

The influence of the international press and foreign correspondents in transitional democracies: the role of the Anglo-American journalists during post-Francoist Spain (1975-1978).

Abstract

The intersection between journalism and political transitions in contemporary history is a research field which has begun to flourish in recent years. From the “Carnation Revolution” in Portugal in 1974 through to post-apartheid South Africa in the early Nineties and up to the so-called “social media revolutions” of the Arab Spring of 2011, both historical and comparative political studies have considered the international press to play an integral role in these processes of democratic change. In this context of regime change, the Spanish transition to democracy (1975-1978) is often portrayed as the most exemplary case study. This article analyses the role played by the foreign correspondents and special envoys of the British and American broadsheets and wire services sent to cover events in Spain at the most tumultuous time in its recent history as well as the contribution made by the Anglo-American press through its editorial stance on key issues and its commitment to the story both in terms of journalistic output and human resources. The article suggests that the role of the international press not only offers a useful connecting route to those charged with making foreign policy decisions and monitoring the state of public opinion in their respective capitals –in this case London and Washington- but can also make an indirect contribution to the sway of political events at a domestic level.

Key words

Transition, democracy, Spain, UK, USA, press, agencies, foreign correspondents.

Introduction: The foreign press and political transitions as a growing research field

The subject matter of this present article, namely the role played by the foreign press during the Spanish transitional process, can be framed within a growing body of international research regarding the conquest of political liberty and the role of the media in the consolidation of democratic systems and allows us to certify the significant influence their coverage can exercise on public opinion and, ultimately, on the evolution and public perception of events themselves. While it is true, as Livingston and Asmolov point out, that the main role of foreign affairs journalists is “to provide essential news on global developments” (2010: 746), it is no less true that the presence of reporters on the ground contributes towards the shaping of public opinion concerning the event in question (Allen and Maxwell, 2010: 634-649) and on the wider public opinion of their respective countries (Salwen and Matera, 1989; McNelly and Izcaray, 1992; Wanta Golan and Lee, 2004). In this context, this article pays tribute to seminal texts regarding the external stimulation of democracy and the international context of regime transition (Schmitter, 1986; Pridham, 1991; McGrew, 1997), as well as comparative studies of transitions among new democracies in Latin America, South Africa, Russia and Eastern Europe (Filgueira and Nohlen 1994; Anderson, 1999; Jones, 2001; Gross, 2004). Voltmer’s work (2006, 2012) on media, conflict and democratisation and particularly on how the media can facilitate, and sometimes inhibit, the rooting of democratic practices in complex transitional democracies and counterbalance political interference in emerging democracies, has also been considered a wider referent for this present study.

The historical context to the press coverage of the Spanish Transition (1975-1978)

While it is true that steps are being taken to redress the balance as shown by both the publication of testimonies by former foreign correspondents (Haubrich 2009; Chislett 2011) and recent contributions regarding the influence on foreign policy of the European and US press (Martin Garcia and Ortiz, 2010; Powell, 2011), until very recently the relevance of the international media coverage of post-Francoist Spain has

been overshadowed by studies surrounding the foreign press implication in and coverage of the Civil War (1936-39) four decades earlier.

During the war, the Anglo-American correspondents were the authors of momentous news stories regarding key aspects of the war such as the Francoist massacre in Badajoz in August 1936 or the destruction of Guernica by German air forces in April 1937 (Southwork, 1977, Knightley, 2001; Deacon, 2008a & 2008b; Preston, 2008). The end of the war and the consequent consolidation of the Francoist dictatorship, led to Spain's disappearance from the international press radar with the sole exception of the work carried out in the wire service newsrooms.¹ During the Second World War, the interest shown by the Anglo-American press in Spanish affairs was limited to observing the movements of their respective governments in their attempts to assure that Franco would not aid Hitler in the Mediterranean given Spain's favourable position towards Germany despite its official declaration of neutrality (Wigg, 2005; Burns, 2009). Throughout the Fifties and Sixties, the Anglo-American broadsheets press counted on the work of its stringers in Madrid whose workload only began to increase after the designation of Prince Juan Carlos as Franco's successor in July 1969 and the assassination by ETA of Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, the ultraconservative prime minister and the young King's future mentor, in December 1973.

The summer of 1974 brings Spain to the forefront of the international pages for the first sustained period of time since the Civil War when Franco falls ill and Prince Juan Carlos is forced to temporarily substitute him as head of State. Special envoys flock to Madrid to cover the story expectant for a possible change of regime which does not occur until October 1975 when a second wave of reporters arrive to cover Franco's second and definitive illness which culminated in his death on the 20th of November. No less than 419 correspondents and special envoys were accredited at the Spanish Ministry of Information for the funeral and approximately 150 international reporters remain in Madrid to begin the coverage of the Transition.

¹ This process is coherent with recent studies which have demonstrated that throughout and following the Cold War, the coverage of international affairs by the media (particularly the US press) fell significantly (Aalberg et al., 2013: 387).

Aims and methodology

In order to calibrate the role and influence of foreign correspondents in political transitions, the authors of this present article opted to analyse the output of the Anglo-American reporters during what is widely accepted as the exemplary “role model” case of contemporary political transitions: the three years comprising the death of Franco in November 1975 through to the referendum on the Spanish Constitution in December 1978. The volume of published material, the dedication of human resources, the characteristics of the coverage itself, the professional profile of the reporters charged with covering the story and the pressures under which they worked when explaining the process of political change in Spain all came under the scope of the study.

