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**VIRGINIA MARTÍN JIMÉNEZ**  
University of Valladolid

# Transition to democracy and state television: Comparative analysis for Portugal and Spain

## ABSTRACT

*Media, and particularly state television, became a key element in the strategy for change during transition in the Iberian Peninsula in the mid-1970s. Television became a means for the new government to talk directly with society, to influence public opinion and to get citizens' support. Within this context of political transition, this article aims to show a comparative view of the role played by state television in Portugal (RTP) and Spain (TVE) in order to draw similarities and differences between transition models from both a political point of view and the standpoint of television media. The sources used for this study are TVE and RTP programmes from the archives of the respective television headquarters, in-depth and face-to-face interviews with journalists who lived through the transition in the Iberian Peninsula, and an updated bibliography.*

## KEYWORDS

Democratic transition  
state television  
TVE  
RTP  
political  
communication  
media events

## INTRODUCTION

In the mid-1970s, Spain and Portugal went through significant political changes almost simultaneously, resulting in the final consolidation of democratic systems in the Iberian Peninsula. However, there is great divergence

in the model for democratic change observed in each of these countries. In Portugal there was a revolution following a military coup on 25 April 1974, whereas the political change in Spain happened after the dictator's death on 20 November 1975, and was aided by the manifest will for democratic transition of his successor, King Juan Carlos I.

Media, and particularly state television, became a key element in the strategy for change within this context of political transition. This article offers a comparative view of the role played by state television in Portugal (RTP) and Spain (TVE) after the end of their dictatorial regimes and aims to draw similarities and differences between both transition models from a political and a media point of view. It should be noted, however, that it is not the intention of this article to present television as the only key element explaining the political change in the Iberian Peninsula, despite the relevant role that state television played during both transitions to democracy. That would be a simplification of both political processes and the role of television at the time. We take into account that there were many factors (legislation, foreign influences, social and political changes and so on) that influenced democratic change. However, the evolution of the transition in both countries cannot be explained without taking into account the state television broadcaster.

This study is based on the analysis of RTP and TVE programmes about politics, prime ministerial speeches on television and news found in the archives of the respective television headquarters, in-depth and face-to-face interviews – carried out by the author – with journalists who lived through the transition in the Iberian Peninsula and an updated bibliography. These were the programmes analysed:

#### TVE

Juan Carlos I's proclamation speech: 22 November 1975.

Arias Navarro's speech on TV: 28 April 1976.

Prime Minister Suárez's speech on TV after his appointment: 6 July 1976.

Suárez's speech about the Political Reform Law: 10 September 1976.

Suárez's announcement as a candidate in the 1977 elections: 3 May 1977.

Electoral campaign in 1977 and the live broadcast of election day: 15 June 1977.

Suárez's speech about the wave of terrorism in the so-called black week: 29 January 1977.

The television appearances of the main political parties in the weeks before the constitutional referendum: December 1978.

#### RTP

The 'Family Discussions' (*Conversas em família*) during an uprising in Caldas da Rainha: March 1974.

Spínola's appearance on RTP: 26 April 1974.

1 May (International Workers' Day) broadcast: 1 May 1974.

Debate between Álvaro Cunhal and socialist Mário Soares: 6 November 1975.

Electoral campaign in 1975 and the live broadcast of election day: 25 April 1977.

After an in-depth literary review, the author of this study viewed the programmes that had the most relevant political content. After analysing the programmes through a questionnaire with several items (Appendix 1),

interviews were conducted. Several journalists were asked about the broadcasts and their professional experience during the transition using a questionnaire with common questions (Appendix 2).

## COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO THE MEDIA-POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE IBERIAN TRANSITIONS

At the time at which both democratic transitions commenced, there were similarities between the situation in Portugal and that in neighbouring Spain. Both countries had become the longest-lasting dictatorships in Europe. In both cases, before it became evident that political change was inevitable, the regimes tried to extend themselves by a continuist-reformist spirit based on a series of measures taken by the Arias Navarro government (1974–76) in Spain and Marcelo Caetano (1968–74) in Portugal. However, it can be said that these measures failed (Lemus López 2002).

In the case of Portugal, colonial wars helped to bring about the end of the dictatorship. In Spain, the memory of the Civil War did not cause the political change in itself, but it settled the grounds that allowed for a transition based on a consensus, in order not to prompt a new civil war and painful strife as in 1936. Regarding the political opposition in both cases, the best-organized group was the Communist left – PCE and PCP – while socialist forces were reorganized during the 1970s.

From a military point of view, the Portuguese influence in Spain was crucial both in terms of the decolonization of Western Sahara and in the emergence of an opposition inside the army, UMD (Democratic Military Union), whose origin was connected with the success of the Armed Forces Movement in Portugal.

