

# NEWSPAPERS' STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL IN AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES

THE EXAMPLES OF *MADRID* (SPAIN) CARLOS BARRERA  
AND *LA OPINIÓN* (ARGENTINA) FERNANDO RUIZ

## Abstract

Authoritarian regimes usually allow the press to act occasionally with a certain degree of freedom. Within this restrictive environment, critical newspapers may use different tactics to survive and, at the same time, to head for democracy. This was the case of two newspapers, *Madrid* in Spain and *La Opinión* in Argentina, whose battle against dictatorship eventually ended with their closing in 1971 and 1977, respectively. The two newspapers were symbols of resistance against the authoritarian regimes in their countries and became ideological, political and cultural reference points for democratic changes. In political terms, *Madrid* and *La Opinión* adopted similar strategies of opening and resistance despite their specific national contexts. In terms of journalistic profession, the two newspapers took the prestigious Parisian daily *Le Monde* as a model, which was a rather common tendency among newspapers in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Yet both of them were particularly vulnerable as commercial companies: various administrative and legal measures taken against them because of some supposed legal offences led eventually to the closure of the two publishing companies.

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## Background<sup>1</sup>

It is relatively common for authoritarian regimes to allow the press to act with a certain degree of freedom, albeit a limited one, at certain times and for particular reasons. Within this restrictive environment, some newspapers take on the role of testing the water, adopting different tactics in order to pursue their desire for democratisation. This was the case with two newspapers (*Madrid* in Spain, and *La Opinión* in Argentina), which both ultimately paid the price of silencing for their criticism of military dictatorships: in November 1971, the newspaper *Madrid* was closed down, and in April 1977, *La Opinión* met the same fate. They had both become symbols of dissidence under the authoritarian regimes of Generals Franco and Videla, and were proof of their inability to take on basic public freedoms. The apparent short-term failure of these publications turned them into an ideological, political and cultural reference point for a democratic future in the medium term.

In the present study, we shall try to describe, by a comparative analysis, the main strategies followed by critical journalists in difficult situations. We consider journalists to be critical when they take a stance to promote the fall of these dictatorships and the recovery of basic freedoms, even though they have to take care how they express their ideas in order to survive and to continue influencing public opinion.

We have divided the basic areas or dimensions of each newspaper into three categories: the area of politics, that of business, and that of the profession of journalism. Given the circumstances, the *political dimension* is obvious in both newspapers, encompassing not only what is explicitly political, but also whatever is “political” in other spheres of life (culture, economics, society, religion, work), which are inevitably politicised in a situation in which fundamental freedoms are lacking. This will form the main part of this study, given the high priority given to political issues by both newspapers.

The *business dimension* of the two newspapers must not be forgotten, however, as they were supported by the economic power of the newspaper companies which owned them. Under a dictatorship, the political power not only tends to exercise coercion regarding the contents of the newspapers, but also employs means of controlling companies: measures which are sometimes more effective in putting an end to dissidence than are those concerning the censorship of printed texts.

Finally, the *professional dimension* enables us to examine what the journalists were actually doing: the formula they adopted to create the two newspapers, which, as we shall see, were inspired by similar ideas. We shall also have to look at the journalists who worked on the two newspapers, their training, professional and ideological-cum-political concerns, and their experience of major trends within journalism world-wide in that era.

All these analyses will enable us to draw some conclusions about the role of these critical newspapers under authoritarian regimes and how they contributed to opening the public forum for discussion in both the short and medium term.

### Strategies of Resistance and the Break of the Restrictive Public Space

Newspapers have a historical agenda, that is, the ideas and values with which the newspaper is most strongly identified. This agenda is formed through a proc-

ess of construction which is the product of its own history, and comes to be part of its identity (Nieto 1967 31-32; Arrese 1995, 919). Although both were fairly new newspapers, they forged their identity with an essential agenda which they nurtured and endeavoured to spread. In the case of *Madrid* from 1966 onwards, and *La Opinión* from its appearance in 1971, the main agenda was a sensibility that was basically opposed to authoritarianism and violence, which led them to question everything that leads to a closed society threatening basic civil rights.

An authoritarian public space gives very little scope for the exercise of criticism of the political powers, and such activities are always risky. The political powers take steps to force opposition newspapers to relinquish their historical agenda completely or partially. For daily newspapers with antiauthoritarian ideals, to challenge a dictatorship is not only a question of values but also a basic need to safeguard their own identity.

### The Case of *Madrid* in Franco's Spain

In the 1960s Franco's dictatorship saw liberalising moves in both economics and politics and, last of all, in society. The year which was most significant in the history of this liberalisation was 1966. In this year two important laws were approved: the "Ley Orgánica del Estado" (Organic Law of the State), designed as a kind of Constitution, and the "Ley de Prensa e Imprenta" (Law on the Press and Printing). While the first introduced innovative ideas which made for greater opening, the second granted a greater margin of freedom for journalists in the press though the Government reserved itself some means of control. An inevitable consequence of this new state of affairs was the widening of the public space for action and debate available to the different political and social powers, which had previously been heavily restricted.