In order to verify these objectives, the authors followed a methodology similar to that set out by Wimmer and Dominick (2000) which combines quantitative techniques (content analysis after a hemerographic and detailed document study) and a qualitative approach through structured in-depth personal interviews with former correspondents.² Two kinds of documentation were used for building the sample for the content analysis: the official (and classified) documents held at the Spanish General Archives in Alcalá de Henares, just outside Madrid; and the detailed examination of the contemporary Anglo-American newspapers namely *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *Financial Times*, *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* all chosen as quality and politically influential dailies according to the classic global elite press classification made by Merrill (1968).

In general terms, the sample covers the 1080-day period from the 20th November 1975 until the approval of the Spanish Constitution on the 6th December 1978. More specifically, and based on a multistage sample, five key moments in the process of Spanish political regime change were chosen: a) King Juan Carlos’ swearing of the oath and the confirmation of Carlos Arias as Prime Minister (November 1975); b) the appointment of Adolfo Suarez as Prime Minister and the approval of political reforms (July-December, 1976); c) the legalization of the Spanish Communist Party as the main

² Edward Mortimer and Richard Wigg of *The Times*, interviewed in London, October 2009; Richard Gott of *The Guardian* and David Gardner of *The Financial Times*, also in London, November 2009; William Chislett *The Times* and Tom Burns of Reuters interviewed in Madrid, May 2011.

obstacle to reform given the hostility of the Armed Forces (April 1977); d) the first free elections (June, 1977) and e) the approval of the Constitution which heralds the consolidation of democratic change (December, 1978). Content analysis techniques were applied regarding each of the news articles and editorials published.

Transition coverage logistics

Before analysing the more qualitative aspects of their news production and their intermediary role in the Spanish transitional process, the professional background of the reporters charged with covering the story, the logistics of their coverage, the sheer volume of their output and their deployment of wire services are practical and quantitative considerations which facilitate the contextualization of the wider theoretical reflections offered later in this article.

Professional profile of the Anglo-American foreign correspondents corps. The comment made by *The Times* correspondent William Chislett that “the foreign press corps at the time of Franco’s death was not a large one, as befitted a European backwater” (Chislett, 2011) rings true in the case of the Anglo-American quality press. While news agencies such as Reuters and Associated Press maintained their bureaus in Madrid, the Spanish capital remained a second level international posting and occasional coverage of events was left to *stringers* such as Harry Debelius at *The Times* or the so-called *super stringers* such as Miguel Acoca who worked simultaneously for *The Washington Post*, *The International Herald Tribune* and *Newsweek*. However, the death of Franco brought British and American reporters back to Spain in numbers reminiscent of the Civil War. New fulltime posts were created, stringers were upgraded to staff correspondents, correspondents were transferred over to Madrid from their previous postings in Paris or Lisbon, op-ed writers were flown in from editorial headquarters as support staff and freelancers filled the news holes surrounding the political transition to democracy.

As Table 1 shows, both the British and American broadsheets under analysis here assembled a significant contingent of staff correspondents to cover the Transition. The total figure fluctuates between 35 and 40 journalists representing around 30% of the approximately 130 journalists who worked from Madrid in 1976 and 1977, the key years of the Transition. The UK roll call includes Harry Debelius and William Chislett at *The Times*, Bill Cernlyn-Jones and John Hooper at *The Guardian*, Roger Matthews, Robert Graham and David Gardner at *The Financial Times* and Harold Sieve, Frank Taylor, Tim Brown and Tony Allen-Mills at the *Telegraph*. American press presence was headed by Henry Giniger and James Markham at the *New York Times* and Jim Hoagland and Stanley Meisler (who doubled up at the *Los Angeles Times*) at *The Washington Post*. As for special envoys, the *Times* counted on Richard Wigg and Edward

Mortimer, the *Guardian* used Richard Gott and the *FT* Diana Smith and Jimmy Burns. US “specials” included Flora Lewis and Henry Kamm for the *NYT*. The vast majority of the British press correspondents both broadsheet and tabloid worked out of the same office in Madrid.

**Table 1. Anglo-American broadsheet press and news agency correspondents in Spain
(November 1975 - December 1978)**

Country	Newspaper / News Agency	Correspondents	Envoys
United Kingdom	<i>The Times</i>	2	2
	<i>The Daily Telegraph</i>	4	-
	<i>The Guardian</i>	3	2
	<i>The Financial Times</i>	3	3
	<i>Reuters</i>	8	
United States	<i>The New York Times</i>	2	3
	<i>The Washington Post</i>	2	
	<i>United Press International (UPI)</i>	6	
	<i>Associated Press (AP)</i>	7	

The professional profile of the Anglo-American correspondents in Spain at the time was very heterogeneous combining i) veteran reporters with access to both official and non-official sources such as Debelius (*The Times*) or Cemlyn-Jones (*The Guardian*); ii) debutants with little or no language skills and scarce previous knowledge of the country such as Chislett (*The Times*) or Matthews (*The Financial Times*); iii) Staff correspondents with language skills such as native speaker Acocha at *The Washington Post* or Giniger who came from Mexico to Spain for *The New York Times*; iv) Staff correspondents who were transferred over to Madrid with no language skills or experience of the country such as Markham (*The New York Times*); or v) journalists working largely out of Lisbon and Paris with a certain sensibility to events in Spain and limited access to sources such as Burns (*The Financial Times*) or Lewis (*The New York Times*).