The Revolution of the Carnations (April 1974) and the death of dictator Francisco Franco (November 1975) took place in these circumstances. Both events marked the beginning of a new historical period in Portugal and Spain, respectively. In the Spanish case, after Franco's death, his successor Juan Carlos I appointed Carlos Arias Navarro as prime minister. During the first government of the monarchy, different and incompatible political projects (continuist, continuist-reformist, reformist, revolutionary and rupturist) battled to gain control of the transition process. It was a 'tug-of-war' (*'un pulso'*), as Soto Carmona defined it, reflecting tensions between the different power groups and agents of change, and it became more intense during the first quarter of 1976 (Soto Carmona 1998: 29).

The deadlock in which the country was immersed, intensified by a wave of strikes, led the king to change his strategy in order to achieve a rapprochement between the rupturists and the reformists (Maravall and Santamaría 1989: 127). At this point Arias Navarro's attempt to 'impose from above a kind of limited democracy, a democracy *a la española* [Spanish type of democracy], as it was called erroneously' failed and, in turn, the 'opposition' also realized that their lack of resources made a sudden change of regime impossible (Maravall and Santamaría 1989: 126–27).

Arias's inability to manage the transition in accordance with public opinion and his disagreements with Juan Carlos I dragged the government into a deep internal crisis. Finally, on 1 July, coinciding with a meeting of the Council of the Kingdom and after listening to the suggestion of the monarch, Arias Navarro resigned (Tusell 1999: 43–9).

After this, the Council of the Kingdom, chaired by Torcuato Fernandez-Miranda, presented a shortlist of possible candidates for the presidency to the

1. *El Movimiento* was a political instrument of Franco's dictatorship. It was composed of the single-party state (*Falange Española y de las JONS*), the trade union organization (*Sindicato Vertical*) and civil servants. For more information, see Martín de la Guardia (1994) and Montabes Pereira (1989).
2. For more information, see Hopkin (2007).
3. For a deeper analysis of the Portuguese transition, see Ramos (2010).

king: Gregorio López Bravo, Federico Silva Muñoz and Adolfo Suárez. The latter, then Minister of the Movimiento,<sup>1</sup> was chosen by Juan Carlos I. A few hours after his appointment, Suárez made a television announcement of a reformist programme for building a democratic state and promised to submit his proposed reforms to a referendum and general elections within a year (TVE archive, 6 July 1976).

The goals set by Suárez's government took shape in the Political Reform Law, designed by a team led by Fernández Miranda. This 'bridge-law', using the expression coined by Soto Carmona, was approved overwhelmingly by Franco's Parliament or *Cortes* in November 1976 and shortly after by the Spanish citizens in a referendum (Soto Carmona 1998: 37). The arrival of this law meant a deep political transformation of the state, because it proposed a bicameral system composed of two chambers (Congress and Senate), articulated a voting system and, among other things, ensured the implementation of legislative reform (Tusell 1999: 57).

As the prime minister promised, the first general elections after Franco's dictatorship took place in mid-1977. In order to validate their results, a series of transformations were developed during the months prior to the elections, such as the legalization of political parties, most notably the Communist Party, which implicitly entailed a symbolic outbreak. Furthermore, some 38 decrees were passed to provide the country with the freedoms necessary to conduct democratic elections, the Court of Public Order was abolished and the High Court was established shortly after; an extension of the amnesty given some months earlier was decreed and press censorship disappeared.

The electoral result of the general elections in 1977 gave victory to the party led by the prime minister, the Union of Democratic Centre (UCD).<sup>2</sup> The Socialist Party (PSOE) managed to obtain a large number of votes, which made it the main parliamentary opposition party. From the moment the government was formed, the so-called *constituent phase* of the transition started. The consensus drew the lines to follow in those months when it became a priority to redress the economic situation, reform the state institutions and the organizational structure, and develop a constitution.

One of the first achievements of the consensus was known as the Moncloa Pacts, signed in October 1977 by the government and major opposition parties, which included a *programme of reorganization and reform of the Spanish economy* and another of *legal and political action*. Another result of the consensus, with the establishment of a new territorial organization ('pre-autonomy'), was the 1978 Spanish Constitution, approved on 6 December of the same year. The Spanish Constitution democratized monarchy, established freedom of speech and the territorial organization, and set the basic principles of the new system. With the constitution in hand, in March 1979, general elections led to a UCD victory.

In Portugal, democratic change was a result of a revolution, not of continuous reforms based on consensus and negotiation. In the Portuguese case, colonial wars wore down public opinion and produced a deep transformation in the military. This resulted in the military uprising of 25 April 1974 that led to the resignation of Marcelo Caetano and the creation of a National Salvation Junta led by General Spínola.<sup>3</sup> As Bernard Levin – then columnist on *The Times* – wrote, the most impressive aspect of the military coup that had occurred in Portugal was to see how in the space of a few hours, a regime that had lasted half a century and seemed well suited to a rural and Catholic country disappeared as if it had never existed (Levin 1979: 115).

The Spínola phase extended from 25 April to 30 September 1974. In that period, as Lemus stated, a clash between four models of social and political organization took place: the pluralist parliamentary democracy, a communist-oriented regime, direct democracy and the assembly model. In this context, a division occurred between Spínola in the army, who tried to maintain some kind of neo-colonial policy in Africa, and those who were supporters of rapid decolonization (Lemus López 2002: 107). Spínola put Vasco Gonçalves in charge of the second provisional government, and the radicals took charge of the government, causing the fall of Spínola, who was replaced by General Costa Gomes.

