

## From Dictatorship to Democracy in Portugal: The use of Communication as a Political Strategy

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**Abstract:** *Like in every Fascist Regime, with its wide range of limited freedom, in Portugal, the New State forbade the freedom of speech and started controlling the Media, by using them to promote the Regime. The political speeches by António de Oliveira Salazar with the old political ideas of "God", "Homeland" and "Family" of the authoritarian Regimes became state dogmas from the thirties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on. As Salazar stated, "Only what we know that exists truly exists". According to this thought a great propaganda strategy of absolute certainties was created. The State even created a Secretariat for the National Propaganda which aimed to frame the social everyday life into the spirit of the Regime. From the forties on, due to international happenings there is a decrease of the ideological propaganda speech of the Government, since the main aim was the political survival. The fall of Dictatorship, in April 1974, made the freedom of speech possible. However there wasn't a State impartiality regarding the Media. The revolution strategists immediately used the radio and the newspapers to spread news pro the political rebellion and the television to present themselves to the country. It is obvious that with the abolition of censorship there was a radical change in the system of political communication. But a long time of Democracy was necessary for the Media not to suffer political and governmental pressure.*

**Keywords:** *Portugal, dictatorship, democracy, propaganda, political, media*

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### Introduction

The Dictatorship which was settled in Portugal with the State attack that took place on the 28th May 1926, had its apogee with António de Oliveira Salazar's Regime, known as the New State.

Salazar was in favour of a policy that refused the parliamentary and liberal past, since, according to him, only a change in the political, administrative, economic, social and cultural conditions could allow the rebirth of the Portuguese Nation (Salazar, 1928-33, p.141). Therefore he established the corporate nationalism, the social and economic intervention to develop a strong State.

From then on the ideals of Salazar's Dictatorship are confused with the ones of the other European Dictatorships, in spite of the Portuguese singularities. In fact, as Braga da Cruz points out, the New State wasn't theoretically totalitarian or, at least the doctrine didn't assume that way (Cruz, 1988, p.52).

Salazar ruled for forty years, despite the obstacles he had to face. For him the most important concepts, the ones he took for granted were "God", "Homeland", "Authority", "Family", "Work". These were enduring values that couldn't be discussed by the Press or by any other sector of the public life. In the last years of the New State the resistance to this Dictatorship started to arise.

When Marcelo Caetano was chosen to be the Prime Minister after António de Oliveira Salazar, in 1968, he followed a policy of "evolution in the continuation", hence destroying the expectations of a change in the Regime. In fact, Marcelo Caetano followed Salazar's ideas, trying to make them seem more modern. But the strong authoritarian ideas against the existence of different political parties still existed, as well as the colonial war<sup>1</sup>. And the colonial war was in fact the reason why there was a military revolution on the 25<sup>th</sup> April, 1974. This revolution led to a Democratic Regime in Portugal.

### 1- The Political propaganda in the New State

The political communication in the New State was essentially based on the propaganda. Although this propaganda followed Salazar's ideas, this dictator wasn't directly responsible for it. A journalist, António Ferro, started being in charge

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<sup>1</sup> At this time Portugal was facing the war of its overseas colonies that wanted to become independent

of this propaganda in 1933. Salazar rarely used the Press, the radio and later on the television to communicate directly with the Portuguese people, in a written or oral way.

Maybe his shy personality, against Media exposure, explained it. Besides that he wasn't very good at talking in public (Medina, 1978, p.160). Therefore he studied his speeches very carefully and never talked or wrote anything spontaneously. His friends considered that he should become more popular, get closer to people, turn his cold and distant image into a more human one. Salazar stated that he didn't feel comfortable in front of crowds and that the search of popularity was pointless (Nogueira, 1977, p.176). However it was in 1932 that he gave several political interviews to the journalist António Ferro for *Diário de Notícias*, a Portuguese newspaper.

When we analyse Salazar's speeches (Salazar, 1961) we notice that the ones he made in different situations were rarely published in the Press afterwards or written with that aim. That just happened on very special occasions for the country or for the Regime. As examples we may refer what he wrote for *Jornal de Notícias*, another Portuguese newspaper, on the 28<sup>th</sup> May 1933 about the official presentation of the "Portuguese Youth", the unofficial notes he sent to the newspapers when the Second World War started, to explain the neutrality of Portugal, as he had done about what had happened in Spain. In 1943 he also made use of the Press to explain some military measures that had been taken and in 1944 this means of communication was also used to inform that the Portuguese Government had forbidden the export of wolfram according to the request of the British Royal Highness.