These similarities aside, there is an important difference regarding the profile and journalistic mindset of the British and American correspondents who came to Spain in the mid-Seventies. In the case of the American reporters, many had a professional curriculum specialized in the coverage of armed conflicts. Hoagland of *The Washington Post* came straight from Beirut while Lewis at *The New York Times* came fresh from the Arab-Israeli conflict. Some came from Cyprus, others from Northern Ireland and more than one from covering the military dictatorships in South America. In maybe the most spectacular change of professional scenery, some US correspondents came to Madrid straight from Saigon after the end of the Vietnam War

in 1975. Such was the case of James Markham at *The New York Times* or war veteran Malcolm Browne who joined the Associated Press bureau in Madrid, both of whom came from the South Vietnamese capital with similar expectations of armed conflict. The strategic decision to opt for these journalists responds in some way to the widespread idea among American media that Spain was in a political cul-de-sac and that a failed Transition could lead to a second Civil War. This theory was corroborated by the president of the Spanish news agency Europa Press, José Mario Armero, when declaring that “it was an especially interesting period during which an important number of journalists came to Spain and stayed for long periods here because many believed that another civil war was about to blow off.”³ As the months went by, many American foreign correspondents were forced to take a reality check and witness how the gradual process of democratic reconstruction led to their expectations not coinciding with reality. When asked about the fact that the US press had sent its figurehead war correspondents to Spain in 1975, Chislett of *The Times* said there had been a certain amount of “wishful thinking” on behalf of these reporters due to the excessive levels of professional adrenaline inherent to their trade and an unsophisticated reading of Spanish politics and society.

Table 1 also shows that the Anglo-american news agencies did not lag behind when it came to dedicating considerable human resources to the Transition in Spain. Their well staffed offices lend weight to the idea that the political reforms provided a constant source of news for foreign reporters. While some stayed for shorter periods, most of the correspondents stayed the pace for the full three or four year period while others continued into the early Eighties. The roll call offers some very interesting names. The AP list includes Pulitzer prize-winning Malcolm Browne who had previously worked as bureau chief in Saigon as one of the “Vietnam brat pack” accused of “losing the war” for the US by the Pentagon, bureau chief John Wheeler, the dean of news agency correspondents who stayed in Madrid for 12 years from 1969 through to 1981 and Julie Flint one of just two female correspondents for whom Madrid represented her journalistic “rites of passage” given that she covered the Transition aged just 25 years old. Flint made her name by covering the Transition and the assassination of Italian prime minister Aldo Moro⁴. The Reuters register includes David Cemlyn-Jones, son of *Guardian* Madrid correspondent, Bill Cemlyn-Jones and Tom Burns Marañón, grandson of eminent Spanish

³ “El Club Internacional de Prensa y la Transición Española”. www.cip.es Former Reuters man Tom Burns also remembers the arrival of the war correspondents and vividly remembers legendary Spanish Civil War correspondent Martha Gellhorn’s short stay in Spain at the time. “I took her one day to Carabanchel (Madrid’s largest prison) but she wanted more action. She was always looking for the demonstrations. Personally I think she wanted to cover the war of 1936 all over again.”

⁴ After her stay in Spain and Italy, Flint left AP and signed for the *Guardian* and *ABC News* in Lebanon from 1983 until 1990. Unlike her colleagues, Flint continues working as a journalist –she works for the BBC among others- and is a respected authority on the crisis in Sudan.

physician Gregorio Marañón.⁵ As for UPI, their most prolific staff writers were Arthur Hernan and bureau chief Peter Uebersax whose news wires were retyped, translated and evaluated to detect their position on issues of the day.⁶

Volume of news production. As can be observed from Table 2, The main US and UK newspapers lend exhaustive and intense coverage to the Spanish Transition, especially during the first eighteen months when many obstacles were to be overcome in order to hold free elections. As can be seen from Table 2, the most extensive coverage is carried out by *The Times* with a total of 1,261 published articles at an average of more than one a day over a three year period. *The Financial Times* (867) and *The Guardian* (816) next on the list followed by *The Daily Telegraph* (663), *The New York Times* (641) and *The Washington Post* (388). To give some comparative quantitative statistics for the same period, in France and Italy, only *Le Monde* publishes an equivalent number of articles (852) followed by *Corriere della Sera* (764). *La Repubblica* (610), *La Stampa* (456) and *Le Figaro* with 332 news items are slightly behind their Anglo-american colleagues in terms of output.

Use of wire services. News agency articles account for just over 8% of all published stories in the leading Anglo-American newspapers. Their presence varies according to the broadsheet in question. *The Times* is the UK newspaper which most often reproduces newswires with a total of 155 articles, 12.3% of its total Transition-related output followed by the *Guardian*, (51) and the *FT* (35). In all cases, the British press opts first for Reuters. It is worthy of note that the *Telegraph* offers no signed news agency articles.