After Spínola's failed attempt to regain control and restore the 'purity of 25 April' (Ramos 2010: 727), the so-called Revolutionary Process in Progress (PREC in the Portuguese acronym) began on 11 March 1975.<sup>4</sup> The radicalization of the government, induced by the Operational Command of the Continent (COPCON), led a surprised US government to assert that Portugal was taking unprecedented action with 'armed forces shifting towards the left in a Western country and a member of NATO' (Gomes and Moreira 2008: 81–93).

It was in those days when the nationalization of industries, banks and print media started. The state arrogated the power to replace those run by private companies and to impose fines and suspensions on newspapers. On the other hand, conflicts multiplied between the administration, management and staff committee within the Portuguese press, as in the *Jornal do Comércio or O Século* (Telo 2007: 110).

As for the media, in both nations television emerged almost in parallel: in 1956 in Spain, and the year after in Portugal. In addition, television was controlled only by the state, which had the monopoly in this area during the transitions and into the 1980s and 1990s, when the debate about the need to open the communication sector to private companies began. Therefore during the last years of dictatorship and during the period of transition to democracy, Spanish Television (TVE) and Broadcasting Portuguese (RTP) became the only opinion-forming agents on the small screen, since they provided viewers with a uniform message of a much elaborated political and informative agenda (Martín Jiménez 2013: 307).

This monopoly was reinforced by the enhanced coverage of both state broadcast stations, and also by a relevant increase in the audience addressed. This potential influence was more significant in the context of the reduced circulation of daily newspapers (Ramos Simón 1989: 172).

In Portugal, the struggle for the control of the organs of social communication, including television, intensified until 25 November, when the PREC concluded. Military confrontations led to the liquidation of the influence of the PCP and the extreme left in the army, and the country saw the promulgation of the Constitution in April 1976. On 23 July of that year, Mário Soares, leader of the Socialist Party, became the first constitutional government's prime minister (De la Torre Gómez and Sánchez Cervelló 2000: 381–87).

Because of the revolutionary character of the Portuguese transition compared to the reformist consensus change in the Spanish case, the evolution of the media was completely different either side of the border. After the death of Franco, the Spanish state controlled several media: Spain's National Radio (RNE), Spanish Television and a newspaper group linked to the *El Movimiento Nacional*.<sup>5</sup> Shortly after the death of the dictator, the new government did not carry out nationalizations, but privatized the state-owned

4. For more information on PREC, see Allué Buiza (2012).

5. See footnote 1.

6. A recommended publication about political discourse concerning media and television would be Fernández and Santana (2000).
7. Pedro Erquicia worked at TVE and was editor of the programme *Informe Semanal*.
8. For more testimonies of journalists who lived through the political transition in Spain, see Martín Jiménez (2013). For the case of Portugal, see Hogan Teves (2007).
9. Manuel Teixeira worked at the Porto newspaper *O Comércio* (Portugal) from 1973 to 1992.
10. For deeper analysis of political projects for television during Portuguese and Spanish transitions, see Magnan (2001).

newspapers in 1977, keeping ownership of the public television and radio to this day.<sup>6</sup>

In both countries there was a profound change in the discourse of the media. In Spain the purging of workers from different media did not take place because there was an absence of a break with the dictatorship and thus staff retained their positions. As journalist Pedro Erquicia points out, in Spain:

the same groups that were formed during the dictatorship, the same people that worked on TVE under Franco's government, will continue on TV during the democratic transition. We all came from the same place as the TV director and the Prime Minister. There was not a before and an after in relation to staff in state television.

(Pedro Erquicia,<sup>7</sup> interview, 2010)<sup>8</sup>

However, one of the first consequences of the revolution in Portugal was the removal of the journalists close to the former regime and the purging of radio and television. As Teixeira points out, 'In state media there was a reorganization of staff. A cleansing aimed to create mass media that revolves around the orbit of the state' (Manuel Teixeira, interview, 2010).<sup>9</sup>

As for the legal framework of journalists, we must bear in mind that two main concerns had been coexisting since the beginning of the legal action of 25 April: first, to destroy the mechanisms that restricted the freedom of speech typical of the old regime, in other words abolition of censorship; and second, to guarantee the influence of new political forces in the mass media with a large audience (for this reason, on 25 April the television and radio stations were taken under the control of the revolutionaries straight away; Palla 1992). Among the measures taken, the MFA (Movement of the Armed Forces) included the immediate abolition of censorship, but at the same time the creation of a commission to control the media dependent on the National Salvation Junta (Cádima 2002: 8).