As far as the radio is concerned the situation wasn't very different. Usually Salazar's radio speeches took place before the elections, to explain the advantages of some internal policy and mainly of the foreign policies. But these speeches were rare during his Government.

As a matter of fact, even Salazar admitted in a speech for the National Radio in the end of an election campaign for a new Assembly, "I don't know anything that I can add to the propaganda which has already been done" (Salazar, III, p.103-104).

António de Oliveira Salazar thought carefully about every single word he said and, in the same way, he considered that each word released by the Press should be analysed with much criterion. Therefore he instituted the previous censorship, since the Media could be extremely dangerous if they weren't controlled. So, the freedom of speech was regulated by the Decree Law no. 22469, from the 11<sup>th</sup> April 1933, so that it could be possible to "prevent the perversion of the public opinion in its function of social strength that should be used so as to protect the public opinion from all things that could be against the truth, justice, moral, good administration and common welfare and to prevent the main principles of the organization of society from being attacked." This was referred in the 3<sup>rd</sup> article of the above-mentioned Law. As a result of this policy of the control of information, only the people who had the political trust of the Government could be the directors of newspapers. Consequently the directors of newspapers weren't the ones who had the right skills but the ones chosen by the Government (Correia e Baptista, 2006, p.28).

There are authors who state that Salazar's censorship policy was the most efficient upholder of his Regime above all repression mechanisms that were used (Cádima, 1995, p.319).

Salazar, who was initially doubtful towards a propaganda policy, gradually became aware of its importance<sup>2</sup>, which led him to create the National Propaganda Secretariat (SPN) in October, 1933, to be a "governing instrument and not an instrument of the Government" (Salazar, 1928- 34, p.262). He designated António Ferro to be the headman of SPN. António Ferro was already the official journalist of the New State and the two men admired each other (Veríssimo, 2003, p.19). SPN was strictly under Salazar's supervision and had its apogee between the thirties and the forties. The aim of the National Propaganda Secretariat was to let people know what happened in the "life of a nation as a whole", since "politically the only things that exist are the ones the public is aware of." <sup>3</sup> This means that everything which was advertised had the purpose of creating in people a feeling of belonging to a nation, so that those people could understand that the nation had a much wider sense than just "our house, our street, our land, our road, our school"<sup>4</sup> Therefore this Secretariat had the obligation to "broaden people's spirit" (Nogueira, 1997,II, p.242), building a new mentality based on the ideological certainties of the Regime, so that the Portuguese wouldn't remain ignorant about their nation. These great "certainties" were transmitted to people through a simple and objective speech, with clear and unquestionable ideas on which all people agreed, since there was nothing to be discussed. As Salazar said, "We tried to give back the comfort of

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<sup>2</sup> Although Salazar felt the need to clarify that the Propaganda in Portugal wasn't similar to the one that existed in Italy or Germany, full of "theatrical effects" (Salazar, volume I: 262).

<sup>3</sup> Words said by Salazar in the opening session of a new department (Nogueira, 1977, volume II: 242).

the great certainties to the minds torn by doubt and negative feelings. We don't discuss God and Virtue; we don't discuss Fatherland and its history; we don't discuss Authority and its prestige; we don't discuss Family and its ethics, neither do we discuss the glory in work and its duty" (Salazar, II, p.130).

These were unmistakable truths, since according to Salazar those truths were the solid bases for the development of peace, order, the union among the Portuguese, the strong State, the prestigious authority, the honest administration, the strengthening of economy, the patriotic feeling, the corporate organization, the overseas empire" (Salazar, II, p.136).

However, the conviction about these strong principles wasn't enough. So it was necessary to instil those principles into the Portuguese minds all the time. With this purpose the Government created organisms connected to all sections of the everyday life, which were monitored by the State and had their own propaganda directed to the target public: organizing social and political meetings, congresses, journeys, masses and parades (Rosas, 1994, p.292).

The national propaganda was an adjunct of the sections propaganda and was directed to culture, education, great political gatherings, such as the election campaigns, great celebrations, big support demonstrations to Carmona or Salazar organized with the only existing political party.

The cultural shows also had the purpose of a political promotion. Examples of these were the painting exhibitions, the literary prizes, the colonial exhibitions, the show rooms in international exhibitions, the Great Exhibition of the Portuguese World. The National Propaganda Secretariat (SPN) was also in charge of the settings for the opening sessions of hospitals, river dams, national neighbourhoods and stadiums, showing the historic greatness, rediscovered after the "obscurity of Liberalism" (Rosas, 1994, p.293). And all this was possible thanks to the true nationalism of the New State. There wasn't a single public action, either cultural, military or religious, which wasn't framed inside the ideological paradigms of the system.