Table 2. Transition-related stories and news agency bylines in the Anglo-American press during the Spanish Transition (21 November 1975- 6 December 1978)

<i>By-lines</i>	<i>Times</i>	<i>Telegraph</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>FTimes</i>	<i>NYTimes</i>	<i>Wash Post</i>
No. articles	1261	663	816	867	648	388
<i>Reuters</i>	106	0	30	29	61	4
<i>AP</i>	26	0	2	2	43	5
<i>UPI</i>	23	0	19	4	34	12

⁵ Aged just 26 years old, Burns came to Madrid in late 1974 to cover the final months of the Francoist regime and the early Transition period. In 1978 he joined *Newsweek* as correspondent for Spain while also working for the *Washington Post* and later for the *Financial Times*. In the Nineties Burns wrote a trilogy about the Spanish transition and in 2001 was awarded an OBE.

⁶AGA-MIT-42/9052.1 Notas informativas de la agencia de prensa americana UPI. Difusion Informativa de la Direccion General de Coordinacion- Vision Informativa de Agencias Extranjeras

The presence of the news wire services is far higher in the case of the US newspapers under analysis reaching a combined total of 15.4% for the *NYT* and the *Post*. The *NYT* registers a figure of 138 articles which, while lower than the London *Times*, represents no less than 21.3% of its total output and spreads its agency allegiances more widely between AP, Reuters and UPI.

Correspondents output. The material produced by the foreign correspondents is the most important contribution to the total number of articles referring to the Spanish Transition over the period analysed. As can be seen from Table 3, their work accounts for more than 60% of all news items on this subject. The figures vary depending on the newspaper: 89% at the *Washington Post*, 70% at *The Daily Telegraph*, 68% at *The Financial Times*, 67% at *The Guardian*, 64% at the *NYT* and 62% at *The Times*. An additional and relevant observation is that the number of signed news articles is far higher than the comparative figure for those which finish with the phrase “from our own correspondent”. The difference is particularly notable at *The Guardian*, the *Financial Times* and the *NYT* and is still significant in the case of *The Daily Telegraph* and the *Washington Post* where signed articles are double those left unsigned. Bearing in mind that in the case of the British press the signing of news articles was not standard practice until *The Times* began to adopt named by-lines just eight years earlier in 1967 (Rees-Mogg, 2011, 144), the statistics reveal a high level of trust by newspaper editors in the interpretative criteria of their correspondents and special envoys.⁷

Table 3. Correspondent by-lines in Anglo-American press during the Spanish Transition (November 1975 - December 1978)

<i>By-lines</i>	<i>UK:</i>	<i>Times</i>	<i>Telegraph</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>FT</i>	<i>USA:</i>	<i>NYT</i>	<i>W Post</i>
Total news		1261	663	861	876		648	388
Correspondents		783	463	577	594		412	345
		(62%)	(70%)	(67%)	(68%)		(64%)	(89%)
Name by-line		463	317	560	542		356	213
No name by-line		320	146	17	52		56	132
Others		478	200	284	282		236	43

⁷ Access to authored by-lines allows us to quantify the volume of articles produced by each of the correspondents and special envoys for the Anglo-American press during this period. Harry Debelius (*The Times*) John Hooper (*Guardian*) and Roger Mathews (*FT*) top the podium with more than 300 articles; Frank Taylor (*Telegraph*) and Bill Cemlyn-Jones (*Guardian*) come in second at around 200 items followed in third place by Henry Giniger (*NYT*), Miguel Acoca (*Post*) Robert Graham (*FT*), James M. Markham (*NYT*) and William Chislett (*Times*) who all sign around 150 news stories. With the exception of Harold Sieve (*Telegraph*), the rest produce less than fifty articles.

Editorial presence. This high level of trust shown by the broadsheets in their roster of foreign correspondents regarding their interpretation of current events in Spain can also be seen in its transference to the op-ed pages of the respective newspapers where a visible coherence between the points of view expressed by the staff correspondents and the editorial writers published by their papers can be observed. The high level of news coverage shown in Table 2 inevitably leads to a significant presence of Transition-related editorials and a systematic attention to the democratic changes taken place in Spain. Over the three-year period, *The Times* published 36 editorials, at the rate of one a month and *The Guardian*, 32, while *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Financial Times* published 25 respectively. The number of editorials in the US press, while lower in absolute terms -14 in *The New York Times* and 6 in *The Washington Post*- is not so in proportionate terms (3.6% in the case of the *NYT* as against 2.8% in the case of *The Times* for example).

Constraints on coverage

The weight lent to the work of the Anglo-American foreign correspondents meant that their movements were closely followed especially during the first months of the post-Franco era. Testimonies from journalists at the time show that their working environment often included phone tapping, secretly arranged meetings made at mutual risk, supervision at hotels and border controls, shadowing at rallies or demonstrations and constant threats of expulsion, some of which were executed. On arrival, journalists were given a provisional work permit by the Ministry of Information and Tourism. Non-possession of this permit could lead to expulsion. The hotels where journalists stayed (particularly the Palace in Madrid) were under constant supervision as were the border controls at Irun-Bilbao. Some reporters were deported immediately. Recent interviews with veteran correspondents reveal that telephone threats were not uncommon. Tom Burns at Reuters remembers moments of considerable pressure and threatening phone calls from the secret police. The International Press Club (IPC) was temporarily closed on occasions. Letters of protest by the IPC president were sent to the MIT complaining of “the difficulties encountered by professionals in the exercise of their duty and attempts by authorities to use foreign correspondents as policemen”.⁸