The press law was passed in February 1975; however, it was not until 1979 that the legal framework for television was defined.<sup>10</sup> This delay in the legalization of the small screen is reminiscent of what happened in Spain, where the abolition of censorship did not come until April 1977. However, this law – which restricted freedom of speech in matters related to the monarchy, the army and the unity of Spain – did not refer in any case to freedom of speech on television. It was not until the 1978 Constitution that this right was introduced and not until 1980 that TVE had a statute to govern this media democratically (Magnan 2001).

As will be seen later, in both countries, due to their political circumstances, governmental manipulation was tolerated on television. Nevertheless, while in Spain there were limits that marked the difference between television during the dictatorship and in the transition, in Portugal, especially during the PREC, the country had a state television that in effect played the role of Secretary of State Propaganda. However, in these two countries, television fulfilled the role of creating a new national identity, legitimating the new governments, and a didactic function linked to the new values of state (Mesquita 1996: 361).

Concerning the role played by newspapers, in Spain

both media – TV and newspapers – played different but complementary roles. In the sphere of public opinion, print media had a greater impact

to generate debate; while television had more influence on the sphere of building an image of democratic change favourable to the government. (Pedro Erquicia, interview, 2010)

And in Portugal, 'while the state controlled public media, a nucleus of resistance came out in newspapers, many of them newly created, trying to throw a different message to the public opinion' (Manuel Teixeira, interview, 2010).

## FIRST STEPS IN DIRECT POLITICAL USE OF PUBLIC TELEVISION IN THE IBERIAN PENINSULA

### *TVE as political agent*

As early as 1976, the government reacted quickly after realizing the negative reaction of the press media towards the new Spanish prime minister, Adolfo Suárez, and chose to make direct use of television. Suárez thought that television was essential for the formation of public opinion, and it was a media he knew well because he had led it during the last years of Franco's regime (Palacio 2001). The newly appointed prime minister spoke to the public through Spanish television cameras to present his government project and to silence voices critical of the king's decision about his appointment (TVE archive, 6 July 1976). With this broadcast a new era began in political communication on Spanish television, in which the prime minister would implement, in the words of journalist Fernando Ónega, 'direct speech, interpreted as a form of personal communication between him and the Spanish people' (interview, 2010).<sup>11</sup>

On 6 July, during the news broadcast at 9.30 p.m., viewers of the state broadcaster had the opportunity to see and hear Adolfo Suárez.<sup>12</sup> The site chosen for recording was not, as had been the norm until now, the presidential office, but a very different place transmitting an image of accessibility and change: his own home. On the other hand, the speech offered the audience 'moderate, harmonious and reconciliatory' language – in the words of Suárez himself (TVE archive, 6 July 1976) – and content that was different from Franco's era (Martín Jiménez 2013: 73).

With this message 'the concept of popular sovereignty as the basis for political organization' (Ysart 1984: 64–5) was introduced on television for the first time in decades. Indeed, the new prime minister, by means of his appearance on public television, explained to the viewers his desire to lead the nation following the will of public opinion, opening a door to a reformist transition project and maintaining discursive principles very similar to those used by the King in his proclamation: justice, social and economic rights, national diversity and religious freedom (TVE archive, 22 November 1975).

During the broadcast, Suárez referred directly to the negative reaction that his proclamation had provoked in public opinion. His words helped to turn around a generally non-favourable climate by showing an attitude (the consensus) completely away from the previous government. The prime minister showed his gratitude for 'all comments about my appointment' and said that the chances for a successful transition would be greater if 'we are able to accept criticism, to respect the opponent, to provide opportunities for collaboration and to incorporate the will of public opinion' (TVE archive, 6 July 1976).

The differences between the new prime minister and his predecessor, Carlos Arias Navarro, were remarkable not only with regard to their political project but also in the relationship maintained with public and private media.

11. Fernando Ónega worked at TVE and was an adviser to Prime Minister Suárez during Suárez's term of office.

12. One of the first calls Suárez made after he was named prime minister was to Fernando Ónega to ask him to prepare this short speech to address the nation on television (Fernando Ónega, interview, 2010).

13. No-Do, an acronym for News and Documentary, was a mandatory informational film shown in Spanish cinemas before the movie between 1942 and 1981. A recommended publication on No-Do would be Tranche and Sánchez-Biosca (2005).

It is possible to see a clear example of this disparity in the content and setting of Arias Navarro's television appearance – caused by a serious crisis in his administration – on 28 April the same year (TVE archive, 28 April 1976).

However, despite the few similarities between them, Arias Navarro's message, issued at one of the most critical moments in his career, showed that he was aware of the impact that his televised appearance could have; an awareness that had not been present in Spain since the inauguration of public television in the mid-1950s (Martín Jiménez 2013: 75).

This decision to appear on TVE pointed timidly at the beginning of political communication in television, which had been almost non-existent in the field of propaganda during the dictatorship. However, it was still a very weak awareness because during Arias Navarro's appearance on the public broadcaster – recorded from his presidential office – he said that although he wanted to speak to the Spanish people, he did not have to prove anything or justify his actions before the public (TVE archive, 28 April 1976). That is, television was used by Carlos Arias only as a loudspeaker that allowed him to reach a greater number of Spaniards.