In 1957 appeared another Media: the television. However, Salazar didn't value it properly and rarely used it, not only because of his shy personality, but also because he was unable to see how far this new means of communication could go<sup>5</sup>, differently from Marcelo Caetano, who was the Minister of the Presidency at that time.

António de Oliveira Salazar was rarely seen on television. He appeared on the reception to Queen Elizabeth II, in February 1957, at the airport in the farewell to Craveiro Lopes, in June of the same year, in the meeting with Franco in Ciudad Rodrigo in Spain and not in many other occasions.

Although his misanthropy didn't allow him to promote himself, it didn't prevent him from controlling this new Media – Television – and use it to emphasize the importance of the Regime.

The television information was almost an agenda of the Government, with an unofficial speech that followed the protocol rules. The news received from the foreign countries were carefully analysed and often refused by the censorship. From 1959 on Salazar appeared on TV a bit more often. However, he was still against the exposition to the Media and television remained an instrument of the State. In the sixties he didn't mention the crisis the Regime was going through: the escape of Henrique Galvão and Álvaro Cunhal from jail, the exile of the Bishop of Porto city, the big manifestations of the 1<sup>st</sup> May.

Marcelo Caetano was the one who appeared on Television more frequently representing the Government when he was the Minister of the Presidency, while Salazar remained in the shadow. What is extremely curious about this character is that in spite of his lack of Media exposition, he managed to maintain a Regime created according to his image for such a long time.

## 2. The political importance of the means of communication for Marcelo Caetano

Marcelo Caetano soon realized that the means of communication were important for politics, especially the television. So from the very first regular broadcasts, since March 1957, he appeared frequently on the screen talking to the Portuguese. He stated, "I was the first member of the Government to talk to the country about matters that interested everyone, in June 1957. I don't deny that I followed the first steps of the Portuguese television with a strong interest and even with enthusiasm. I didn't imagine that some years later, as the chief of the Government, television would be so useful to establish the communication between myself and the Portuguese people. However, I knew from the very beginning that it was the ideal tool for a Government to become popular...if it deserved to be"(Caetano, 1977, p.472).

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<sup>5</sup> In the interview to *Figaro*, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1958, with regular broadcasts on the Portuguese television (RTP), Salazar still privileged the Press and considered the other media inferior.

Shortly after the birth of television in Portugal, Caetano was replaced in his political post and only returned to the Government on the 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1968, after Salazar had been considered incapable of governing. Caetano was chosen by Américo Tomás (the President of the Republic) to be the Council President. Four days later he presented his first message through the Media in which he told the Portuguese people that he was enthusiastic and needed their support. "I have enough enthusiasm to face the huge obstacles that I foresee. But I wouldn't be able to succeed without the support of the country."

Aware of the power that the television could have, especially in a period in which the New State was fragile and going through big social changes, Caetano prepared the admittance of Ramiro Valadão to the Presidency of the Portuguese Television. He had a close relationship with this man and by doing so he started a new communication strategy, centered on the Council President. Caetano is the image of the Regime and therefore he is the one who establishes a direct communication with the Portuguese through a TV program created by Valadão, named *Family talks*. The first broadcast of this program was on the 8<sup>th</sup> January 1969 and was followed by fifteen more, the last of which was broadcasted on the 28<sup>th</sup> March, 1974. This last transmission had a bitter tone due to the rebellion in Caldas, as if anticipating the future.

From 1969 on the television set up another big propaganda strategy for the National Assembly elections. The campaign started two months before the elections with a series of daily editorials trying to demonstrate that "only a policy is possible.", in a desperate attempt to legitimate the evolution in the continuity.

The television manipulation was clear, even without election campaigns. The broadcast of an official protocol was always more important than any other major event, even than the one with such a great importance for mankind as the arrival of man at the moon.

Marcelo Caetano became the Prime Minister in 1969, after António de Oliveira Salazar. Although he represented an expectation of change for the Portuguese society, by talking about a political transformation as well as by allowing the Bishop from Porto city and Mário Soares (opponents to the Regime) to return from their exile, he didn't intend to establish a Democracy. He just wanted to update the Dictatorship. As a consequence, and as far as the Media are concerned he didn't immediately abolish the 3<sup>rd</sup> article of the Law Decree from the 11<sup>th</sup> April 1933. He just abolished it in 1972. Meanwhile the censorship still existed (Carvalho, 1999, p.45).