Along with their movements, foreign correspondents’ output was monitored by the Ministry of Industry and Tourism (MIT) through a daily internal bulletin entitled the “News View of the Foreign Press” which evaluated the contents of their texts in an attempt to detect attitudes or editorial positions hostile towards the government. Through this bulletin, the Spanish

⁸ MIT Ref. 42/09043/4. “Press Correspondent organizations in Spain 1975.”

government could track articles published by the UK/US press outlets regarding the democratic process and the consequences this could have on British and American policy towards Spain (Powell 2011, 363). This bulletin, along with a daily summary of both radio and television programmes called “Spain seen from abroad” (*España vista desde el extranjero*), evaluated the contents of the texts and scripts in an attempt to detect attitudes or editorial positions hostile towards the post-Francoist regime. Authorities in Madrid received complementary information about the foreign correspondents working out of the Spanish capital from the consular staff at the Information Offices at their respective Embassies. Numerous internal memos headed “The political meaning of the foreign press” attempted to calibrate the ideological affiliation of the international reporters in Madrid. Journalists were categorised according to their “ideology”, level of “objectivity” and their “position with respect to Spain”. The newspaper for which they worked was classified into one of three groups: “independent”, “conservative” and “liberal”.

The MIT was particularly vigilant when it came to the coverage of any Communist Party related news story and at Franco’s death published an internal memo expressing concern regarding “foreign press correspondents’ contacts with subversive organizations and militants of orthodox communism”.

Vigilance was also intense regarding coverage of events in the Basque Country. MIT archives show how the work of UPI bureau chief Peter Uebersax and *Financial Times* correspondent Roger Matthews was constantly shadowed by internal security as was Reuters journalist William Robinson who was finally given an expulsion order for his articles on the troubles.⁹ To go beyond the official version of events, foreign journalists had to abandon the relative ‘comfort zone’ of Madrid and enter into delicate negotiations with unknown sources. Simply assisting at a pro-Basque rally could be a dangerous activity for those committed to covering the story. With both foreign correspondents and Basque separatists under surveillance, the meetings between the two were arranged at mutual risk. Foreign newspapers were usually unobtainable in the Basque Country if they carried reports on the situation, particularly those concerning ETA. Debelius at *The Times* feared the government would crack down on foreign correspondents in Spain and expel some of them after being accused by conservative daily *ABC* of participating in a ‘propaganda campaign against the unity of Spain’ for having published a front page article in which he said the underground movement closely followed the BBC’s Spanish service reporting of the state of exception in two of the Basque provinces in summer of 1975. A Basque source was quoted in *The Times* as saying the BBC coverage was reminiscent of the coverage it gave during World War II to the resistance to Nazism.

⁹ Just a month prior to Franco’s funeral, Joel Leslie Gandelman, “special” correspondent for the *Chicago Daily News* and *Newsweek* was forced to leave Spain for “having published stories about the supposed torture of Basque separatists by the Spanish police”, an incident which was interpreted by many as a warning shot to the foreign press corps regarding their coverage of the Basque conflict

Reprisals were occasionally taken. On October 1st 1975, the BBC's Chief European correspondent, Charles Wheeler, was arrested and detained by the police in the Puerta del Sol in Madrid. Just ten days before Franco's death, Spanish national radio stopped offering technical assistance to the BBC alleging that its recent programmes were an intrusion into Spanish internal affairs. In the spring of 1976 the Reuters office in Madrid received a call from the security forces warning them that if they went ahead with publishing a story about student demonstrations in Bilbao they would be "out of Spain tomorrow". The agency published the story. In a large demonstration in favour of Catalan autonomy that the police could not control in February 1976 some foreign correspondents were hurt including Alexis Hantz, of US wire service UPI whose car and camera equipment was seriously damaged according to fellow correspondent Harry Debelius ("Big Catalan protest angers police" y "Catalan flags fly in Barcelona", *The Times*, 9th February 1976). The violence continued up to May 1977. When reporters turned in Vitoria to cover the first legal celebration of the *Aberri Iguna* (Basque National Day) since the Civil War, the police shot at BBC correspondent Gordon Martin while he was relaying events back to London. The definitive reprisal played by regime was the embargo on the import of foreign newspapers at Spanish airports, a tactic described by Chislett of *The Times* as "commercial censorship":

"Foreign correspondents were free to write what they wanted, but [...] the regime was able to control the distribution of foreign publications in Spain as copies of each one were sent from Madrid airport [...] to the Information Ministry. The articles on Spain were then translated and given to senior officials [...] and the decision taken whether to allow the sale of the publications at newsstands. Distributors were then given permission, or not, to deliver the publications to newsstands. All the copies of an unauthorised newspaper were thrown away. Another tactic was to allow distribution, but to hold it up for several days. A newspaper published on a Monday was unlikely to sell on a Thursday. (...) *The Times*, *Le Monde*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* [...] correspondents agreed among themselves to publish at the end of each month the number of days when their publications were banned. This greatly displeased the government which liked the outside world to believe there was unrestricted distribution of the foreign press in Spain." (Chislett, 10)

A pro-democratic political news agenda

So far we have seen the commitment made to the Spanish transition story by the UK and US press and news agencies in terms of human resources, news story production and editorial presence. However, an important issue remains: what exactly did the Anglo-American press focus on in its contribution to the political transition process? Beyond occasional issues such as the UK-Spanish conflict over Gibraltar or the geo-strategic interest in the incorporation of a democratic Spain in the EEC and NATO, a content analysis of the published articles reveals a shared UK-US news agenda dominated by the internal political manoeuvrings related to regime

change. The legalization of the Spanish Communist Party or the political tandem between the new King and prime minister Suarez are two predominant examples of a news frame built by correspondents and special envoys which presents a complex political process whose result is uncertain while at the same time highlighting and lending support to any kind of initiative of change and strongly criticising those who present obstacles to this process.