Taken together, the burgeoning political debate on subjects that had previously been taboo, and the growing freedom of the press meant that newspapers became privileged actors on the political stage. Of course, the newspapers could not say everything they were thinking, but most of them exerted more or less sustained pressure in the direction of opening, and within the politics of the regime tended to support more liberal protagonists rather than hard-liners. A newspaper with a particular commitment, like *Madrid* from 1966 onwards, was in the firing line: in fact, it received a total of twenty official charges of breaking newspaper law until 1971.

Since the autumn of 1966, *Madrid* began to display ideological leanings towards the democratisation of the Franco regime. A touchstone in this was the campaign around the referendum on the "Ley Orgánica del Estado," to which it gave an open reading. The newspaper affirmed in this sense: "We believe that we can say that an interesting period in the life of Spain has closed, at the same time as another opens, a period which belongs to the coming generations who have not known the grieves, pains and hopes that preceded the birth of a young, social, democratic, European Spain."<sup>2</sup> On another day, it pointed out that Spain's request to join the European Common Market "needs to include democratisation of Spain in two areas: ... trade unions, and political pluralism."<sup>3</sup> It also stated that the Second Vatican Council, which had recently come to an end, demonstrated how "in the Catholic environment, social pluralism is being emphasized, as is the

need for this pluralism to be expressed politically.”<sup>4</sup> *Reference to external figures in an attempt to influence the orientation of official politics was made explicit.*

When the law was finally approved by referendum on 14 December 1966, other print media produced a wealth of conformist or continuist readings which made much of the point that the Spanish people’s “Yes” vote was a “Yes” above all to Franco, as the official campaign had conveyed. However, *Madrid* let its dissident strategic position be clearly known, writing that the Spanish people had shown “its desire to embark on a new stage in which the rule of law is replaced by the rule of men. This is the essence of constitutional democracy.”<sup>5</sup> *An interpretation which can be seen to differ radically, and clearly in favour of the democratisation in the Spanish political life.*

A new voice in terms of language and attitude had emerged in the panorama of the national political press. By using a mixture of political possibilism and support for the sectors of the regime that were more in favour of opening, it tried to combat opposing trends. From 1967 onwards, when *Madrid* again caught the public eye with its pronouncements, there began a series of government threats and attempts to silence this voice.

For some periods of weeks or months the newspaper had to suffer a voluntary “freeze” or “hibernation” to avoid irritating the government too much. So in spring 1967, the leaders practically disappeared and were replaced by articles with by-lines on the same page. At other times, no comments or information were given about controversial or particularly sensitive issues. On other occasions, as in the state of exception proclaimed from January to March 1969, the return to the previous censorship motivated an increase in articles on international subjects (that is, with a lesser degree of commitment), or the disappearance of some of the more “dangerous” or daring columns.

In such situations, under government pressure, *Madrid* maintained a difficult balance: while keeping up its critical approach and independent image, it tried not to run unnecessary risks which would lead to its closure. The tactics used to achieve this, aside from the episodic but regular voluntary “freezes” in which certain subjects were simply ignored, included: *omitting comment, and keeping to objective information, “as silence was the only honourable way out”* (Calvo Serer 1973, 44); the so-called “guerrilla tactics” consisting of “changing the lines of attack as soon as one met with over-heavy resistance” (Calvo Serer 1973, 46), that is, tackling an issue up to the limit which the Ministry would tolerate, then shifting attention to another; and *continuous references, above all in the leaders and articles, to democratic countries as models, using the constitutional language proper to such systems.*

A clear example of *support for the more open-minded sectors of the regime* was the attention devoted to what the press called the “*Cortes trashumantes*”: meetings organised in various Spanish cities by the first deputies directly elected by voters in 1967. When the chair of the Cortes decided to ban these meetings, in 1968, a reporter from *Madrid* summed up the episode of the “*Cortes trashumantes*” in the following apposite words: “They died where they were born: in the press.”

At other times, the newspaper’s news and editorial strategy for demonstrating its dissidence consisted of what might be described as a *lack of enthusiasm for the regime*. This could be seen particularly in one striking case: the reporting of the mass demonstration in Madrid in favour of Franco and against foreign intervention in December 1970 after various members of the terrorist group ETA were con-

demned to death. While the other Madrid newspapers dedicated their front pages to large photographs and headlines about this event, *Madrid* only gave the bottom right-hand quarter of the front page to this issue, with an aseptic headline: "Yesterday's demonstration,"<sup>6</sup> which contrasted with the adjectives used by other papers: "imposing," "spectacular," "a conclusive plebiscite" and "overwhelming" (Barraera 1995a, 376-377).

A further two significant pronouncements in the history of *Madrid* under the Press Law of 1966 were: the article by Rafael Calvo, the man behind the newspaper's ideology, on 30 May 1968, which resulted in the newspaper's suppression for four months; and its opposition to the nomination of Prince Juan Carlos as Franco's successor with the title of King, in July 1969. Calvo's article had the headline: "Retire in time. No to General De Gaulle." Even though he was writing about the events of May 1968 in France, no reader could fail to notice what he said in one of the last paragraphs: "Spain bears many resemblances to its neighbour."<sup>7</sup> Not explicitly, but between the lines, it seemed to be asking for the retirement of a general closer at hand.