Notwithstanding these constraints, Arias Navarro's decision to appear on television during a governmental crisis reveals a transformation of attitude towards television and an incipient awareness of how controlling the small screen could benefit the government, since, despite the political and cultural influence of television during the Franco regime, it was not until Suárez's government that TVE's potential in social influence was fully used. The reason for this is that the use of television for propaganda had been, since its inception in Spain, based on a concept almost identical to that used in the official news report (No-Do),<sup>13</sup> issued by the dictatorship during film projections:

when television was born in Spain, it was as an imitation of No-Do. It did not start as a medium with very particular characteristics because TV was born to relieve No-Do, bringing the same content to Spaniards' homes. The concept of propaganda on which No-Do's broadcasts were based will be the same that governs the course of the early years of television.

(Pedro Erquicia, interview, 2010)

It is clear from these two television appearances that during the early stages of the transition to democracy in Spain there was a change in political communication. It took its first steps with Arias Navarro, but Suárez was its main promoter. This was the beginning of the process of establishing a 'spectator democracy', a 'video-democracy' (Sartori 1998) or a 'tele-democracy', where the small screen developed a very important role. This new practice of the 'politics of visibility' – using the expression coined by Félix Ortega – gave to this audiovisual media the ability to start promoting and managing national policy (Ortega 2003: 71).

As mentioned, there were differences between Arias Navarro and Suárez concerning the main objective they pursued when appearing on television. In addition, Suárez was more aware of the importance of conveying a message to the citizens through mass media, especially television. However, behind these two attitudes, there was not just a different idea of what television was and the role it should play in the transition to democracy. Their speeches also showed how the two prime ministers had a different project for the transition and a different concept of the role of citizens.



In the case of Arias Navarro, as he said in his speech on television in April, the prime minister did not have to justify or explain his decisions to citizens. On the contrary, Suárez opted for more transparency and therefore when the government had to take important steps for the Spanish people, he appeared on television to obtain their support. Thus Suárez's attitude in relation to the small screen reflects a political project based on national consensus and understanding. This is reflected in his first speech on TVE:

If government is to manage the good of all people, it will be logical that the first purpose is the direct relationship with all citizens, and this has a dual purpose: to talk and listen, accept proposals and make sure, according to the message of the Crown, that no just cause will go unheard.

(TVE archive, 6 July 1976)

Since the appointment of Suárez as prime minister, the small screen became considered as an instrument of a direct relationship between the government and citizens-viewers. The cameras served as the chain of transmission of the whole process of change and tried to foster public opinion that was favourable to the leadership. This strategy was reinforced at specific times of great relevance when it was necessary to keep the support of the Spanish people (Martín Jiménez 2013: 311). In addition to the speeches already mentioned there were several examples of the political use of state television in Suárez's broadcast speeches about the Political Reform Law (10 September 1976), his announcement as a candidate in the 1977 elections (3 May 1977), the electoral campaign in 1977 and the live broadcast of election day (15 June 1977), Suárez's speech about the wave of terrorism in the so-called black week (29 January 1977),<sup>14</sup> the television appearances of the main political parties in the weeks before the constitutional referendum (December 1978) and so on (TVE archive).<sup>15</sup> As Ansón pointed out, 'During those months, Suárez's government was an excellent product and it would be unforgivable [...] not to sell it well. So, television influenced people to vote for Suarez' (Pérez Ornia 1988: 93).

### **RTP as a political instrument**

While in the case of Spain it can be said that Arias Navarro – with an approach more linked to propaganda<sup>16</sup> – is the first member of a government aware of the importance of connecting with people through television, in Portugal the first politician to give public television a fundamental political value was Marcelo Caetano. As he himself said:

I was the first member of the government to use TV to expose issues of general interest to the country in June 1957. It was not a secret that I followed the first steps of Radio Television Portugal with great interest and enthusiasm. I never imagined that years later, as head of government, TV would be so useful for the establishment of a communication stream between the Portuguese people and myself. But I knew from the beginning, it was an ideal instrument for a government if it became popular.

(Caetano 1977: 472)

As in the Spanish case with Franco, dictator Salazar's absence from the television, as studied by Rui Cádima (1996), cannot be explained only by

14. Spain suffered a wave of terrorism in the seven days of so-called *black week* (23–29 January 1977). On January 23, during a pro-amnesty demonstration, student Arturo Rey was killed by the radical group *Gerrilleros de Cristo Rey*. Next day, Lieutenant General Villaescusa was kidnapped by the terrorist group GRAPO. A few hours later, in a demonstration over the death of Arturo Rey, the demonstrator Maria Cruz Nájera died because of police action. The radical right group, *Fuerza Nueva*, killed five labour lawyers and, two days later, GRAPO killed three members of the Security Force.
15. Rafael Ansón was director of RTVE between June 1976 and November 1977.
16. The political use of television should not be defined as political communication in undemocratic political contexts (Rospir 2003: 22).