In order to highlight the correspondents' discourse on the development of the Transition and its transference to the corresponding editorial stance of the Anglo-American broadsheets, the analysis of their coverage of five key moments of the process reveal the level to which the foreign reporters in Madrid were committed to peaceful democratic regime change:

a) **Support for King Juan Carlos.** *The Washington Post* (Miguel Acoca: "Juan Carlos vows change", 1975-11-22) and *The Daily Telegraph* ("A good start for Spain", 1975-12-13) share an attitude of unconditional trust in the capacity of the young King to manage these new stage in Spain's political life and offer explicit support to its first government presided by Franco's final prime minister, Carlos Arias. *The New York Times* denounces the strong pressure to which the young Monarch is subject given that he lacks the support of both the Francoists and the clandestine opposition (Henry Giniger: "Spain Mourns Franco Awaits Advent of King", 1975-11-22). When Juan Carlos receives the applause of the US Congress for his compromise with democracy in June 1976 then correspondents and editorial writers follow suit (Murray Marder: "Juan Carlos Tells of Democratic Commitment", *The Washington Post*, 1976-06-03; "A King to Democracy", *The New York Times*, 1976-06-04). Despite looking towards the British monarchy as a role model, the UK press was more lukewarm in its support and occasionally offers shows of distrust in *The Times* ("Spain's slow march towards freedom", 1976-01-14), *The Guardian* ("Arias amid the winds of change", 1976-01-29) and *The Financial Times* ("An ugly situation develops in Spain", 1976-01-15).

b) **Backing of new prime minister Adolfo Suárez and the approval of political reforms.** The low profile of the new prime minister deeply concerned all the foreign correspondents who feared a step backward but the King's announcement of an amnesty in defiance of Arias' insistence on denying such a measure is well received by *The Financial Times* (Roger Mathews: "A Royal gamble in Spain", 1976-07-15) and by the reticent *Guardian* ("Spain watches the prison gate", 1976-07-19). All the correspondents coincide in the weakness of a disunited illegal opposition with the Communist Party as the only political force with an influence on the streets and in the factories of Spain. Despite military tensions and terrorist attacks in the autumn of 1976, the correspondents backing of Suarez's political reform project and their support for a popular referendum which definitively approves the political reform law is unanimous ("Spain should say yes –even so", *The Guardian*, 1976-12-15; Roger Mathews: "The Spanish

referendum: two cheers for democracy”, *The Financial Times*, 1976-12-17; James M. Markham: “Madrid Rejoices Over Poll Victory”, *The New York Times*, 1976-12-17; Miguel Acoca: “Spanish Vote Strengthens King in Meeting Opponents”, *The Washington Post*, 1976-12-18).

c) **Correspondents lobby for the legalization of the Spanish Communist Party.** Ideologies apart, all the UK and US newspapers make their position clear regarding the need to legalize the Communist party as a necessary pre-condition for lending credibility to the new Spanish democracy. The serenity and the internal discipline shown by the Communist Party after the cold-blooded assassination by extreme right wingers of five Communist lawyers in January 1977 reduces the fears surrounding the legalization of the party (Roger Mathews: “Spain between hope and chaos”, *The Financial Times*, 1977-01-29; “The Strain in Spain”, *The New York Times*, 1977-01-29; Frank Taylor: “A long, hard road to democracy”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 1977-02-09; “Spain’s Passage”, *The Washington Post*, 1977-02-14). The Eurocommunist summit in Madrid between SCP leader Santiago Carrillo, Italian leader Enrico Berlinguer and French representative Georges Marchais and the distance they show towards orthodox communism eases the reporters’ concerns (Jim Hoagland: “3 Eurocommunist Pledge Democratic Contest for Power”, *The Washington Post*, 1977-03-04; James M. Markham: “Portugal and Spain Worlds Apart on Communism”, *The New York Times*, 1977-03-13).

d) **Positive reaction to Suarez’s victory in first free elections.** Foreign correspondents, columnists and editorial writers alike lend their support to Suarez’s decision to call free elections (Miguel Acoca: “Spain Ends Ban on Communists After 38 Years”, *The Washington Post*, 1977-04-10; James M. Markham.: “Spanish Generals Reportedly Accept Red’s Legalization”, *The New York Times*, 1977-04-14; “Spain breaks a taboo”, *The Times*, 1977-04-12; “Spain takes its plunge”, *The Guardian*, 1977-04-11). Suarez’s candidacy receives greater support from the British and American press than he does from the local press as the correspondents consider him necessary in order to guarantee the reform process and take Fraga’s Francoists out of the frame (“Suárez fixes a date for elections”, *The Financial Times*, 1977-04-18; “Polling nears in Spain”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 1977-04-28). While the foreign press takes note of the uncertainty on the streets regarding the legitimate fears of terrorism and the shadow of the armed forces it also detects signs of great hope (Richard Gott: “Enjoying democracy as the Spanish hustings return”, “Spain may be on the verge of the most astonishing upset since the elections of April 1931 that swept away the monarchy and pave the way to civil war” and “The two horses of democracy ride into town”, *The Guardian*, 1977-05-28, 1977-06-02). The June 1977 election results are well received by the foreign correspondents who present Adolfo Suárez’s centrist UCD win as a victory for the King and the defeat of extremist political options (Jim Hoagland: “Premier Suarez Leads in Spanish Election”, *The Washington Post*,