The newspaper's position regarding Franco's choice of a successor in July 1969 was one of opposition, although the tone in which it was expressed ended up — after long negotiations with Minister Fraga — fairly soft. As it was a monarchist newspaper, it did not like the fact that Franco had violated the line of succession by making Juan Carlos the heir to the throne instead of his father, Juan de Borbón. In a very technical, measured leader, and without mentioning names, the newspaper proposed that the best solution would be a formula envisaged by the Law of Succession in which a prince regent could be nominated instead of a successor to the title of king<sup>8</sup>: it was the only solution which safeguarded the rights of Don Juan.

In an internal document written in September 1969, Antonio Fontán —the editor of *Madrid*— set out what the newspaper's strategy should be:

*a) to maintain a modern political and democratic position in independence of the Government, which is critical of the Regime's false solutions and approaches, and which is clearly dissident on moral and political grounds, but which avoids two risks: one of silence, which might seem to be conformism, and the other of illegality, towards which we are being pushed by the political Powers;*

*b) to prepare a broad base for the future: that is, to promote a politics which can be taken up by the less inflexible members of the Regime, by the moderates in the opposition, and by a broad sector of the silent, paralysed Spain of today;*

*c) to ensure, with the aid and collaboration that may be necessary, that Franco is not succeeded on his death by a "fascist king" or prisoner of a military dictatorship;*

*d) that is, to continue working so that Spain can be truly and simply a normal country.<sup>9</sup>*

These are the views which inspired the political and professional activities of the newspaper *Madrid*. Obviously, they could not be transmitted as such to public opinion, as this would mean immediate suspension. They had to remain beneath the surface.

## The Case of *La Opinión* in the 1970s Argentina

Founded in 1971 and directed by Jacobo Timerman, the newspaper *La Opinión* intended not to lose its identity in the face of the new military regime led by General Jorge Rafael Videla since March 1976. This identity was linked to its historical agenda, which had been expressed under this regime around two central issues: criticism of political violence, and the demand for a government that was open to dialogue and to the consensus of broad sectors of politics and society. The newspaper's strategy was characterised by ten basic features:

- recognition of the legitimacy of the dictatorship;
- publication of information which showed official participation in violence, giving voice to the families of the victims, but never directly accusing the regime
- working on the divisions that already existed within the regime;
- "over-interpreting" official pronouncements;
- threatening the regime with the isolation it might have to suffer, particularly from the international community and the Catholic Church;
- conscious simulation so that official tolerance is not exceeded;
- reinforcement of "objective" presentation of facts, at the expense of their interpretation;
- "guerrilla" tactics when tackling certain conflictive issues;
- encouraging initiatives towards opening on the part of the government;
- using democratic models from other countries as examples.

These strategies were quite similar to those used by the newspaper *Madrid* in the context of Franco's Spain. If we fix our attention in these ten points, we can see that all except the second (which was more specific to the Argentinean situation, and had no parallel in Spain) were also practised by the staff of *Madrid*, as has been shown above — remarking them in italics — in a way that is more narrative than systematic. We shall now look at how they were put into practice in *La Opinión*.

To produce discourse that was critical of the military regime, the newspaper had to recognise that the dictatorship had a legitimate origin. It was credible to do so, because *La Opinión* had been one of the most outspoken voices in favour of the coup. The crisis in the democratic regime that began in 1973 had been escalated by a process of extreme violence and raging inflation, and most sectors felt that it was untenable. According to the newspaper, the need to restore order did not mean to fall in such a hard military regime like that of General Augusto Pinochet, in neighbouring Chile in September 1973.

During the first few months, various columnists on *La Opinión* developed the strategy of encouragement as a form of criticism. The idea was to remind people of the legitimate origins of the regime in order to correct its exercise of power. This can be seen, for example, in the following text:

*Few military regimes have had to overcome less resistance than this one. Less still those which, like this regime, were preceded by a popular consensus. The Argentine people have accepted the fact and consequent perspective that they are living under a state of emergency for as long as is necessary to rebuild the State, abolish corruption and immorality, and defeat subversive delinquency once and for all...*<sup>10</sup>

A second point in their strategy consisted of *publishing information about the official violence under the dictatorship*. This kind of news was often found in *La Opinión*. In several of the most important cases, official participation in or tolerance of such events was recorded, but the newspaper did not include this incriminating information in its usual discourse. Historical truth indicates that the anonymous repression which scourged the country in 1976 and early 1977 was an official strategy directed from the top of the military hierarchy. *La Opinión* never pointed directly to this relationship. This was probably the invisible barrier which could not be crossed. To accuse the regime of mass murder would have been a suicide strategy.

Scarcely four months after the dictatorship had been established, names began to appear in the newspaper which were associated with the military hardliners. The figure of the provincial governor of Buenos Aires (General Ibérico Saint Jean) was mentioned in some articles in a slightly questioning way. This general seemed to be the most likely candidate to replace President Videla. As the internal disputes within the military hierarchy became more noticeable, *La Opinión*, which had been publishing news about the existence of a hard and a soft line within the regime, began to be more outspoken, taking sides in the dangerous military infighting.