17. For example, one of these Family Discussions (*Conversas em família*) was broadcast on the occasion of the uprising in Caldas da Rainha (RTP archive, March 1974).

his 'multiple phobias of technological innovation, public speeches, advertising, etc., but also [...] by his lack of instrumental virtues of this new medium of communication' (Cádima 2002: 167). Salazar did not seem to give much importance to the media as instruments of political strategy, while Caetano persistently argued that governments always ought to give a good account of what they 'think, plan and do through the media' (Caetano 1971: 119).

Keeping this in mind, in 1969 Caetano set the *Family Discussions* in motion, a series of communications during which he spoke to the Portuguese through RTP to discuss issues related to the country.<sup>17</sup> For the first time in Portuguese politics, it was possible to find the implementation of a visibility strategy aimed at establishing a direct relationship between the government and the people. These talks, as Cádima explains, became pseudo-events that filled the television news and caused great excitement (Cádima Rui 1996: 214). In the words of Portuguese journalist Teixeira:

Marcelo Caetano created a TV show to achieve his political objectives. It was a weekly program in which it was explained to the Portuguese what was happening in the country, by discussing the colonial wars, economy, education [...] RTP was a privileged platform from which to indoctrinate public opinion. His predecessor Salazar used it to communicate through formal speeches on the radio, but he was afraid to go further than formal speech and face up to television because he could not master non-verbal language. Caetano, on the contrary, had to know how to use non-verbal language and he used informal and direct speech without problems, as demonstrated in the Family Discussions.

(Manuel Teixeira, interview, 2010)

Later, during the revolution of 25 April 1974, RTP played a more important role, reaffirming its position as an agent shaping public opinion and a driving force of political change. The military operation that resulted in the Spínola government had the radio and television headquarters as main objectives, while newspaper buildings would not even be occupied. Bearing this in mind, Caetano decided that nevertheless the audiovisual media did exert a direct influence in the 1970s, while the press did not. On the other hand, the onset of the operation was done at the national level through radio stations such as *Rádio Renascença*. The coup leaders seized *Rádio Clube Português* and the RTP and the Portuguese population were informed of the developments through brief statements that were broadcast first on radio and later on television (Telo 2007: 31). Therefore, considering these measures, it might be inferred that leaders of the 'Revolution of the Carnations' believed that neutralizing the media was enough to get people to wait peacefully for the fall of the dictatorship. Thus, Spínola appeared on RTP at 1 a.m. on 26 April (RTP archive, 26 April 1974) to introduce himself to viewers as the president of the National Salvation Junta and explain what had happened in the country (Ramos 2010: 713).

It is therefore possible to draw a comparison between the different uses to which Caetano and Spínola put television in Portugal and Arias Navarro and Suárez did in Spain. Shortly after their arrival in the government, Spínola and Suárez decided to appear on the small screen to introduce themselves to the population and explain the political strategy that they were to follow. Consequently, in both countries there was a reformulation of political leadership from the first moment of political transition.

In both Spain and Portugal, as part of the creation of a political strategy for television, governments made the decision to appoint those who would direct public television during the periods of transition to democracy. In Portugal the appointees were mainly military – such as Captain Pedroso Marques – while in Spain the people chosen were more or less close to the government, such as Rafael Ansón and Fernando Arias-Salgado in 1977.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, public television was considered as a means of serving society and, therefore, it was used as instrument capable of influencing public opinion. As Ansón points out:

I tried to make a TV that could contribute to build a democracy. And I think that I got it because democracy came. It cannot be denied. It is true that television was so important during the 1970s, therefore it helped to bring about democratic change. It's funny that people said that the TV served the King and the Prime Minister during the transition. Of course! Who else was TV going to serve?

(Rafael Ansón, interview, 2010)

The same applies to Portugal. Proof of this is found in the content of the first statement signed by the MFA (Armed Forces Movement) and addressed to all staff of public television:

The RTP is considered one of the most important media in the service of the Portuguese people and must serve with much care, contributing to the freedom of information, entertainment and cultural progress. Thus, it is not admissible in any manner, directly or indirectly, that deviations occur in the orientation of the production of emissions, from the purposes set out in the political program of the Junta of National Salvation.

(Hogan Teves 2007: 47)

### ***Politicians on the small screen and media events as elements of identity***

The difference in the televised speeches of Suárez and Arias Navarro or Caetano and Spínola in Portugal and Spain, and the collaboration of public television in political change, was an indication that RTP and TVE had become the central agents of political strategy in the field of a new kind of political communication: 'video-politics' (Sartori 1998). It should be noted that, a long time before this happened in Spain, in Portugal politicians not only appeared in front of the cameras but also began to debate among each other. When the opposition leader, Felipe González, challenged Adolfo Suárez to a media battle for the election of 1979, he rejected any chance of a televised debate (TVE archive, 16 February 1979). The Portuguese people, on the contrary, could watch from their homes a debate between Álvaro Cunhal and socialist Mário Soares on 6 November 1975. Mesquita (2001: 364) described it as 'a kind of marathon without limit' that 'reflected successful management that mixed media propaganda and the logic of democratic pluralism'.