1977-06-16; “Flying start for Spain”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 1977-06-17; William Chislett: “King Carlos is the real victor in Spain”, *The Times*, 1977-06-17; Richard Gott: “Spain’s two trendy young men”, *The Guardian*, 1977-06-17; Roger Mathews: “The extremists checked”, *The Financial Times*, 1977-06-18).

e) **The approval of the Constitution which defines the new regime.** While the recovery of political autonomy in Catalonia and the Basque Country is seen as an indispensable condition for the new Spanish democracy, Suarez’s centrist party does not win in either of the two regions. The surprise agreement, sponsored by the King, with the exiled President of the Catalan Republic, Josep Tarradellas, receives the backing of correspondents and the UK and US newspapers in general while both point out the neutralising of the socialists and communists, winners of the elections in Catalonia (John Hooper: “Political dynamite in the fight for home rule” and “How Madrid nobbled the Catalans”, *The Guardian*, 1977-06-30 and 1977-10-01). The return to power of Tarradellas is valued with a point of historical solemnity by *The Times* (“Autonomy for Catalonia”, 1977-09-30) and is covered from Barcelona by James M. Markham for *The New York Times* (“Catalan Leader, Exiled 38 Years Return to Tumultuous Welcome”, 1977-10-24). The unexpected constitutional consensus beyond those political differences which had led to the Civil War receives all kinds of applause from the foreign press (“A milestone in Madrid”, *The Financial Times*, 1978-11-01; “A new start for Spain”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 1978-11-02; Miguel Acoca: “Spain to Vote on Constitution as Last Step to Democracy”, *The Washington Post*, 1978-11-11).

Foreign correspondents as mediators of political transition in Spain

The Anglo-American press’ overriding interest in Spanish political stability meant that their foreign correspondents often became a bargaining tool and an instrumental part of the political struggle for control over the Transition. To begin with, foreign reporters provided useful cover for local journalists as during the months immediately after Franco’s death, their material could be cited with impunity by the national press as a way of avoiding restrictions. In this context, it must be remembered that in the eighteen months between King Juan Carlos’ ascent to the throne and the first democratic elections in June 1977, the Press Law of 1966, with all its mechanisms of control, was still in force.¹⁰ Foreign correspondents –particularly wire service correspondents given their more anonymous professional condition- were often approached by local pro-democratic journalists with offers of collaboration and stories they could not publish. There was no shortage of local pro-democratic journalists ready to cooperate. That the ever-present

¹⁰ Spanish National archives show that 163 disciplinary measures were taken against newspapers and magazines in the years 1976-1977 by the Ministry of Information and Tourism.

Ministry for Information and Tourism was aware of the collaboration between young Spanish journalists and their foreign colleagues can be seen in this circular:

our sources are convinced that the largest part of news stories and commentaries hostile to the Spanish Regime emanate from a small group of young Spanish journalists who are at the service of foreign news agencies in Madrid and which represent in general terms the most radical elements of Spanish journalism. These young journalists frequent the corridors of parliament and fashionable clubs and restaurants and in their rush to make a name for themselves are the best vehicle for the dissemination of false rumours put into circulation by their political comrades in Madrid.¹¹

Secondly, in an attempt to curry favours with the Western powers and international public opinion, correspondents were often resorted to by Spanish politicians in order to send a message out beyond national borders much to the chagrin of local journalists. In this sense, ministers themselves were typically more forthcoming with foreign journalists than with the national press. *ABC* complained on numerous occasions about how Prime Minister Arias and Home Affairs Minister Manuel Fraga, announced their plans in *Newsweek* and *The Times*, instead of to the national press.¹² Chislett of *The Times* corroborates this when stating “there were many jokes at the time about Spaniards reading the foreign press to find out what was happening in their own country...An editorial in the conservative *ABC* daily newspaper commented laconically that it was ridiculous for people abroad to know what was happening in Spain before Spaniards did. Some people claim that the foreign correspondents helped Spain achieve democracy by holding a mirror up to what was going on”. (Chislett, 2011)

The government tried to use the foreign press to project a positive image abroad as many members of the Transition governments have explained in their memoirs.¹³ Rodolfo Martín Villa, responsible for relations with the trade unions, recognised that “in those days it was the norm that the exclusive and headline-making statements regarding the political intentions of the government were published in the foreign press” (Martín Villa 1984, 18). Prime Minister Arias himself was the first to do so: he told special envoy Arnold de Bochgrave (*Newsweek*, 5th January 1976) of proposals for reform which he would not announce in the Spanish parliament until the 28th of January. The very next day Manuel Fraga, who had been Spanish Ambassador to London, gave Richard Wigg more specific details about the political reform proposals than the prime minister himself. (“Spain to adopt universal suffrage in 1977 election battle”, *The Times*, 30th January 1976). The King himself used the foreign press to send out a critical

¹¹ MIT Ref, 42/9051/5. “Informative notes regarding news agencies”.