The newspaper's first clash with the most visible representative of the military hardliners was carried out by the editor himself. On Sunday, 24 October 1976, in the back page, Jacobo Timerman published his most important, and most daring, article since the start of the dictatorship: "The Governor of Buenos Aires can be excluded from the process." No one would have dared to risk so much in 1976. The editor of *La Opinión* offered an explanation of the attitude of Argentinean society to the emerging guerrilla. He explained that "everybody assumed — absolutely everybody — that by incorporating Peronism in the legal body of the country with a superhuman effort of understanding, the problem of violence would be solved within this framework." Timerman emphasised in his article that the military also shared this conviction, and that they were as responsible as politicians, journalists or business people for what happened in the country.<sup>11</sup>

People close to Governor Saint Jean formed a sort of coalition of enemies of *La Opinión*. They consisted of army officers of this particular tendency, and other newspapers which were connected with this sector, particularly *La Nueva Provincia* and the nationalist magazine *Cabildo*. These publications focused their attacks increasingly on Timerman and his newspaper. They felt that *La Opinión* was promoting subversion, understood in the broadest sense: its political and ideological attitude, from its foundation in 1971 onwards, had fostered all the evils which had brought the country into its present straits. The military investigation which culminated in the closure of *La Opinión* was carried out by hardliners who had been antagonised by the newspaper, and was not supported wholeheartedly by representatives of the military sectors of the softer tendency.

Another strategic exercise employed by *La Opinión* was that of "overinterpreting" official words or discourse, so that the newspaper played the role of critical advisor of the military dictatorship. The great source for this was the speeches of General Videla, the country's President. His ambiguous tone made it possible for the staff of *La Opinión* to overinterpret them fairly freely. The President's aims were reinterpreted by the newspaper, which gave them a different, sometimes very different, meaning from that with which President Videla had invested them.

There were two main occasions for this focus on Videla's speeches: the days before a presidential speech, during which postures that the newspaper might view as favourable were suggested; and after the speeches had been made, when the columnists saw what they wanted to see in the President's words.<sup>12</sup> Videla's words were always interpreted in terms of praise, either because of something he had said, the tone he had used, or even something he had not said. Alonso wrote, for example: "Even if Monday's presidential message, given on the eve of the May holidays, does not include a section especially intended for youth, his concern for young people is latent or explicit throughout the speech."<sup>13</sup> Overinterpretation was a way of gaining possession of the chief discursive authority of the dictatorship and putting it at the service of the newspaper's historical agenda.

From the very first week of the dictatorship, the newspaper brought in world *public opinion as a political protagonist* which ought to be considered when it came to defining the main politics, particularly the relationship between repression and respect for human rights. Since *La Opinión* was so receptive to the agenda of the outside force, it succeeded in using it as an ally to exert pressure on the dictatorship in defence of one of the points in its historical agenda, that is, respect for individual human rights. The regime's "international image" became a true conditioning factor affecting the dictatorship, and *La Opinión* succeeded in reinforcing it.<sup>14</sup>

The *threat* of being isolated internationally was accompanied by that of *internal isolation*, particularly the risk that the Catholic Church, valued as the country's politically most influential institution, would speak out against the regime. *La Opinión* provided ample information about the movements of the bishops, and promoted, or perhaps even provoked, an increasingly confrontational attitude. Just as the newspaper alerted the government about the hardening attitude of external forces, it also warned of a tougher approach on the part of the Argentinean bishops.<sup>15</sup>

In an attempt to maximise its possibilities of survival, *La Opinión* used some other strategies. One of the tactics used most widely was simulation. The newspaper's strategy to maintain its agenda in the authoritarian public space was characterised by a certain degree of pretence, in which journalists avoided publishing provocative material which might cross the invisible barrier of the regime's tolerance. The political actors always act, in the literal sense, but in authoritarian regimes there is a heightened tendency towards acting (Furet 1995, 137; Arendt 1994, 425-450).

As the years passed, the interpretative journalism which *La Opinión* had been renowned for before the coup diminished in both quantity and depth. Forced by outside circumstances, journalists began to put their name to fewer articles, and the newspaper lost interpretative vigour, concentrating rather on providing "*objective*" information, within the possible limits, *based on purely telling the facts*. The great restriction of the public space available reduced to a minimum the use of interpretative texts, meaning that it was necessary to fall back on texts based on only news. In the end, *La Opinión* prioritised information over commentaries.

