

Title

Portugal's Dictatorship and the early days of the Spanish Civil War: Censorship and Propaganda

Extended abstract

On July 17, 1936, after five years of the Second Spanish Republic's rule, Spain saw the start of a military coup that would extend for almost three years, later becoming known as the Spanish Civil War. The Portuguese population, fearing what might come of a conflict so close to home, searched journalism for answers and any reports of escalation. To satisfy public interest on the topic Portuguese publications sent a number of reporters to the front lines including, on August 11, 1936, a young Portuguese journalist named Mário Neves who was sent to cover the Republican resistance in the Spanish border city of Badajoz. From August 11 to 13 Neves reported on the growing number of incoming refugees and how the city of Badajoz was being bombarded as the conflict escalated. And then, on August 14, after an intensive siege, the town of Badajoz finally fell to the Nationalists forces and what ensued was one of the cruelest and most violent moments of the Spanish Civil War. From August 14 to 17, journalist Mário Neves described in detail the destruction of the city and the witnessed atrocities in a series of articles for Portuguese newspaper *Diário de Lisboa*, finishing his last chronicle with the solemn promise to never return to the city of Badajoz (a promise he kept until 1982 for a TV documentary).

However, Mário Neves' August 17 article, his last one, was not printed at the time since it was completely cut down by Portuguese censorship, only coming to light decades later. By 1936 Portugal was already an authoritarian regime and its dictator, António Salazar, aligned on the side of the Spanish general and future dictator Francisco Franco. This effective alignment during the Spanish Civil War meant that Portuguese forces covertly played a part in capturing Republicans trying to escape through the border as well as helping the Nationalist forces in having access to logistics and ammunitions. For the Portuguese dictatorship's relationship with news media, however, there was another fight to be had, one where Portugal was not to be seen as actively playing a part in helping the Nationalists perpetrate acts of cruelty and authoritarianism in Spain, while at the same time showing a side of strength and peacefulness within national borders. This was achieved through active propaganda and effective misinformation towards Portugal's press, as well as through censorship of any dissenting voices that sought to bring to light the troubling news that multiplied across the border and the Portuguese role in them.

To further explore this subject this study will explore the early days of the Spanish Civil War with a particular focus on Portugal and how its national propaganda actively influenced public perception of the conflict, as well as how the Portuguese government changed the tide of war. Through an analysis of Portuguese press during this timeframe, particularly through Mário Neves' detailed narrative, later published in the book *A Chacina de Badajoz* (The Slaughter of Badajoz, 1985); we hope to show how warfare propaganda and censorship effectively played a role in shifting public opinion, not just in Portugal but also abroad, in a time of growing authoritarian regimes. At the same time, Neves' reports stand out as it shows how a journalist expertly and carefully portrayed the events that led to the mass executions and the undeniable cruelty of the Spanish Nationalist forces. Neves' work on the massacre of Badajoz would earn him persecution and disbelief in the years that followed, as this study will show and, overall, these reports stand today as an example of unbiased media reporting on the Spanish Civil War and how it ended up affecting Portugal's own dictatorship, ultimately defining and shaping its increasing censorship, imprisonment, and brutality towards freedom of speech and media's liberties for the years to come. In this way this study hopes to approach this subject with clear examples of misinformation within Portuguese borders during the Spanish Civil War and how these were intrinsically part of Portugal's authoritarian ideology and foreign policy.

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Brief Bio

Manuel Carvalho Coutinho is a researcher at the Research Centre for Communication and Culture (CECC) at FCH-UCP. He holds a Bachelor Degree in Philosophy, a Master Degree in Philosophy of Education, and a Master and a PhD Degree in Communication Sciences – Media and Journalism Studies. He is currently researching contemporary Portuguese literary journalism and the relationship between literature and journalism throughout the 20th and 21st century. His research interests also cover a number of other topics such as cultural journalism, sports journalism and comics journalism.