceptional dictatorial form of government within a European framework favorable to democracy. But the regime, anti-

communist from the beginning, survived, thanks to the division of the world into a capitalist and a communist bloc. In the new world order, communism seemed to be more dangerous than General Franco.

In the 1950s Gabriel Arias-Salgado took over the Ministry of Information and Tourism. He established the so-called "doctrine of information", legitimizing the intervention of the State in mass communication and rejecting the liberal doctrine according to which the press should be independent of the ruling political power. On the contrary, he declared that "State and the Press are not two antagonistic factors". His reasoning is purely ideological: "As opposed to the liberal despotism or Soviet fanaticism, it is extremely urgent for us to establish Christian values, to establish a national and social State, to establish our social and political institutions and to change our antisocial and materialistic way of being into a spiritual one." He adds: "National journalism is about unifying and integrating variety by means of the unification and subordination of the particular goals to the common good; it goes beyond partisanship and puts itself at the service of Spain's universal destiny, its unity, its greatness and its freedom ... we talked about the doctrine of information and not about the doctrine of press, because, although the written press was the first manifestation of the modern life's needs for information, cinema, radio and television have come later to the service of this informative task with different techniques. We believe that it is appropriate to develop a general doctrine on information, which also covers the extent and intensity of new information solutions." He thinks that among social institutions, information occupies the position of the highest risk and highest honor, as one of the determining factors of public opinion. Frequently, the news, in order to be understood, should be explained and interpreted according to a background or some doctrinal criteria. Sometimes the simple news holds great strength of exemplarity about the Good or the Evil. The publication should stick to certain principles. He emphasizes the principle of journalistic subjectivism and the fallacy of objectivism, and defends the value of the necessary interpretation. For him, the journalist must be the real moral guidance. He identifies the place of the Spanish press in the frontier zone between the uncontrolled press and the tightly controlled press. The Spanish one is the perfect press, the oriented press.

The theology of information, which emerges directly from this doctrine of information, was based on the four fundamental principles of the Francoist regime: Catholicism, unity, greatness and universality. Arias-Salgado distinguishes between "freedom of expression" (associated with the private sphere), and "freedom of diffusion" (the public

sphere), and freedom of the press belongs to this second category. He claims: "Freedom of the press or freedom of diffusion, is not a strictly individual and personal freedom, but is a social freedom, where the scope and purpose are determined by the common good." That is why the State must watch over it. The minister became the great doctrinaire of this unique information policy, ignorant of the international debate on the question. He suggested to substitute "public opinion" for "popular opinion" or "national opinion", because these concepts were more adequate for the morality of a country that was being formed by means of the prevailing ideology. Because "national opinion" is built up by the facts shared by a part of the society endowed with conscience, responsibility and special sensibility towards the ultimate truth. Only this part of the society deserves to be heard.

National opinion is based on information. Being informed directly is impossible. Everything depends on the informants, they form the national opinion. Arias-Salgado lashed out several times at the international news agencies for monopolizing the sources and turning newspapers into second-class informants, posing a danger to the control over national opinion. The need for controlling the content of the information flow was derived from the regime's conception of information. He says: "Information will come to the foreground. From now on, the news will be a weapon, a factor and a force at the service of a certain ideology, a political ordering scheme, an economic system, an understanding of life, a concept of mankind."

Arias-Salgado had a kind of spiritual and transcendental conception about information, going well beyond the traditional understandings. Although his declarations reflected perfectly that he didn't favour freedom of speech, in his rhetorics other elements also appeared. For example, he argued that information must reach people through the phases of the "national instruction". They didn't want to familiarize people with culture as if it were the synthesis of facts, timeless scientific knowledge and the acquaintances of the wise men, but it was about giving news in order to offer novelties, not to learn them, but to judge them, to take them into account, to discuss them and to give an opinion on them. According to the principles of this national instruction, they didn't want to teach people, but to inform them; they did not take them as students, but as spectators and readers. Some of his explications seemed to approach democratic attitudes, nevertheless, they were designed to comply with the general directives.

The Cold War saved the Spanish dictatorship, as communism became the most dangerous enemy of the Western world. Spain joined the doctrine of containment (President

Harry S. Truman's policy towards the Soviet Union and the increasing communist influence) and the Spanish mass media also reflected this disposition. The doctrine of information and the theology of information were the appropriate instruments for the elaboration of anti-communist campaigns controlled by the State on the basis of slogans and censorship.

The "Serrano Suñer Law" of 1938 and the Arias-Salgado doctrine defined Spain's information policy until 1962. They reaffirmed the old informative conceptions of the Francoist regime emphasizing their immobility, reinforcing censorship and state control and the removal of the schemes that were applying to journalism in the capitalist bloc within the bipolar system. The "theology of information" contributed decisively to Spain's uniqueness comparing it to the positions of the so-called free world that used the media as the driving force for literacy, democratization and industrialization. In the mid-1960s, the impossibility of carrying on with the legislation copied from dictatorial regimes, forced the substitution of the law of 1938 with another that brought new developments into the Spanish panorama.

In the 1960s Spain commenced the period of political and economic opening with the implementation of the first Development Plan. The new Press and Print Law was passed in 1966 and paved the way for some more substantial changes that were brought about with the death of the Spanish dictator in 1975.

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