What we called, in the case of the newspaper *Madrid*, "*guerrilla tactics*" were also used on certain occasions. The newspaper took up certain potentially dangerous subjects, then dropped them or changed the focus when it met with resistance or noticed a dangerous silence. This happened, for example, with some affairs firstly regarding the University and, some weeks later, referred to centres of mental health. The official silence was the response in both cases.<sup>16</sup>

It thus tried to give wide coverage to political initiatives which it thought of as being forward-looking, favouring the “soft” rather than the “hard” factions within the regime.<sup>17</sup> Fixing its eyes beyond its own boundaries, Timerman’s newspaper made *constant reference to “progressive” trends in the world at large*. The international comparison which the newspaper used most in order to encourage the opening of the Argentinean public space was precisely Spain’s transition to democracy, which was discussed on more than one occasion as an example to be followed in what was essential.<sup>18</sup>

## The Vulnerability of Newspaper Companies

Up until now, we have analysed the survival tactics and strategies of the newspapers *Madrid* and *La Opinión* in a hostile environment. We have confined ourselves to the contents of these newspapers, as it is through this that we can perceive their political intentions, which are both explicit and tacit. But newspapers are also businesses, which straddle the line between the commercial and the ideological. This commercial dimension, in the two cases we are examining, proved to be their weakest flank. As a result of various measures taken against the companies that published *Madrid* and *La Opinión*, the two newspapers ceased to exist in 1971 and 1977 respectively. Rafael Calvo Serer, after publishing a critical article in *Le Monde*,<sup>19</sup> sought exile in France a few days before the newspaper closed down, thus avoiding imprisonment. The same fate, exile, awaited Jacobo Timerman, but in his case this came after his arrest and torture and the newspaper’s closure.

### The Forced Closure of the Newspaper *Madrid*

The company which published *Madrid* was one hundred percent owned by the company FACES, created in 1962 and owned by men of various political and professional backgrounds. After a series of complex ups and downs, from December 1966 onwards Rafael Calvo Serer figured as the majority shareholder in the newspaper, with roughly two thirds of the capital. Struggles for ownership of the newspaper gave rise to a chain of internal disputes and suits which led to tortuous litigation from 1967 until the closure of the newspaper in 1971, and even thereafter. From the formal point of view, this internal situation was the reason for its closure.

The freedom to found press companies was limited by their obliged inscription in the Register of Newspaper Companies. The Ministry of Information had the power to refuse inscription to a company which requested it, as well as to annul an inscription that had already been made (Barrera 1995b, 97-98; Fernández Areal 1971, 88-92; Nieto 1967, 55-63). The final order of *Madrid*’s closure arrived by these means on 25 November 1971. Most of the files which had been initiated before then concerning infringement of the press law had concentrated on news and opinions which violated the second article, that is, the one which set the limits to freedom of expression. But none of them, despite the four-month period of suspension in mid-1968, succeeded in bringing the newspaper down.

The legal excuse brandished for the closure was the existence of 402 shares in FACES, which appeared without any owner when the statutes required the reimbursement of the whole of the capital. The subsequent verdict of the Supreme Court on 25 October 1976 argued that 402 shares out of a total of 48,000 did not mean any real change in the structure of the company. A sanction as severe as the

suspension of a newspaper could only be imposed, according to the verdict, “when the omission or infraction is very large, or essential for the first or successive inscriptions.” However, this decision arrived too late and *Madrid* could not have reappeared.

From 1967 onwards, various Government pressures, including administrative inspections, were at work on the people who made up the newspaper company (Calvo Serer 1973, 59-60; Valls 1973). Nothing abnormal was found: in economic terms the company was going well and there was no deficit to cover, as sales and advertising generated enough income. Only the 1968 balance sheet showed a major deficit (over 4.6 million pesetas), because the newspaper had been suspended for four months.<sup>20</sup>

*Madrid* was an operation which was fundamentally political and journalistic in its means and in its ends. It did not therefore primarily intend to be an economically viable business: this was necessary only in order to survive and continue to influence public life. But this proved to be its weakest flank, and here lay its downfall. The underlying reasons for the closure were political.

### The Closure of *La Opinión* and the Detention and Exile of Timerman

The formal reason which the Argentinean military regime used to finish off Timerman's *La Opinión* was also connected with the shares in the publishing company OLTA S.A. and the company which owned the premises Establecimientos Gráficos Gustavo, S.A. In this case, the blame was attached to the banker David Graiver's shareholding in this news business: he came to own 45 percent of the shares in both companies. Graiver died in August 1976, and military research showed that the guerrillas had used him as a financier for a ransom of \$ 40 million obtained by a kidnapping in 1974. At this moment, *La Opinión* was one of the newspapers that were most critical of the guerrillas, and two years previously the Peronist guerrillas had even planted several bombs in *La Opinión* and the home of its editor, Jacobo Timerman.

The banker Graiver had relations with opposite sides in the confused political world of Argentina of the 1970s. In 1971 he had secretly financed a magazine which called for armed struggle, and at the same time he travelled around the world with the son of the military president of the moment, General Alejandro Lanusse, in whose government he served as a high-ranking civil servant in the Ministry of Social Welfare. His bank also acted to collect funds for Isabel Perón, later to be vice-president and president; and at the same time, his relations with the guerrillas were becoming closer. When Graiver died in August 1976 in an air crash, this web of contradictory relationships came to light. Alongside Graiver's family, who were all arrested and some of whom were tortured, even to death, in prison, the newspaper *La Opinión* was one of the main victims.