According to this new political-propagandistic use of public television, media events were highlights on television on the Iberian Peninsula, such

18. Fernando Arias-Salgado was director of RTVE between November 1977 and January 1981.

19. The other dimensions of narratives that Dayan and Katz use are the competition and the coronation.

as the previously announced television ceremonies (Dayan and Katz 1995). When these events were transmitted by the cameras they contained an important political value and were used to integrate society around a collective ideal linked to the new political system.

An example of a media event in the Portuguese transition would be the 1 May (International Workers' Day) broadcast that took place after the fall of the dictatorship in 1974. During the last days of April, the RTP organized the work of reporters and the dissemination strategy of the day's celebration, which was marked by a strong symbolic meaning (RTP archive). Thus, on the first day of May, viewers could see the wave of protesters inundating Portuguese cities (Hogan Teves 2007) as a symbol of the new Portugal.

Something similar would happen when the referendum on the Political Reform Law took place in Spain in December 1976. It was seen through the cameras of TVE as the first television ceremony of the transition and almost a founding act of the new democratic system. On 15 December, history was told live (Dayan and Katz 1995). This event was widely broadcast by public television professionals from TVE and the idea that a historical moment was happening in the country was transmitted to the viewers: a real ceremony involving the entire nation and each particular citizen. The marathon live broadcast interrupted the everyday life of the audience, who sat in front of the television keenly following what was happening in the country (Martín Jiménez 2013: 118).

Public television treated the media events of 1 May and 15 December as a 'rite of passage' from dictatorship to a new democratic system using the narrative dimension of the conquest (Dayan and Katz 1995: 30),<sup>19</sup> as it did the first elections held on 25 April 1975 and 15 June 1977 in Portugal and Spain, respectively (TVE and RTP archives). The narrative dimension of the conquest refers to an event without a specific periodicity that takes place at times when society is overcoming boundaries and limits. The event is related on television as if it were a giant step for humanity. Given this fact, the audience becomes a witness who looks in awe at what is happening and ends up becoming a hero themselves, as was the case in the above-mentioned broadcast. In turn, the temporal dimension is the future (in the case of the competition it is the present, and for the coronation it is the past). The televised narrative used during these events sends a message to the audience: the conflict has been overcome and a new stage begins (Dayan and Katz 1995: 37).

These narrative strategies were aimed at making the audience conclude that this event was a 'sacred ritual', a 'symbolic act' in the sense developed by Dayan and Katz. Thus, through these media events, television became the official storyteller of the transition, able to formulate informative and interpretive models that would end up building a collective vision of the transition: as a people's revolution in the Portuguese case, and as a peaceful change agreed without opposition groups in Spain.

Moreover, these political ceremonies served to alleviate the problems occurring during this complex stage of a system still under construction. Coming from a dictatorship on the road to a democracy, a number of shortcomings were still to be solved: lack of freedom, the pressure of radical forces, the presence of groups who longed for the past, violence, a lack of understanding between ideological groups and so on. These media events generated an image of conquest that would encourage public support for the new political system.

Citizens felt that change was progressing slowly. This, and the terrorist violence that was taking place in Spain, generated dejection among the population in the Iberian Peninsula. It could be argued that citizens would turn to television to be told that there was a brighter future, that they could trust their leaders and that they would cross the boundaries and reach the desired objective (Martín Jiménez 2013: 314).

As Mesquita points out, these media events were an instrument:

for legitimating the authority, which serves to reinforce or supplement gaps in the constitutional arrangements [...] These events wrap the power in liturgical gestures from other eras and introduce a placebo that can alleviate, at least in part, the shortcomings and imperfections of democratic representation.

(Mesquita 2001: 126)

## CONCLUSIONS

During the political transitions to democracy in the Iberian Peninsula, state television served as a transmission chain of the whole process of change and tried to foster public opinion to favour whatever was dealt out by the leaders, acting simultaneously as a witness to the transition and also as an agent of change in itself. In this political-media strategy, state television became considered as an instrument of direct relationship between government and citizens/spectators and, in turn, an agent of political socialization through the contents of its programmes, and the language used in them.

Moreover, through the space that television granted for the transmission of media events, TVE and RTP worked with the aim of not only informing but also altering the collective memory, and shaping 'popular history' (Edgerton 2001) by carrying out a process of socialization of the memory of those events (Burke 2000: 65–9). Both television stations became at first a means for testifying and then for creating the collective memory of recent history on the Iberian Peninsula. This collective image, created through the socialization of memory, contributed to the legitimacy of the process and therefore to the evolution of the transition along the lines marked out by the leaders of these countries.

Despite the influence of state television, the governments ended up losing the support of society during PREC in Portugal and during the term of office of Unión de Centro Democrático (UCD) in Spain. The loss of public support by the UCD was apparent in the municipal elections of 1979 and Suárez resigned in January 1981. Subsequently, the Socialist Party (PSOE) won the elections, obtaining an absolute majority in October 1982. Moreover, in Portugal on 25 November 1975, the Revolutionary Process (PREC) ended because of a revolutionary movement; the following year the Socialist leader Mário Soares became the first prime minister of the constitutional government after the end of the dictatorship.