However the country had changed in economic, social and cultural aspects (Loff, 2007, p.153-154). The international situation had also changed. The Americans no longer supported Dictatorship, neither did they agree with our colonial politics. The European Economic Community (EEC) was also against that politics. So the informative tolerance increased. It was a period during which the Press started using lots of metaphors and the caricature to talk about matters that were impossible even to mention before that time, especially the political ones (Carvalho, 1999, p.58-59).

Caetano's governing demonstrated, in a certain way, a kind of "opening" of communication, by allowing more news from abroad and by publishing the exiled people's opinion against the Government. But what this Government actually showed was a deeper knowledge of the means of communication and a greater skill to use them to serve its political purposes.

We shouldn't forget that in 1973 it was still common to start the TV news with the personal comments of César Moreira Baptista, the State Secretary for Information and Tourism. The news was the most important TV programme due to its political role. Ramiro Valadão, in a meeting of the Programme Council, in 1971, stated that, "...due to its exceptional diffusion the news can enable the Government of the Nation to achieve its aims"<sup>6</sup>

Marcelo's control over the Media, especially over television, was evident and he often told his friend Valadão, "...nowadays television is a tool of political action and we can't hesitate on its use."<sup>7</sup>

### 3- The role of the Media in the establishment of Democracy

The Revolution that led Portugal to Democracy started with the appropriation of the means of communication: the Portuguese *Radio Clube*, the National Radio and the National Television by the military forces (MFA). The rebellion started when the announcer João Paulo Dinis, according to the instructions received from Captain Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho, played the song "*E depois do adeus*", by Paulo de Carvalho, five minutes before eleven o'clock p.m. (Ferreira,

<sup>6</sup> Minute Project of the 45<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Programme Council of the National Television, from the 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1971, Lisbon, 1980, page 240-242.

<sup>7</sup> The information politics in the Fascist Regime. Commission of the *Black Book* about the Regime. Lisbon, 1980, page 239.



1993,p.24). It was the signal for the troops to set forth and they did that very quickly. The Captain Salgueiro Maia, responsible for the School of Cavalry in Santarém, arrived in Lisbon in a record time: two hours (Ferreira, 1993: 32). Twenty-five minutes after midnight *Renascença* Radio played the song, *Grândola Vila Morena*, by Zeca Afonso. It was the confirmation that everything was happening as it had been planned.

At around three o'clock in the morning all other means of communication were already controlled by the troops. Those means of communication were always advising people to stay calmly at home, waiting for the news about the revolution that had been started by the military forces to put an end to the Regime.

The Government only reacted to the appropriation of the Radio on the following morning, by ordering the cut of the electric energy and of the telephones of *Radio Clube* (Ferreira, 1993,p.33).

The rebellions quickly solved the problem and their communication went on the radio and later on television. Actually the strategy used by the leaders of the operation "Regime-ending" of transmitting constant communications to the population was perfect, since they convinced the population who came out to the streets to support the military forces.

We can say that the fall of the Regime happened mainly due to the control of the Media.

Once the revolution happened, the National Rendering Group that took control of the power used the television again to present the new President, General Spínola, the members of his Commission and their programme to the country.

It was only after reading their programme on television that the text was handed out to be published in the newspapers.

A country which lived under a political authoritarianism for almost half a century was lacking in political forces. Therefore it remained under the military control for some time and these military forces still used the Media for their political propaganda.

The following years were complicated and the freedom brought the social and political turmoil. There were some temporary governments and all political events were transmitted by the Media, especially by television, which was used as an information vehicle between the governments and the people, not only to broadcast dismissals but also the start of new governments. Everything happened on the National Television.

As the military forces were organising themselves, the means of communication were getting more and more importance, because not only the government but also their opponents used the Media to convey their messages. Meanwhile the freedom of speech made the appearing of other publications with different themes possible. However a long path in Democracy had to be followed before people could say that there was freedom of the Media towards the political power, mainly in what concerned the National Television which was the only Portuguese channel till the nineties and was controlled by the State.

## Conclusion

Whenever it was possible the political power tried to control the means of communication. Therefore their use with a political purpose wasn't a special feature exclusive of the New State. Practically this happened since the discovery of the Press and its use was improved as the society was evolving.

With the establishment of Democracy and the freedom associated with it, the freedom of speech became an incontestable truth.

Nevertheless this didn't mean that the political power, Government or opponents didn't try to use and manipulate the Media, since the existence of Democracy doesn't necessarily imply the resource to Democratic methods.

In our country, after the Media help in the fall of a Regime, almost without violence nobody would have doubts about their importance that increased up to the present.

No wonder that the Media are considered the 4<sup>th</sup> power.

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