The investigation into the Graiver case was in the hands of the hardliners, whom *La Opinión* had attacked, and they saw this as the perfect excuse for putting an end to the annoyances which this newspaper caused. The argument used by the military investigation team was: if the guerrillas had given Graiver several millions, and Graiver was the capital holder in *La Opinión*, then the money which maintained the newspaper must have come from the kidnappings. In the morning of 15 April 1977, the director and deputy director were kidnapped. Then followed a period of uncertainty after which it was admitted that they had been arrested, and the newspaper was wound up. Timerman's *La Opinión* had come to an end.

Beyond the arbitrary fate to which any person singled out as an enemy of the dictatorship was subjected, even the military courts recognised that the money backing *La Opinión* did not come from the guerrillas. Graiver had contributed before 1973, and the kidnapping had been in 1974. The newspaper could have shown other sources of income, both from its own business activities and from official banks. Neither these arguments, nor the request from the Supreme Court of Justice to free Timerman, were enough for him to get his newspaper back. They were used only to justify his being freed and deported, while robbing him of Argentinean citizenship and expropriating his newspaper. Moreover, a certain anti-Semitic attitude among the Argentine military could be noticed in this case because Graiver and Timerman were Jews (Rajneri 1987, 38).

We can conclude that, given the political cost to the regime of admitting the real, that is, political, reasons for the closure, an attack on the publishing company of *La Opinión* seemed like the most feasible and least traumatic means of achieving this end.

## The Journalistic Model and the Commitment of the Newsroom

*Madrid* and *La Opinión* took the prestigious Parisian daily *Le Monde* as a model, and even sometimes acknowledged it openly. They aspired to become points of reference, and the interpretive model of the French evening paper attracted them; moreover, the tendency to adopt this model had been a constant in journalism worldwide from the late sixties and early seventies.

This formula implied a strong vocation to playing a leading role in politics, worked out in three dimensions: more interpretation, but also more information and more opinion. All three were used as means of criticising the restrictive public space in which they were managing to survive. This professional model adopted by the two newspapers, which we could call a “professional strategy of resistance,” reinforced their political tactics. In fact, the formula they adopted brought them into contact with a modern readership consisting of open-minded people, with an interest in public affairs, who distrusted excessively authoritarian approaches. At the same time they managed to create a *certain relationship with other newspapers on an international level*, and enjoyed the support of some of the most influential publications in the world.

*Madrid* began in September 1966 as a newspaper with a heavy ideological load and a high intellectual level. The fact that, in the early months of this new stage, there were few changes in the newsroom meant that the newspaper’s ideological content was basically in the hands of Rafael Calvo and his collaborators in the leaders on page three. From April 1967 onwards, when Antonio Fontán was appointed as editor of the newspaper, the news content of *Madrid* was boosted with a view to bringing the various sections of the newspaper into line with the new editorial style. New journalists were taken on, most of them young, and some of the older members of staff were shifted to less responsible posts. This ensured that the members of the newsroom also shared the newspaper’s democratic principles and attempted to leave their mark on the different sections.

This commitment to the reforming line taken by *Madrid* was a factor which helped *the journalists themselves gradually to become aware of the importance of their*

*professional work* within the newspaper and the company. In neighbouring France, the creation of so-called associations of journalists was becoming fashionable, mainly in the wake of the example set by two great dailies, *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*. In this atmosphere, it is not surprising that the Association of Journalists of the Newspaper *Madrid* finally came into being, between the summer and autumn of 1971. In its founding statement, dated 14 August, express mention was made of the work which the writers had contributed to the newspaper's prestige. Going further, they proclaimed:

*We have reached the conclusion that our responsibility to inform gives us the right to participate in and control all the important decisions which might increase or reduce the newspaper's independence and the quality of information in it (Aguilar 1982, 192).*

The association was publicly constituted two months later, on 22 October. In the battle between the Ministry and the company, the Association of Journalists aligned itself with the latter and, in the face of some attempts to the contrary, defended Fontán's position at the head of *Madrid*. The price to be paid for this loyalty was high, and many of the journalists who were one day to have brilliant professional careers, took years to find another job of the same level in other Spanish publications.

As for *La Opinión* is concerned, one of the more remarkable professional novelties consisted of the salary paid to its journalists, higher than it was usual in Argentinian newspapers. So they took conscience of the importance of their labour and dedicated their strongest efforts to the newspaper. Much of them became very well known and appreciated in the public sphere.