¹² “Información hacia dentro” and “Aquí, en España” (*ABC*, 13/01/1976; 31/01/1976)

¹³ Such is the case with Manuel Fraga, José María de Areilza and Alfonso Osorio, all members of the first post-Francoist government (Fraga 1987; Areilza 1977; Osorio 1980).

message to President Arias in an interview with Arnold Borchgrave (“Juan Carlos looks ahead”, *Newsweek*, 26th April 1977) The government denied that such an interview had even taken place but what is certain is that just two months later, Arias resigned from the post.

Thirdly, along with government authorities, foreign correspondents were also used by opposition figures to project an alternative agenda and to denounce any apparent brake on the transition process in the international press. SCP leader Carrillo himself was acutely aware of the pulling power of the news story he embodied and used the international journalists present in Spain as a threat as for example when, in 1976, he made a public demand from Rome for a Spanish passport:

(Carrillo) began by holding an open meeting of the PCE Central Committee in Rome at the end of July. Amply publicized by the media, it had considerable impact, revealing to the Spanish public for the first time that a significant number of intellectuals and labour leaders were Communists (...) Carrillo who was living clandestinely in Madrid, informed Suárez through intermediaries that, if he did not receive a passport, he would hold a press conference in Madrid in the presence of Oriana Fallaci, Marcel Niedergang and other influential foreign correspondents. (Preston, 1986: 120)

According to Preston, in this way the foreign correspondents became an instrumental part of the struggle between Suárez and the opposition – in this case from the PCE – for control over the Transition. Some foreign journalists went a step further and lent a more practical hand. For example, the coalition known as the Democratic Junta (*Junta Democrática*) was proclaimed in the office of Walter Haubrich, correspondent of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, and it was Haubrich who acted as cicerone to a clandestine Felipe González, General Secretary of the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE) and future prime minister of Spain whom he personally presented to the foreign correspondent community in Madrid at that time. The International Press Club in Madrid was often used as a cover for participating in acts demanding greater press freedom, all of which were closely followed by the Director-General of Security. According to Spanish agency Europa Press president Jose Maria Armero: “the relationship between foreign journalists and the most important figures of the opposition was intense. They knew them all. Through the correspondents one could obtain more contacts and more information than from our Spanish colleagues...During the Transition, the foreign correspondents controlled a lot of information and many politicians resorted to them”.¹⁴

Aside from their instrumentalization by local journalists, governmental authorities and opposition figures it is clear from the constraints on their coverage and the scrutiny to which

¹⁴ <http://www.clubinterprensa.org/paginas/el-cip-y-la-transici%C3%B3n-esp%C3%B1ola>

they were subjected (Tulloch, 2015) that the foreign correspondents presented an uncomfortable dilemma for a regime unaccustomed to permissive informative practices but which found itself forced to tolerate as a further example of its compromise with a democratic society. In times of political instability, the greater margin for manoeuvre enjoyed and exploited by the foreign correspondents compensates for the limitations of a far greater controlled local press. The shadowing of their work present in numerous internal Ministry of Information memos is the implicit recognition of their perceived influence and further evidence of their distrust towards the very figure of the foreign correspondent somewhere between a spy, agitator and ideologically motivated Trojan horse.

Concluding remarks

The Spanish transition to democracy presents a relevant case study concerning the role of foreign press correspondents in the configuration of public opinion and even the development of regime change itself. By providing both quantitative and qualitative data, this article has tried to show how the Anglo-American newspapers commitment to the Transition story both in terms of human resources and news production allowed them to highlight conflictive issues, evaluate the decisions made to solve them and alert to the risks involved.

The chronology of events in late-Seventies Spain shows how foreign correspondents and editorial writers highlighted critical aspects of political change in Spain which ended up being resolved in line with their comments such as their incitement of speedier reform of the Francoist structures, their petition for change of the first post-Francoist government presided by Carlos Arias, their insistence on the need to legalize all political parties including the Communist Party as a guarantee of credible democratic change, their plea to Adolfo Suarez to run for election in order to put a stop to the neo-Francoists of Manuel Fraga or the recognition of Catalonia and the Basque Country as an indispensable condition for the success of democratic reform.

Interviews with former foreign correspondents and the consultation of published Transition literature has also allowed us to observe how the proto-democratic government used foreign reporters, instead of their own national press, to announce their plans whilst at the same time monitoring their coverage of the opposition and internal conflicts well aware that the correspondents offer a direct route to international ruling elites and their capacity to understand developments in the country. In this regard, former Reuters correspondent Tom Burns points out how the work carried out by the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* amongst other newspapers “was crucial for persuading congressmen and those on the Senate Committee for Foreign Relations to take a serious interest in areas such as the military bases agreement or the

future legacy of the dictator". This journalistic lobbying presents the international correspondents as influential agents within a State in conflict, as monitors of governmental measures, as speakers for those political actors with no official media platform and manufacturers of a public opinion in their home countries which can condition the very nature of diplomatic relations between the countries in question.

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