Therefore, if television – the most influential media for shaping public opinion – supported the government, why did PREC and UCD fail and lose the support of voters? Did the rulers assess that RTP and TVE were more influential than they actually were? Or did the leaders carry out a persuasive job through the small screen?

The role of the media should not be overestimated, because television was not the only factor that influenced the development of the transitions on the

Iberian Peninsula. Television was not the only agent in shaping public opinion and the circumstances surrounding this political change were very complex. However, it is possible to argue that Portuguese and Spanish governments were convinced that the influence of television was absolute, and that through the balance between freedom of information and control they could gain support from society for a longer period.

At first, the use of television was essential in the development of change from a dictatorship. However, during the final years of the transition in the Iberian Peninsula, the political and persuasive strategy on television suffered. As noted by the journalist Manuel Teixeira (interview, 2010), who worked at the Porto newspaper *O Comércio* during the Portuguese political change:

there were two public opinions at a time throughout the end of that period of history: on the one hand, public opinion formed from the intense action of the television; and on the other hand, public opinion was created through a pluralistic and different media market – newspapers like *El País* and *Diario 16* in Spain and *O Expresso*, *O Jornal de Notícias* or *O Novo Jornal* in Portugal.

In both countries, these newspapers began to accuse the public broadcaster of working for the government. The journalists of these daily newspapers reported the state control of television and requested that this audiovisual medium be an open window to all political and social activities.

In Portugal, for example, RTP failed in its attempt to persuade citizens. Government campaigns conducted through television did not achieve their objectives because this attempt at control was turned against those who introduced it. Was the case of Spain similar? It should not be forgotten that the Spanish population did not live through a revolution after the death of Franco, but a moderate change based on consensus within the established system itself – in the words of Suárez, *de la Ley a la Ley*, literally translated as ‘from the Law to the Law’. Given this context, at the beginning of the government of Adolfo Suárez, the government’s television campaigns – the referendum on the Political Reform Law and the June 1977 elections – were a success. Television directors, especially Rafael Ansón, and the Spanish government constructed an image of a transformed public media: TVE was presented as more pluralistic and tolerant than before 1975. This plurality, which was actually very limited, was accepted because of the political consensus that existed at the time. However, during the stage when Arias-Salgado was director of Radio Televisión Española, the control over television increased and the political consensus ended after the approval of the Constitution. Therefore, the political opposition and the newspapers began to call for greater freedom of speech and information in state television and demanded a law to regulate public media in order to avoid government control over the small screen.

Despite these limitations, state television played an important role during the transition in both Spain and Portugal. Media became a means used by the new government to talk directly with society, to influence public opinion and to gain the support of citizens. Despite political use of state media, the power of TVE and RTP during the transition was not unlimited. It can be rightly argued that in both countries political change would have been different if governments had not been in control of television, but on the other hand, that control failed to ensure long-lasting and absolute control of the country

and public opinion, which ended up demanding more independence of state television from the government.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Questionnaire: RTP and TVE Programmes/Items

Programme  
Date  
Television headquarters: RTP/TVE  
Time  
Length  
Live: yes/no  
Content: speech/news/report/other  
Speaker  
Leading  
Focus  
Subject  
Context  
Contents  
Commentary



## APPENDIX 2

### Interviews: Questionnaire/Items

Name

Country

Television headquarters (RTP/TVE) – Newspaper – Radio

Period

Position

Main news or historical moments covered

In her/his opinion, was it possible to inform without censorship?

Journalist opinion about main changes in mass media during transition to democracy in Spain and Portugal

Journalist opinion about political use of television during transition to democracy in Spain and Portugal

Journalist opinion about television changes (TVE or RTP) during transition to democracy

Further comments

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### CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Having obtained a Ph.D. (with distinction) at the University of Valladolid, Virginia Martín Jiménez is a journalist and a historian and has a degree in sociology. She is a lecturer in journalism at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Valladolid.

Her academic interests include various aspects of the correlations between media, politics and culture: the role of media during democratic transitions, mediated collective memory and political communication on television.

She has enjoyed fellowships such as the Teacher Training University Scholarship of the Spanish Ministry of Education and has researched in prestigious international centres such as Prague's Charles University in the Czech Republic and the Centre for Population Studies, Economics and Society (CEPESE) in Portugal.

Contact: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Área Periodismo, Plaza del Campus Universitario s/n, Universidad de Valladolid, 47011 Valladolid, Spain.

E-mail: virgimj@hmca.uva.es

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### Editor

Luísa Oliveira  
ISCTE-IUL  
[luisa.oliveira@iscte.pt](mailto:luisa.oliveira@iscte.pt)

### Editorial Consultant

Stewart Lloyd-Jones  
ISCTE-IUL  
[stewart.lloyd-jones@iscte.pt](mailto:stewart.lloyd-jones@iscte.pt)

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