Table 1: How *La Opinión* and *Madrid* defended themselves against dictatorship

	<i>La Opinión</i>	<i>Madrid</i>
POLITICAL–JOURNALISTIC STRATEGIES		
Recognition of the legitimacy of the dictatorship	YES	YES
Accusing government with the news, but acquitting in editorials	YES	NO
Working on the divisions checked within the regime	YES	YES
"Over-interpreting" official pronouncements	YES	YES
Threatening with the external and internal isolation	YES	YES
Supporting opening initiatives, even if they were light	YES	YES
"Simulation"	YES	YES
Diminishing interpretative texts and keeping to objective information	YES	YES
"Guerrilla tactics"	YES	YES
Use of foreign news to lead towards internal changes	YES	YES
Lukewarmness or lack of enthusiasm for the regime	NO	YES
PROFESSIONAL STRATEGIES		
Support from and/or relations with important foreign newspapers	YES	YES
Strengthening of the autonomy and professional consciousness on behalf of the newsroom	YES	YES

### ***Madrid* and *La Opinión* as for the Future of Democracy**

The passing of time, and the perspective this gives us to pronounce judgement on events, has led public opinion to regard *Madrid* and *La Opinión* almost unanimously as two newspapers that were ahead of their time. Their actions and ideas,

their difficult relations with the authoritarian political powers, and their traumatic end made them into symbols of political and professional dignity. This powerful symbolic role led them to be considered as leading protagonists in the construction of the future democracies of Spain and Argentina. In the professional field, they came to be seen as examples of dignity in practising journalism. This explains, for example, why both Antonio Fontán, the editor of *Madrid*, and Jacobo Timerman were chosen as two of fifty “press freedom heroes” by the International Press Institute (IPI) in spring 2000.<sup>21</sup>

Between 1966 and 1971, the newspaper *Madrid* spoke in favour of reform within the legal parameters of Franco’s Spain. In some way, it was able to hold Francoism against the wall and put to the test its intentions of allowing greater opening. In the context of the liberalising process in the 1960s, this newspaper was at the forefront of those who wanted swifter changes to bring about a democratic regime. It became a point of reference not only in Spain (Fraga 1980, 178) but also abroad, where its actions did not pass unnoticed. The newspaper introduced and incorporated into Spanish public life the concepts current in western democracies about the practice of political pluralism. As Fontán wrote years later, “it was an unusual way of saying things, without ambiguities ... an invitation to confront Spain’s political problems in real terms” (Fontán et al. 1972, 26).

The blowing-up, on 24 April 1973, of the building in the centre of Madrid which had housed the newspaper, caused a further sensation in public opinion. The image of the building collapsing into itself and turning into a heap of rubble amid a cloud of dust was seen all over the world. It was the newspaper company itself that had decided to blow up the building in order to sell the land to pay off the debts incurred as a result of the closure. But in the eyes of history, this symbolised the impossibility of genuine freedom of the press under authoritarian regimes.

*La Opinión* promoted a first breaking within the two main journalistic traditions in Argentina: the commercial press and the politic press. It tried to combine a strong political vocation with an attempt of modernising the practice of journalism. For example, until the launch of Timerman’s daily it was not usual the “commented news” in Argentinean newspapers. But the interpretative journalist practised by *La Opinión* came up against the increasingly restrictive public space during Videla’s dictatorship. Its professional approaches did not have an immediate and lasting effect on the profession of journalism in Argentina until the fall of the military dictatorship in 1983 opened the way for the democratisation of the Republic. As the democratic regime consolidated itself, the professional cultures of the day began to question themselves, and as this happened, *La Opinión* became the main professional point of reference.

The new media initiatives launched at the dawn of the new times in some way bore witness to Timerman’s newspaper. In 1987, the newspaper *Página 12* appeared on the scene, which generated transformations in local journalism; the similarity between the two newspapers has often been commented on. In 1998, the newspaper *Perfil* appeared, which proved to be the most significant newspaper launched in fifteen years of democracy: its explicit historical reference was to *La Opinión*. The death of Jacobo Timerman in late 1999 was reported in the Buenos Aires press in the following terms: he was “a leader” (*Crónica*); “a great man” (*Ambito*); “an innovator” (*Clarín*); he was “epoch-making,” a “model journalist” and “legendary” (*Buenos Aires Herald*). *Página 12* dedicated the entire front page to him. It is also possible

that this was the first time that the death of an Argentinean journalist had been announced to the world from the front page of *The New York Times*.

## The Results of Opening-up the Authoritarian Public Space

Although the press freedom in Spain was increasing, *Madrid* suffered seizures, lawsuits, fines and suspensions in a number higher than the rest of newspapers (Barrera 1995a, 224-246, 411-430; Terrón 1981, 199-218). The public space for debate, which until then had been confined to a small elite with hardly any direct link with the people, opened up thanks to the courage of some print media, among which was Calvo Serer's *Madrid*. Its readers were offered a wider range of news and comment, and so were better able to form their own opinions.

*Madrid* gave a public voice to a new spirit or mentality which was opening up in the Spain of the 1960s, particularly among the generations that had not lived through the civil war. This spirit was hard to define politically, as it was to be found among a great mixture of people who had some fundamental things in common: the need to adapt Spanish politics to the new economic, social, cultural and religious circumstances; the desire to move closer to Europe and its political system; and the wish to overcome political stagnation. In this sense, *Madrid* fulfilled the function of giving voice to the slowly growing dissident sectors which were active in the socio-political structures of the regime, and at the same time, it pointed out the deficiencies and problems raised by Spain's peculiar status.

In the Argentina of the 1970s, *La Opinión* played a similar part, by publishing news about official violence, thus giving a voice to those condemned by the regime, and by trying to lead the dictatorship along softer lines. The context was different: *Madrid* acted in the declining years of a long dictatorship, while *La Opinión* was active while the dictatorship was on the rise, which made for greater difficulties in expressing its democratic beliefs. But both newspapers aspired to the same thing: to broaden the public space and manage to survive in it, while spreading the main points of their historical agenda.

Along this difficult path, *Madrid* and *La Opinión* suffered serious confrontations with the political authorities which ended in closure for both newspapers. On more than one occasion, *Madrid* was prohibited from discussing certain subjects: the legitimacy of the regime, political parties, issues of public order, the European Common Market (Calvo Serer 1973, 62); or else news that was considered dangerous was frozen: this is what happened, for example, with a survey among workers about what the new trade union law ought to be like, a survey which Minister Fraga regarded as "aggressive" (Fraga 1980, 208). Fontán thus rightly wrote that *Madrid* had had "a long journey along the uncomfortable tracks of discrepancy."<sup>22</sup>

The uncertainty of the limits imposed on *Madrid* and *La Opinión* made their respective paths difficult. The measures of pressure on behalf of the Governments made them practise similar strategies, like those we have described in the paragraphs above. One typical feature of the authoritarian public space is that it contains a grey area which makes it hard to know exactly when the invisible barrier of the regime's tolerance is going to be crossed. Each dictatorship decided this in accord with its degree of authoritarianism, but the final result was the same: the definitive silencing of both newspapers. However, their influence has to be seen, above all, not in the short but in the medium term, as vehicles for spreading ideas and attitudes which would play a part in the subsequent democratic development of Spain and Argentina.

## Notes:

1. This paper is based on a text published in Spanish in *Comunicación y Sociedad*, the academic journal of the School of Communication of the Universidad de Navarra (Pamplona, Spain), vol. XIII, no 2, December 2000.
2. *Madrid*, 22-11-1966, p. 3 (leader): "End of an era in the history of Spain."
3. *Madrid*, 3-11-1966, p. 3 (leader): "Trade with Europe (and 2)."
4. *Madrid*, 5-9-1966, p. 3 (leader): "Will there be a head of government?"
5. *Madrid*, 15-12-1966, p. 3 (leader): "The future begins. Spain sanctions the new Constitution."
6. *Madrid*, 18-12-1970, p. 1.
7. Calvo Serer, Rafael. "Retirarse a tiempo. No al general De Gaulle." *Madrid*, 30-5-1968, p. 3.
8. See *Madrid*, 21-7-1969, p. 1 (leader): "On the Cortes of 22 July."
9. "A new plan for a new era" (12-9-1969). Manuscript by Antonio Fontán. Papers of the Editor of *Madrid* (henceforth PEM), box 12, file D.
10. *La Opinión* (henceforth LO), 20-5-1976, p. 1: "A parallel subversiveness seeks to undermine the Government."
11. See Timerman, Jacobo. "The Governor of Buenos Aires can self-exclude in the process." LO, 24-10-1976, p. 12).
12. See "Expectation before the Videla's message on 24." LO, 14-5-1976, p. 1. See also the columns by Giussani, Paredes, Chávez Paz, Schoó and Alonso in the edition for 26 May 1976.
13. Alonso, Enrique. "The youth as a key to a process." LO, 26-5-1976, p. 11. See also Giussani, Pablo. "Politics." LO, 26-9-1976, p. 14.
14. See "The Government takes care of its international image." LO, 2-4-1976, p. 12. See also López, José Ignacio. "If the State does not recover the monopoly of force, the risk of isolation will grow." LO, 22-8-1976, p. 28.
15. See López, José Ignacio. "Pastoral evaluation on the course adopted." LO, 17-3-1977, p. 12.
16. See "Dismissed professors," LO, 11-4-1976, p. 8; "Centres of mental health are paralysed," 30-4-1976, p. 20; "A wall of silence around the breaking up of the centres of mental health in the Federal Capital and the Great Buenos Aires," 9-5-1976, p. 24.
17. See Cerón, Sergio. "It is important for the National Project to be feasible and have consensus," LO, 1-10-1976, p. 14; Díaz, Fanor. "The concept of adherence, maintained by Harguindeguy, insinuates an opening." LO, 13-10-1976, p. 14; Díaz, Fanor, "New political dimension." LO, 24-11-1976, p. 15.
18. See "A course for the Argentina of 1977 from the Spain of 1976." LO (second section), 23-9-1976, p. IV; Timerman, Jacobo. "Mother Spain." LO, 28-1-1977, p. 1; Fain Binda, Raúl. "Good sense guarantees the Spanish process." LO, 25-2-1977.
19. See Calvo Serer, Rafael. "The Government of Spain against the liberties. I also accuse." *Le Monde*, 11-11-1971, p. 5.
20. See archive of Rafael Calvo Serer and PEM, 14 A and 19 F.
21. See *IPI Report*, Second Quarter 2000, Special Edition.
22. Fontán, Antonio. "The problem of *Madrid*, a political problem" (manuscript dated 10-9-1969), in PEM, 11 B.

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